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ALL IN THE DARK

BY

J. SHERIDAN LE FANU

AUTHOR OF

"THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," "GUY DEVERELL,"

"UNCLE SILAS," ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1868.

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TO

MY DEAR BROTHER,

WILLIAM RICHARD LE FANU,

This Tale

IS

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WITH GREAT AFFECTION

AND ADMIRATION.

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ALL IN THE DARK.

CHAPTER I.

GILROYD HALL AND ITS MISTRESS.

NEAR the ancient and pretty village of Saxton, with its gabled side to the road, stands an old red-brick house of moderate dimensions, called Gilroyd Hall, with some tall elms of very old date about it; and an ancient, brick-walled garden, overtopping the road with standard fruit-trees, that have quite outgrown the common stature of such timber, and have acquired a sylvan and venerable appearance.

Here dwelt my aunt, an old maid, Miss Dinah Perfect by name; and here my cousin William Maubray, the nephew whom she had in effect adopted, used to spend his holidays.

I shall have a good deal to say of her by-and-by, though my story chiefly concerns

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William Maubray, who was an orphan, and very nearly absolutely dependent upon the kindness of his aunt. Her love was true, but crossed and ruffled now and then by temper and caprice. Not an ill temper was hers, but whimsical and despotic, and excited oftenest upon the absurdities which she liked letting into her active and perverse little head, which must have been the proper nidus of all odd fancies, they so prospered and multiplied there.

On the whole, Gilroyd Hall and the village of Saxton were rather slow quarters for the holidays. Besides his aunt, William had but one companion under that steep and hospitable roof. This was little Violet Darkwell, a child of about eleven years, when he had attained to the matured importance of seventeen, and was in the first eleven at Rugby, had his cap, and was, in fact, a person with a career to look back upon, and who had long left childish things behind him.

This little girl was—in some round-about way, which, as a lazy man, I had rather take for granted than investigate—a kinswoman; and Miss Dinah Perfect had made her in some sort her property, and had her at least eight months

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out of the twelve down at Gilroyd Hall. Little Violet was lonely at home—an only daughter, with a father working sternly at the bar, not every day seen by her, and who seemed like a visitor in his own house—hurried, reserved, unobtrusive, and a little awful.

To the slim, prettily-formed little girl, with the large dark eyes, brown hair, and delicate bright tints, the country was delightful—the air, the flowers, the liberty; and old Aunt Dinah, though with a will and a temper, still so much kindlier and pleasanter than Miss Placey, her governess, in town; and good old Winnie Dobbs was so cosy and good-natured.

To this little maid, in her pleasant solitude, the arrival of William Maubray for the holidays, was an event full of interest and even of excitement. Shy as he was, and much in awe of all young lady-kind, she was far too young to be in his way. Her sparkling fuss and silvery prattle were even pleasant to him. There was life and something of comicality in her interruptions and unreasonableness. She made him visit her kittens and kiss them all round, and learn and recite their names;

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whistle after tea for her bulfinch, dig in her garden, mend and even nurse her doll, and perform many such tasks, quite beneath his dignity as a "swell" at Rugby, which, however, the gentle fellow did very merrily and industriously for the imperious little woman, with scant thanks, but some liking for his guerdon.

So, in his fancy, she grew to be mixed up with the pleasant influences of Gilroyd Hall, with the flowers and the birds, with the freaks of the little dog Pixie, with the stories he read there, and with his kindly welcomes and good-byes.

Sitting, after breakfast, deep in his novel in the "study," with his white flannel cricket trousers on, for he was to play against Winderbroke for the town of Saxton that day, he received a smart tweak by the hair, at the back of his head, and, looking round, saw little Vi, perched on the rung of his old-fashioned chair, and dimly recollected having received several gentler tweaks in succession, without evincing the due attention.

"Pert little Vi! what's all this?" said the stalworth Rugby boy, turning round with a little shake of his head, and his sweet smile

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and leaning on his elbow. The sunny landscape from the window, which was clustered round with roses, and a slanting sunbeam that just touched her hair, helped to make the picture very pretty.

"Great, big, old bear! you never listen to one word I say."

"Don't you call names, Miss," said Aunt Dinah, who had just glided into the room.

"What was little silver-hair saying? What does she want?" he replied, laughing at the child's indignation, and pursuing the nomenclature of Southey's pleasant little nursery tale. "Golden hair, I must call you, though," he said, looking on her sun-lit head; "and not quite golden either; it is brown, and very pretty brown, too. Who called you Violet?" He was holding the tip of her pretty chin between his fingers, and looking in her large deep eyes; "Who called you Violet?"

"How should I know, Willie?" she replied, disengaging her chin with a little toss.

"Why, your poor mamma called you Violet. I told you so fifty times," said Aunt Dinah sharply.

"You said it was my godfathers and god-

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mothers in my baptism, grannie!" said Miss Vi, not really meaning to be pert.

"Don't answer me, Miss—that's of course, your catechism—we're speaking of your poor mamma. 'Twas her mamma who called her Violet. What about it?"

"Nothing," answered William, gently looking up at his aunt, "only it is such a pretty name;" and glancing again at the child, "it goes so well with her eyes. She *is* a jolly little creature."

"She has some good features, I suppose, like every other child, and you should not try to turn her head. Nothing extraordinary. There's vanity enough in the world, and I insist, William, you don't try to spoil her."

"And what do you want of me, little woman?" asked William.

"You come out and sow my lupins for me."

"Why, foolish little woman, it isn't the season; they would not grow."

"Yes, they would though—you say that just because you don't like; you story!"

"*Violet!*" exclaimed Aunt Dinah, tapping the table with the seal end of her silver pencil-case.

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"Well, but he is, grannie, very disobliging. You do nothing now but read your tiresome old books, and never do anything I bid you."

"Really! Well that's very bad; I really must do better," said William, getting up with a smile; "I *will* sow the lupins."

"What *folly!*" murmured Aunt Dinah, grimly.

"We'll get the hoe and trowel. But—but what's to be done? I forgot I'm to play for the town to-day; and I don't think I have time—no, certainly—no time to-day for the lupins;" and William shook his head, smiling disconsolately.

"Then I'll *never* ask you to do anything for me again as long as I live—never—never—*never!*" she vowed with a tiny stamp.

"Yes you shall—you shall, indeed, and I'll do ever so much; and may she come and look at the cricket?"

So, leave granted, she did, under old Winnie's care; and when she returned, and for days after, she boasted of Willie's long score, and how he caught the ball.

When he returned at the end of next "half" he found old Miss Dinah Perfect with her

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spectacles on, in her comfortable old drawing-room, in the cheer of a Christmas fire, with her head full of the fancies and terrors of a certain American tome, now laid with its face downwards upon the table—as she jumped up full of glee and affection, to greet him at the threshold.

It was about this period, as we all remember, that hats began to turn and heads with them, and tables approved themselves the most intelligent of quadrupeds; chests of drawers and other grave pieces of furniture babbled of family secrets, and houses resounded with those creaks and cracks with which Bacon, Shakespeare, and Lord Byron communicated their several inspirations in detestable grammar, to all who pleased to consult them.

Aunt Dinah was charmed. Her rapid genius loved a short-cut, and here was, by something better than a post-office, a direct gossiping intimacy opened between her and the people on t'other side of the Styx.

She ran into this as into her other whimsies, might and main, with all her heart and soul. She spent money very wildly, for her, upon the gospels of the new religion, with which the

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transatlantic press was teeming; and in her little green-papered dressing-room was accumulating a library upon her favourite craze, which might have grown to the dimensions of Don Quixote's.

She had been practising for a year, however, and all the minor tables in her house had repeatedly prophesied before she disclosed her conversion to her nephew, or to anyone else except old Winnie.

It was no particular business of his if his aunt chose to converse with ghosts and angels by the mediation of her furniture. So, except that he now and then assisted at a *séance*, the phenomena of which were not very clear to him, though perfectly so to his aunt, and acquiesced in dimly and submissively by good old Winnie, things went on in their old course; and so, for some three or four years more, during which William Maubray read a great deal of all sorts of lore, and acquired an erudite smattering of old English authors, dramatists, divines, poets, and essayists, and time was tracing fine wrinkles about Aunt Dinah's kind eyes and candid forehead, and adding graceful inches to the lithe figure of Violet Darkwell;

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and the great law of decay and renewal was asserting itself everywhere, and snows shrouding the dead world in winter, and summer fragrance, and glow of many hues in the gardens and fields succeeding, and births and deaths in all the newspapers every morning.

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CHAPTER II.

A LETTER.

THE following letter, posted at Saxton, reached a rather solitary student in ——— College, Cambridge.

"DEAR WILLIAM,—You will be sorry—I know you will—to hear that poor old auntie is not long for this world; I don't know exactly what is wrong, but something I am certain very bad. As for Doctor Drake, I have no faith in him, or, indeed, in medicine, and don't mean to trouble him except as a friend. I am quite happy in the expectation of the coming change, and have had within the last week, with the assistance of good old Winnie Dobbs some very delightful *communications*, you know, I dare say, what I mean.

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Bring with you—for you *must* come *immediately*, if you care to see poor Aunt Dinah before she departs—a basket-bottle of eau de Cologne, like the former, you know the kind I mean, and buy it at the same place. You need not get the cameo ring for Doctor Drake, I shan't make him a present—in fact, we are not now on terms. I had heard from many people of his incivility and want of temper; God forgive him his *ingratitude*, however, as I do. The basket-bottle holds about a pint, *remember*. I want to tell you exactly what I can do for you by my will; I always told you, dear William, it was very *small;* still, as the people used to say, 'every little makes a muckle,' and though little, it will be a *help*. I cannot rest till you come; I know, and am sure you love poor old auntie, and would like to close her eyes when the hour comes; therefore, dear Willie, come without delay. Also bring with you half a pound of the snuff, the same mixture as before; they make it up at Figgs's —*get it there*—not in paper, observe; in a canister, and *rolled in lead*, as will be poor auntie before long! Old Dobbs will have your room and bed comfortable, as usual; come by

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the cross coach, at eight o'clock. Tea, and anything else you like, will *await* you.

"Ever your fond old

"AUNTIE.

"P.S.—I send you, *to guard against mistakes*, the exact proportions of the mixture—the *snuff* I mean, of course. I quite forgot a new collar for Psyche, *plated*. Make them engrave 'Mrs. Perfect, Gilroyd Hall,' upon it. Heaven bless you. We are all progressing upward. Amen! says your poor old Aunt Dinah, who loves you."

It was in his quiet college room by candle-light that William Maubray read this letter from his kind, wild, preposterous, old aunt, who had been to him as a mother from his early days.

Aunt Dinah! was it possible that he was about to lose that familiar friend and face, the only person on earth who cared about him.

He read the letter over again. A person who did not know Aunt Dinah so well as he, would have argued from the commissions about scents, dog-collars, and snuff, that the old lady had no honest intention of dying. But he

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knew that incongruous and volatile soul too well to infer reliable consolation from those levities.

"Yes, yes—I shall lose her—she's gone," said the young man in great distress, laying the letter, with the gentleness of despair, upon the table, and looking down upon it in pain and rumination.

It would certainly make a change—possibly a fatal one in his prospects. A sudden change. He read the letter through again, and then, with a sinking heart, he opened the window and looked out upon the moonlight prospect. There are times when in her sweetest moods nature seems unkind. Why all this smiling light—this cheer and serenity of sky and earth—when he was stricken only five minutes since, perhaps undone, by the message of that letter—that sorrow-laden burlesque?

This sort of suggestion, in such a moment, comes despairingly. The vastness of creation—the inflexibility of its laws, and "What is man, and what am I among men, that the great Projector of all this should look after ephemeral me and my concerns? The human sympathy that I could rely upon, and human

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power—frail and fleeting—but still enough—is gone, and in this solitary hour, as in the coming one of death, experience fails me, and I must rest all upon that which, according to my light, is faith, or theory, or chance!"

With a great sigh, and a heavy heart, William Maubray turned away from the window, and a gush of very true affection flooded his heart as he thought of kind old Aunt Dinah. He read the letter once more, to make out what gleams of comfort he could.

A handsome fellow was William Maubray—nearly three-and-twenty by this time—good at cricket—great at football: three years ago, in the school days, now, so old, tall, and lithe. A studious man in his own way—a little pale, with broad forehead, good blue eyes, and delicately formed, but somewhat sad features.

He looked round his room. He had grown very fond of that homely apartment. His eyes wandered over his few shelves of beloved old books, in all manner of dingy and decayed bindings—some of them two centuries and a half old, very few of later birth than a hundred years ago. Delightful companions—ready at a moment's call—ready to open their minds,

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and say their best sayings on any subject he might choose—resenting no neglect, obtruding no counsel, always the same serene, cheerful, inalienable friends.

The idea of parting with them was insupportable, nearly. But if the break-up came, they *must* part company, and the world be a new one for him. The young man spent much of that night in dismal reveries and speculations over his future schemes and chances, all of which I spare the reader.

Good Dr. Sprague, whom he saw next day, heard the news with much concern. He had known Miss Perfect long ago, and was decorously sorry on her account. But his real regrets were for the young man.

"Well, you go, of course, and see your aunt, and I do trust it mayn't be quite so bad. Stay, you know, as long as she wants you, and don't despond. I could wish your reading had been in a more available direction: but rely on it, you'll find a way to make a start and get into a profession, and with your abilities, I've no doubt you'll make your way in the world."

And the doctor, who was a shrewd as well as a kindly little gentleman, having buttoned

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the last button of his gaiter, stood, cap in hand, erect, and smiling confidently, he shook his hand, with a "God bless you, Maubray," and a few minutes later William Maubray, with all his commissions stowed away in his portmanteau, had commenced his little journey to Gilroyd Hall.

The moon was up, and the little town of Saxton very quiet, as Her Majesty's mail, dropping a bag at the post office, whirled through it, and pulled up at the further end, at the gate of Gilroyd Hall, there to drop our friend, an outside passenger.

The tall, florid iron gate was already locked. William tugged at the bell, and drew back a little to reconnoitre the premises. One of the old brick gables overhangs the road, with only a couple of windows high up, and he saw that his summons had put a light in motion within them. So he rejoined his hat-case, and his portmanteau, awaiting him on its end, in front of the white iron gate that looked like lace-work in the moonlight.

"Ha! Tom; glad to see you."

"Welcome, Mr. William, sir; she a wearyin'

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to see ye, and scarce thought you'd a come to-night."

The wicket beside the great gate was now open, and William shook hands with the old retainer, and glancing anxiously up at the stone-faced windows, as it were to read the countenance of the old house, he asked, "And how *is* she, Tom, to-night?"

"Complainin' an' down-hearted a bit for *her*, that is now and again. She cried a good bout to-day wi' old Winnie, in the little parlour.

"She's up, then?"

"Ooh, ay; she's not a body to lay down while she's a leg to stan' on. But I do think she's nigh her endin'. Gie't to me," this referred to the portmanteau. "I do, poor old girl! and we's all be sorry, Master Willie."

William's heart sank.

"Where is she?" he inquired.

"In the drawing-room, I think."

By this time they were standing in the oak-pannelled hall, and some one looked over the banister from the lobby, upon them. It was old Winnie, the light of her candle shining pleasantly on her ruddy and kindly face.

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"Oh! Master Willie. Thank God, you're come at last. Glad she'll be to see you."

Old Winnie ambled down the stairs with the corner of her apron to her eye, and shook him by both hands, and greeted him again very kindly, and even kissed him according to the tradition of a score of years.

"Is she *very* ill, Dobbs?" whispered he, looking pale.

"Well, not to say *very* to look at, you'd say, but she's 'ad a warnin', her and me sittin' in the bedroom, an' she's bin an' made a new will; the lawyer's bin up from Saxton. Don't ye say I said nothing, mind; 'twould only fret her, maybe."

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CHAPTER III.

MISS DINAH PERFECT AND HER GUESTS.

"Is she alone?" he asked, postponing the trying moment of seeing her.

"No, the Doctor's with her still—Dr. Drake, and Miss Letty, his sister, you remember; they're drinkin' a cup o' tea, and some crumpets, and they'll all be right glad you're come."

"They ought to go away, don't you think?" mildly suggested William Maubray, a good deal shocked. "However, let me get to my room for two or three minutes, and I shall be ready then."

They passed the drawing-room door, and Miss Letty Drake's deliberate tones were audible from within. When he had got to his room he asked Dobbs—

"What was the *warning* you spoke of?"

"Well, dear me! It was the table; she and

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me, she makes me sit before her, poor thing, and we—well, there *is* cracks, sure, on and off! And she puts this an' that together; and so one way or other—it puzzles my poor head, how—she does make out a deal."

William Maubray was an odd, rather solitary young man, and more given to reading and thinking than is usual at his years, and he detested these incantations to which his aunt, Miss Perfect, had addicted herself, of late years, with her usual capricious impetuosity; and he was very uncomfortable on hearing that she was occupying her last days with these questionable divinations.

When, in a few minutes, William ran down to the drawing-room, and with a chill of anticipation opened the door of that comfortable rather than imposing chamber, the tall slim figure of his aunt rose up from her arm-chair, beside the fire, for though it was early autumn, the fire was pleasant, and the night-air was frosty, and with light and wiry tread, stepped across the carpet to meet him. Her kind, energetic face was pale, and the smile she used to greet him with was nowhere, and she was arrayed from head to foot in deep mourning, in

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which, particularly as she abhorred the modern embellishment of crinoline, she looked more slim and tall even than she was.

The presence of her guests in no wise affected the greeting of the aunt and nephew, which was very affectionate, and even agitated, though silent.

"Good Willie, to come so quickly—I knew you would." Miss Perfect never wept, but she was very near tears at that moment, and there was a little silence, during which she held his hands, and then recollecting herself, dropt them, and continued more like herself.

"You did not expect to see me up and here; everything happens oddly with me. Here I am, you see, apparently, I dare say, much as usual. By half-past twelve o'clock to-morrow night I shall be dead! There, don't mind now—I'll tell you all by and by. This is my friend, Miss Drake, you know her."

They shook hands, Miss Drake smiling as brisk a smile as in a scene so awful she could hazard.

"And this, my kind friend Dr. Drake."

William had occasionally seen Dr. Drake in

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the streets of Saxton, and on the surrounding high roads at a distance, but he had never before had the honour of an interview.

The doctor was short and fat, a little bald, and rather dusty, and somehow, William thought, resembled a jolly old sexton a good deal more than a physician. He rose up, with his hands in his trowsers pockets, and some snuff in the wrinkles of his black cloth waistcoat, and bowed, with raised eyebrows and pursed mouth, gravely to his plate of crumpet.

William Maubray looked again on his aunt, who was adjusting her black draperies in her chair, and then once more at the doctor, whose little eye he caught for a second, with a curious and even cunning expression in it; but it was averted with a sudden accession of melancholy once more—and William asked—

"I—I hope, sir, there is nothing very imminent?"

The doctor cleared his voice, uneasily, and Aunt Dinah interposed with a nod, a little dryly—

"It is not quite in *his* department."

And whose department *is* it in? the student thought.

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"I dare say Doctor Drake would tell you I'm very well—so, perhaps, in a sense, I am; but—but Doctor Drake has kindly come here as a friend."

Doctor Drake bowed, looking steadfastly into his cup.

"As a friend, dear Willie, just as you have come—an old friend." Miss Perfect spoke low, with a little tremor in her voice, and was, I believe, near crying, but braced her resolution. William drew near gently and sat down beside her, and placing her hand upon his, she proceeded.

"My dear friend Miss Drake, there, does not agree with me, I'm aware; but Doctor Drake who has read more, and perhaps, *thought* more, thinks otherwise—at least, so I'm led to suppose."

The doctor coughed a little; Miss Drake raised her long chin, and with raised eyebrows, looked down on her finger tips which were drumming on the table, and my cousin William glanced from one to the other, not quite understanding her drift.

"But," she continued, "I've apprised them already, and I tell *you* of course; it is—you'll

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remember the name — an intimation from Henbane."

"Poison!" said William, under his breath, with a look of pale inquiry at Doctor Drake, who at the moment was swallowing his tea very fast, and was seized on a sudden with an explosion of coughing, sneezing, and strangling, which compelled him to jump to his feet, and stagger about the room with his face in his pocket-handkerchief and his back to the tea-table.

"When Dr. Henbane," said my aunt with severity, "I mean a—Doctor *Drake*—has quite done coughing, I'll go on."

There was a little pause.

"Confound it," thought William, who was half beside himself, "it's a very odd dying scene!"

The doctor, blowing his nose, returned very red and solemn, and explained, still coughing at intervals, that it was a little tea in the trachea; it invariably occurred to him when he drank tea in the evening; he *must* give it up; "*you* know, Letty."

Miss Drake did not deign to assist him.

"She does not seem to know so much about

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it as you do," observed Aunt Dinah with an irony.

"Owing to my not *thinking* so much," replied Miss Letty, sarcastically.

"Henbane!" murmured William again, in a puzzled horror.

"H'm!—yes!—Henbane? you seem to have forgotten; one of those—one of the spirits who have attached themselves to me," and Aunt Dinah shot a quick glance at the doctor who though looking again at his crumpet, seemed to cower awfully under it.

"Oh—ay—Henbane!" exclaimed William in a tone of familiarity, which indicated anything but respect for that supernatural acquaintance. "Henbane, to be *sure*."

And he looked on his aunt with a half amused recognition, which seemed to say, "Well—and what about that humbug?"

But Aunt Dinah said decisively—

"So much for the present; you shall hear *more*—everything, by-and-bye."

And there followed a silence.

"Did you remember the snuff, dear William?" inquired the doomed lady, with rather an abrupt transition.

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"Certainly; shall I fetch it?" said William, half rising.

Miss Perfect nodded, and away he went, somehow vastly relieved, and with his bedroom candle in his hand, mounted the oak stairs, which were broad and handsome in proportion to the other dimensions of that snug old house.

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CHAPTER IV.

VIOLET DARKWELL.

At the head of the stairs, the topmost step of which had been their bench, there rose to him two female figures. He did not instantly recognise them, for one candle only was burning, and it was on the little table nearly behind them. One was old Winnie Dobbs, the other Violet Darkwell; she stood up slight and girlish still, but looking taller than he had expected, with an old faded silk quilted shawl of Aunt Dinah's about her shoulders, and hood-wise over her head, for the night was frosty.

"Ha! Vi—little Vi, I was going to say; dear me! how you have grown! So glad to see you."

He had the girl's slim hand in his, and was speaking as he felt, very kindly.

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"We've been waiting here, Winnie and I, to hear what you thought of dear grannie,"—(grannie was merely a pet name in this case, defining no relationship)—"and what do you think, William?"

"I really don't understand it," he answered. "I—I hope it's all nonsense; I really think so. She says she is very well; and the doctor—Drake, you know—I really think he was laughing, and one thing I'm quite certain of—it is connected in her mind with that foolish spirit-rapping."

"And you don't believe in it?" inquired the young lady.

"All bosh and nonsense. Not a bit of it," he replied.

"Oh, William, I am so delighted to hear you say so!" she exclaimed, much relieved by the promulgation of so valuable an opinion. "And you're quite right, I *know*, about grannie. It *is*, really—is not it, Winnie?—all all about that awful spirit-rapping. Grannie never speaks of it to me; I believe she's afraid of frightening me; but old Winnie, here—you must not tell of her—she tells me all about it—everything; and I *am* so afraid

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of it; and it is *entirely* that. Grannie thinks she has got a message! fancy! How awful! And Winnie does not know what the words were; for grannie writes down the letters with a pencil, and tells her only what she thinks fit; and I am *so* delighted—you can't think."

"You good little Vi, I'm so glad to see you!" She laughed a low little laugh—the first for several days—as he shook her hand again; and he said—

"Winnie, do, like a dear old thing, open my portmanteau—here's the key—and fetch me a canister you'll see at the top, with a great paper label, blue and red, on it."

Away went Winnie Dobbs, with his key and candle, and he said to the pretty girl who stood leaning lightly against the banister—

"My old friend, Vi! When I went into the drawing-room just now, I looked all round for you, and could not think what had become of you, and was really afraid you had gone away to London. I don't think I should ever care to come to Gilroyd Hall again; I should prefer seeing my aunt anywhere else—it would not be like itself if you were gone."

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"So you really missed me, William?" she laughed.

"I should think so. And another thing—you are not to call me William. Why don't you call me Willie, or old bear, as you used to do? If you change old names, I'll begin and call you Miss Darkwell."

"How awful!"

"Indeed I will, and be as formal as you please, and treat you like a young lady, and you'll never be 'wicked little Vi' any more."

She was laughing as she leaned back, and he could see her small teeth, and he bethought him that she was looking really quite lovely; so with two fingers he picked up her little hand again, as it lay at her side, and he said—

"And we are always to be good friends you know—great friends; and although you've no more dolls to mend, I'll still be of use. I'm going to the bar, and I'll manage all your law-suits, if you let me; and when you are going to be married, I'll draw your settlements, and you are to have me always for your counsel."

She was still smiling, but said nothing, and looked wonderfully pretty, with the old grey silk hood wrapped all about her, so that sober

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old William was on the very point of kissing the slender hand he held in his. But a new feeling of shyness prevented, and he only shook her hand gently once more, and laid it by her side again, as you replace some precious thing you have been admiring where you found it.

"And you really think we may be happy about dear old grannie again?" she said.

The sound of Winnie's footsteps was heard approaching.

"Yes; certainly. I'll try to get a word with Doctor Drake. I can't imagine anything serious. Won't you come to the drawing-room now?"

"No; not to-night; not while those people are there. I was so wretched about dear grannie, I could not bear to go in at first; and now it would be odd, I think, going down when tea is over."

"As if I had brought you down from the nursery, as I often did, Vi, on my back. Well, old Winnie, have you got it?"

"Here, I think, Master William," answered Winnie.

"Yes; all right. So you won't come, Vi?"

"No."

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"Quite made up your mind?"

"Quite, Willie."

"That's right—*Willie*," said he, with a smile, and a nod of approbation. "I should so like to stay here a little longer, as you won't come, and hear all the news, and tell you mine; but Aunt Dinah would lose patience—I'm afraid she *has*."

"Yes, indeed; you had better go. Good night, bear."

"Good night, wicked little Vi. Remember we meet at breakfast—shan't we?"

"Oh, certainly. Good night."

"Good night."

And so the gray silk hood vanished, with a smile, prettily, round the corner, and William Maubray descended with his snuff to the drawing-room, with the pretty oval portrait of that young face still hovering before him in the air.

Miss Letty Drake, whose countenance was unpleasantly long in proportion to her height, and pallid, and her small figure bony, and who was dressed on this sad occasion in her silk "half-mourning," a sad and, it was thought, a dyed garment, which had done duty during

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many periods of affliction, as William entered the room, was concluding a sentence with a low and pointed asperity, thus—"which seems to me hardly compatible with Saint Paul's description of Christian charity," and a short silence followed these words.

"I was going to ring the bell, William," said the doomed lady of the house. "One would have thought you were *making* that snuff. Let me see it—h'm. See, get off this cover. Ho! what is this? A lead wrapper!"

"You said, Aunt Dinah, you wished it."

"Did I? Well, no matter. Get it open. Thanks. Yes; that's it. Yes; very good. You take snuff, doctor, don't you?"

"A *yes*, certainly, nothing like it, I do believe—where a man is obliged to work his head—aw haw—a stimulus and a sedative."

The Doctor, it was averred, "worked" his occasionally with brandy and water, and not a great deal otherwise.

"No, many thanks; don't care for perfumes; high toast is my snuff." And Doctor Drake illustrated the fact by a huge pinch, which shed another brown shower over the wrinkles of his waistcoat.

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"Letty, dear," said Aunt Dinah, turning suddenly to Miss Drake, "we won't quarrel; we can't agree, but I won't quarrel."

"Well, dear, I'm glad to hear you say so. I'm sure, for my part, I never quarrel. 'Be ye angry, and let not the sun go down on your wrath.'"

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CHAPTER V.

AUNT DINAH IS IN THE HORRORS, AND DOCTOR DRAKE PUTS HIS NIGHT CAP IN HIS POCKET.

"I WISH to say good-by to you very kindly," said Aunt Dinah, quite sadly and gently, and somehow not like herself, "and—and I've tried to keep up; I know it must happen, and I'm sure it is for the best, but"——

"I hope and expect, my dear Dinah," interposed Miss Letty, sharply—she was pulling on her worsted "wrists"—"to see you in the enjoyment of many years of your accustomed health and spirits, and I have no doubt, humanly speaking, that I shall."

Miss Letty was quiet and peremptory, but also a little excited. And the doctor, for want of something better to do, cleared his voice, in a grand abstraction, and wound up his watch slowly, and held it to his ear, nobody knew exactly why.

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"You won't believe me, but I know it, and so will you—too late; to-morrow night at twelve o'clock I shall be dead. I've tried to keep up—I have; I've tried it; but oh! Ho, ho, hoo, ooh," and poor Aunt Dinah quite broke down, and cried and hooted hysterically.

"Dr. Drake had now before him an intelligible case, and took the command accordingly with decision. Up went the window; cold water was there, and spirit of hartshorn. And when she had a little recovered, the Doctor, who was a good-natured fellow, said—

"Now, Miss Perfect, ma'am, it won't do, I tell you; it's only right; you may want some assistance; and if, as an old friend, you'll allow me to return and remain here for the night, a sofa, or an arm-chair, anything, I'll be most happy, I do assure you."

But Aunt Dinah, with many thanks, said, "No," peremptorily, and wilful man or woman, who will contend with?

So, like the awful banquet in Macbeth, Miss Dinah Perfect's tea-party broke down and up, and the guests, somewhat scared, got in to their walking wrappers, rather silently, and their

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entertainer remained behind unstrung and melancholic.

But William Maubray, who came down to assist in the rummage for cloaks and umbrellas, asked leave, in his blunt modest way, to accompany Miss Letty and her brother, the doctor, to Saxton.

Now there seemed something real and grisly in Aunt Dinah's terror, which a little infected William Maubray; and the little party marched in silence along the frost-hardened road, white in moonlight, with the bare switch-like shadows of the trees across it, on their way to the pretty old town of Saxton.

At last the doctor said—

"She won't miss you, do you think?"

"She told me she'd like to be quiet for half an hour, and I should be so much obliged if you could tell me, whether you really, that is, *still* think that she ought to have a medical man in attendance to-night."

"Why, you know what hysteria is. Well, she is in a highly hysterical state. She's a woman who resists; it would be safer, you see, if she gave way and cried a bit now and then, when nature prompts, but she won't, except

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under awful high pressure, and then it might be serious; those things sometimes run off into fits."

And so the doctor lectured William upon his aunt's nerves, until they had arrived at the door of his snug house in the High Street.

Here they shook hands; but William Maubray, who was unhappy about Aunt Dinah, after Miss Letty had mounted to her chamber, very urgently entreated the doctor to return and see how it might end.

With a bottle of valerian, his slippers, and a night-cap in his packet, Doctor Drake did consent to return, and he smuggled into Gilroyd Hall.

"I don't know what to make of that spirit-rapping quite," said the doctor, as side by side they approached the Hall. "There's a quantity of books published on it—very unaccountable if half what they say is true. I suppose you've read it all. You read a lot, Miss Perfect tells me."

"I've read very little about it, except in the papers. She fancies she has had a message, telling her she is to die sometime to-morrow. I can't believe there's really anything more

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than self-deception; but is there not a danger?"

"How?" asked the doctor.

"I mean, being so nervous as you suppose, and quite convinced that she is to die at a particular time; might not her own mind—you know Lord Lyttelton died in consequence of such a persuasion."

William paused, Doctor Drake lowered, between his fingers, the cigar he was smoking, and they came to a halt, with a little wheel to the left, and the doctor, with his head aside, blowing the smoke up in a thin stream, looked with a thoughtful scrutiny up at the clear bright moon; perhaps a not unsuitable source of inspiration upon their crazy theme.

"I forget *which* Lord Lyttelton that was," said the doctor, wisely. "Isn't it *Lyttelton*, you say? But the thing is quite possible. There's a spirit you know she's always talking about. She calls him Henbane. Egad, sir, I was devilish near laughing at tea when she named him so suddenly that time; I'd have been up a tree if I had, you know. You did not see what she was at, but I did. That Henbane's her gospel, egad, and she thinks it

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was he who told her—d'ye see? Come along. She'll be wondering where you are."

So on they went towards Gilroyd Hall, whose outline, black and sharp, against the luminous sky, was relieved at one point by the dull glow of candle-light through the red curtains, of what William Maubray knew to be Aunt Dinah's bedchamber window.

"She is in her room, I think—there's light in her window," said William. The doctor nodded, chucking his cigar stump far away, for he knew Aunt Dinah's antipathy to tobacco, and they were now on the door-step. He was thinking, if the case were to end tragically, what a capital paper he would make of it, beside the interesting letter he would send to the editor of the *Spatula*.

"Winnie's bin a callin' over the stairs for you, Master Willie. Misses wants ye to her room," said Tom, who awaited them on the door-steps.

"I'll sit by the fire in the study," whispered the doctor. "I don't mind sitting up a night now and then. Give me a cloak or something. There's a sofa, and I'll do very well."

The principle of life was strong in Aunt

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Dinah, and three hours later that active-minded lady was lying wide awake on her bed, with a variety of topics, not all consisting with the assumed shortness of her hours, drifting in succession through her head. The last idea that struck her was the most congruous, and up she jumped, made a wild toilet, whose sole principle was warmth, tied a faded silk handkerchief over her nightcap, across her ears, and with her long white flannel dressing-gown about her, and a taper in her hand, issued, like the apparition of the Bleeding Nun, upon the gallery, and tapped sharply on William Maubray's door.

"William, William!" she called as she tapped, and from within William answered drowsily to the summons.

"Wait a moment," said the lady, and

"In glided Margaret's grimly ghost,
And stood at William's feet."

"We *must* have a *séance*, my dear boy; I'm going to wake up old Winnie. It certainly has a connexion with your arrival; but anything like the cracking, knocking, and creaking of *everything*, I've never yet heard. I have

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no doubt—so sure as you sit there"—(William was sitting up in his bed with glazed eyes, and senses only half awake)—"that your poor dear mother is here to-night. We're *sure* of Henbane; and—just get your clothes on—I'm going for Winnie, and we meet in the study, mind, in five minutes."

And Aunt Dinah, having lighted William's candle, disappeared, leaving him with a fund of cheerful ideas to make his yawning and bewildered toilet.

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CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE WITCHES ASSEMBLE.

A FEW minutes later she glided into the study, overthrowing a small table, round which her little *séances* were accustomed to be made, and which the doctor had providently placed against the door.

Aunt Dinah held under her arm the 8vo "Revelations of Elihu Bung, the Pennsylvanian Prophet," a contribution to spiritual science which distanced all contemporary competition; and the chapter which shows that a table of a light, smart build, after having served a proper apprenticeship to 'rapping,' may acquire the faculty of locomotion and self-direction, flashed on her recollection as she recognised prostrate at her feet, in the glimmer of her taper, the altar of their mysteries, which

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she had with reverent hands herself placed that evening in its wonted corner, at the opposite end of the room.

Such a manifestation was new to her. She looked on it, a little paler than usual, and bethought her of that other terrible chapter in which Elihu Bung avers that spirits, grown intimate by a long familiarity, will, in a properly regulated twilight—and her light at the moment was no more—make themselves visible to those whom they habitually favour with their advices.

Therefore she was strangely thrilled at sight of the indistinct and shadowy doctor, who awakened by the noise, rose at the opposite end of the room from the sofa on which he had fallen asleep. Tall and thin, and quite unrecognisable by him, was the white figure at the door, with a taper elevated above its head, and which whispered with a horrid distinctness the word 'Henbane!'—the first heard on his awakening, the last in his fancy as he dropped asleep, and which sounded to him like the apparition's considerate announcement of its name on entering the room; he echoed 'Henbane' in a suppressed diapason, and Aunt

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Dinah, with an awful ejaculation, repeated the word from the distance, and sank into a chair.

"Henbane!" cried the doctor briskly, having no other exclamation ready, and reassured by these evidences of timidity in the spectre, he exclaimed, "Hey, by Jove! what the plague!" and for some seconds he did not know distinctly where he was.

"Merciful goodness! Doctor Drake, why *will* you try to frighten people in this manner? Do you want to *kill* me, sir?"

"I? Ho! Ha, ha! ma'am," replied the learned gentleman, incoherently.

"What are you doing *here*, sir? I think you're mad!" exclaimed Aunt Dinah, fiercely.

The doctor cleared his voice, and addressed himself to explain, and before his first period was reached, William and old Winnie, wofully sleepy, had arrived.

Luckily the person who approaches such oracles as 'Henbane,' it is well known, must do so with a peaceful and charitable soul. So Miss Perfect was appeasable, and apologies being made and accepted, she thus opened her mind to the doctor—

"I don't complain, Doctor Drake—William,

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light the candles over the chimney-piece—although you terrified me a great deal more than in my circumstances I ought to have been capable of."

The candles were now lighted, and shone cheerfully upon the short, fat figure, and ruddy, roguish face of Doctor Drake, and as he was taking one of his huge pinches of snuff, she added—

"And I won't deny that I *did* fancy for a moment you might be a spirit-form, and possibly that of Henbane."

William Maubray, who was looking at the doctor, as Miss Perfect reverently lowered her voice at these words, exploded into something so like a laugh, though he tried to pass it off for a cough, that his aunt looked sharply on him in silence for a moment.

"And I'm blowed but I was a bit frightened too, ma'am, when I saw you at the door there," said the doctor.

"Well, let us try," said Miss Perfect. "Come, we are four; let us try who are present—what spirits, and seek to communicate. You don't object, Dr. Drake?"

"I? Ho! oh! dear no. I should not de-

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sire better—aw-haw—*instruction*, ma'am," answered the doctor.

I am afraid he was near saying "fun."

"Winnie, place the table as usual. There, yes. Now let us arrange ourselves."

The doctor sat down, still blinking, and with a great yawn inquired—

"Do we waw—haw—wa—w—want any particular information?"

"Let us first try whether they will communicate. We *always* want information," said Miss Perfect. "William, sit you there; Winnie, *there*. I'll take pencil and paper and record."

All being prepared, fingers extended, company intent, Aunt Dinah propounded the first question—

"Is there any spirit present?"

There was a long wait and no rejoinder.

"Didn't you hear something?" inquired the doctor.

William shook his head.

"I thought I *felt* it," persisted the doctor. "What do *you* say, ma'am?" addressing himself to Winnie, who looked, after her wont, towards her mistress for help.

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"Did you feel anything?" demanded Miss Perfect, sharply.

"Nothing but a little wind like on the back of my head, as I think," replied Winnie, driven to the wall.

"Wind on her head! That's odd," said Miss Perfect, looking in the air, as if she possessed the porcine gift of seeing it, "*very* odd!" she continued, with her small hand expanded in the air. "Not a breath stirring, and Winnie has no more imagination than that sofa pillow. You never fancy anything, Winnie?"

"Do I, ma'am?" inquired Winnie Dobbs, mildly.

"Well, *do* you, I say? No, you don't; of course, you don't. You know you don't as well as I do."

"Well, I did think so, sure, ma'am," answered Winnie.

"Pity we can't get an answer," remarked the doctor, and at the same moment William felt the pressure of a large foot in a slipper—under the table. It had the air of an intentional squeeze, and he looked innocently at the doctor, who was, however, so entirely uncon-

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scious, that it must have been an accident.

"I say it *is* a pity, Mr. Maubray, isn't it? for we *might* hear something that might interest Miss Perfect very much, possibly, I say?"

"I don't know; I can't say. I've never heard anything," answered William, who would have liked to kick the table up to the ceiling and go off to his bed.

"Suppose, ma'am, we try again," inquired Doctor Drake.

"Certainly," replied Aunt Dinah, "we must have patience."

"Will you ask, ma'am, please, again if there's a spirit in the room?" solicited the doctor; and the question being put, there came an upward heave of the table.

"Well?" exclaimed the doctor, looking at Winnie, "did you feel that?"

"Tilt, ma'am," said Winnie, who knew the intelligence would be welcome.

"What do *you* say?" inquired Miss Perfect triumphantly of William.

Doctor Drake was changing his position the moment, and I perceived no other

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motion in the table—nothing but the little push he gave it," answered William.

"Oh, pooh! yes, of course, there was that," said the doctor a little crossly; "but I meant a sort of a start—a crack like, in the leaf of the table."

"I felt nothing of the kind," said William Maubray.

The doctor looked disgusted, and leaning back, took a large pinch of snuff. There was a silence. Aunt Dinah's lips were closed with a thoughtful frown as she looked down upon the top of the table.

"It is very strange. I certainly never witnessed in this house more unequivocal evidences —*preliminary* evidences, of course—of spiritual activity."

"I think, ma'am, I have read," said the doctor, with his hands in his pockets, "I *think*, somewhere, that if any one of the manipulators happens to be an unbeliever——"

"An unbeliever in the manifestations, of course the spirits won't communicate," interposed Miss Perfect, volubly laying down the law. "Winnie is a believer as much as I. We all know *that*. Nephew, how are you?

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Do you *believe?* You shake your head. Speak out. Yes or no?"

"Well, I don't," said he, a little sheepishly.

"You don't? And, not believing, you sit here with your fingers on the table, keeping Doctor Drake out of his—his——"

She could not say bed, and the doctor relieved her by saying, "Oh, as to me, ma'am, I'm only too happy; but you know it's a pity, all the same."

"Very true, doctor. Much obliged. We shall set it to rights. My dear William, you might have told us at starting; but we'll commence again. Sit by the fire, William, and I trust in a little time you may be convinced."

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CHAPTER VII.

THE FAMILIAR SPEAKS.

So the excommunicated William, with his feet upon the fender, leaning upon his elbow in the great chair, made himself comfortable by the fire, and heard his aunt propound the questions, and the answers by the previously appointed manifestations, duly noted down.

"Is there a spirit present?"

"Yes."

"Are there more than one?"

"No."

"Is it a male or female spirit?"

No answer.

"Is it Henbane?"

"Yes" (emphatically).

William *was* surprised. All was now going smoothly, and he could not for a moment suspect a gentleman of Dr. Drake's respectability

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of participating in a trick. But there was a monotony in the matter of a quieting kind, and William grew too drowsy to keep his eyes long open.

"Did you give Miss Dinah Perfect a message on Monday last?"

"Yes."

"Did it concern her death?"

"Yes."

"Is her death to take place at the time then appointed?"

Here the table made a positive jump, and in spite of a grasp made at it by the doctor's fingers, it fell flat on the floor, and it must have been a very violent impulse, for Dr. Drake's slipper was off, and he, very red, no doubt from his effort to prevent the wilful fall of the table.

"Very extraordinary!" exclaimed he, standing up.

"Most wonderful!" said my aunt.

Good old fat Winnie sat with her fingers raised in the air, looking at the prostrate table with placid astonishment.

"That's a tilt," said the doctor, "that means *no*—a very *emphatic* tilt."

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"I think it was a *jump*," said my aunt, sadly.

"No, ma'am, no—a tilt, a tilt, I'll take my oath. Besides, a *jump* has no meaning," urged he with energy.

"Pardon me; when a question is received with marked impatience a jump is no unfrequent consequence."

"Oh, ho!" groaned the doctor, reflectively. "Then it counts for nothing?"

"Nothing," said Miss Perfect in a low tone. "Winnie, get the table up again."

"Suppose, ma'am, to avoid mistakes," said the doctor, after reflection, "suppose we put it upon it to express itself in language. Just ask it what about Miss Dinah Perfect's death."

"I've no objection," said Miss Perfect; and in the terms prescribed by Dr. Drake the momentous question was put.

Hereupon the spelling commenced—

"A-D-J-O-U-R-N-E-D."

"Postponed, put off, ma'am!" said the doctor, expounding eagerly.

"I know; good heaven! I understand," answered Aunt Dinah, faintly.

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"Give her some water. *Here*, ma'am," said he, presenting a glass of water at her pale lips. She sipped a little.

"Now we'll ask, ma'am, please, for how long?" suggested the doctor.

And this question likewise having been propounded, the table proceeded once more to spell—

"S-I-X-E D-I-E."

"It ends with *die*," said my poor aunt, faintly.

"*Sine die*, ma'am. It means indefinitely, ma'am; your death is postponed without a day named—for ever, ma'am! It's all over; and I'm very happy it has ended so. What a marvellous thing, ma'am—give her some more water, please — those manifestations are. I hope, ma'am, your mind is quite relieved—perfectly, ma'am."

Miss Dinah Perfect was taken with a violent shivering, in which her very teeth chattered. Then she cried, and then she laughed; and finally Doctor Drake administered some of his ammonia and valerian, and she became, at last, composed.

With audible thanksgivings old Winnie

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accompanied her mistress upstairs to her room, where Aunt Dinah herself, who, notwithstanding her necromancy, was a well-intending, pious churchwoman, descended to her knees at her bedside, and poured forth her gratitude for the reprieve, and then in a loud and distinct voice read to old Winnie Dobbs the twentieth chapter of the Second Book of Kings, in which we read how the good king Hezekiah obtained by prayer ten years more of the light of life.

Then old Winnie persuaded her to have a glass of very hot port wine-negus, which agreed with her so well that she quickly fell asleep; and never did poor lady need repose more, or drink deeper and more tranquil draughts of that Lethe.

William Maubray was now wide awake, and he and the doctor, being a little chilly, sat before the study fire.

"It's jolly, isn't it?" exclaimed William, for the seventh time. "But isn't it all very odd, sir, and very unaccountable — I — I think?"

"Very, very odd, to be sure," said the doctor, poking the corner of a lump of coal— "very, no doubt."

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"I wish I had been awake. I should like to see one of those things—those *séances*. I had no idea there really was anything so coherent."

"Very lucky for her," replied the doctor, with a sly little wink to William.

William looked inquiringly at the doctor, who smiled on the poker's end, and pushed the embers gently with it.

"You don't believe in it, sir—do you?" inquired William, puzzled.

"I? Well, I don't know exactly what to say, you know. I put my foot in it on Sunday last, when I told her I did not believe a bit of it; nor more I *did*. Egad, you never saw a woman so angry, when I called it all bosh. You'd better not vex her that way, my boy—d'ye see? She lent me one of those wonderful queer books from America—very odd they are—and I read it to please her. So, you see, that's how we stand; very good friends again."

"And you are convinced it's true?" urged William, who, like other young men who sit up late, and read wild books, and drink strong coffee, was, under the rose, addicted to the supernatural.

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"Why, you see, as Shakespeare says, there are more bubbles between heaven and earth than are dreamt of by the philosophers," observed the doctor, with a little paraphrase. "I wish to live at peace with my neighbours; and I'd advise you to think over this subject, old fellow, and not to tease the old lady upstairs about it—that's all."

"I wish he'd speak out, and tell me what happened to-night, and tell me his real opinion," thought William Maubray. "I've read in some old medical book," he continued aloud, "that the vital electricity escapes and diffuses itself at the finger-tips."

"Oh, to be sure! All sorts of theories. The hand's a very mysterious organ. The hand of glory, you may be certain, was not altogether a story. The electric light has been seen at the finger-tips in consumptive cases in the dark; and a patient convulsed, or in a state of extreme nervous exhaustion, will clench the hand so as to prevent the escape of this influence at the finger-points, and then joining hands, in love, you know, or friendship —and in fact it is, sir, a very mysterious organ; and I'm prepared to believe a great

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deal that's curious about its occult powers. Your aunt told you about the-toad she saw climb over her coverlet one night, and turn into a hand and grasp her wrist."

"No," said William.

"Egad, she's ready to swear to it. Last winter she was so frightened, she was not fit to stand for a week after. She reads too much of those books. Egad, sir, she'll turn her head, and that will be the end of it. However, we've pulled her through this, and I hope she'll give it up, true or false. You see, there's no good in it; and if she goes on, sooner or later she'll frighten herself out of her wits."

"But that toad was a very curious idea," said William. "What does she make of it? Does she think it was a fancy only, or a real thing?"

"Pooh! A spirit of course. She calls it the key-spirit that unlocks the spirit-world, you see; and from the time it touches you, you are in rapport with the invisible world, and subject, as she says she is, to their visitations, you see—ha, ha, ha!"

William laughed too.

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"Last winter?" he said. "She never told me."

"Pooh! All fancies," observed the doctor. "Better she should not talk of them. Those American people are all going mad. She'll get touched in the upper story if she does not mind."

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CHAPTER VIII.

WILLIAM MAUBRAY'S VISION.

After some more talk of this kind, they parted, and William Maubray, as he lay down again in his bed, wondered whether the doctor, whom he had heard described as a shrewd man, believed in the revelations at which he had assisted; or, was it possible—could he have been accessory to—Oh! no, it could not be!

The student, as I have said, had a sort of liking for the supernatural, and although now and then he had experienced a qualm in his solitary college chamber at dead of night, when, as he read a well-authenticated horror, the old press creaked suddenly, or the door of the inner room swung slowly open of itself, it yet was "a pleasing terror" that thrilled him;

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and now as he lay this night awake, with a patch of moonlight spread askance on the floor —for Aunt Dinah insisted on a curfew, and he, "preferring the light that heaven sheds" to no lamp at all, left the window-shutter a little open, and for a while allowed his eyes to wander over the old-fashioned and faded furniture of the apartment, and his fancy to wander among those dreams of superstition with which he rather liked to try his courage.

He conned over his aunt's story of the toad, recounted to him by Doctor Drake, and which he had never heard before, until the nodding shadow of the sprig of jessamine on the floor took the shape of the sprawling reptile, and seemed to swagger clumsily toward his bed, and every noise in the curtains suggested its slimy clamberings.

Youth, fatigue, pure country air, in a little while overpowered these whimsies, and William Maubray fell into a deep sleep.

I am now going to relate a very extraordinary incident; but upon my honour the narrative is true. William Maubray dreamed that he was in the room in which he actually lay; that he was in bed, and that the moon-

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light entered the room, just as he had seen it before going to sleep. He thought that he heard a heavy tread traverse the room over his head; he heard the same slow and ponderous step descend the narrow back stair, that was separated from him only by the wall at the back of his bed. He knew intuitively that the person thus approaching came in quest of him, and he lay expecting, in a state of unaccountable terror. The handle of his door turned, and it seemed that his intending visitor paused, having opened the door about a hand's breadth, and William knew that he had only suspended, not abandoned his purpose, be it what it might. Then the door swung slowly open, and in the deep shadow, a figure, of gigantic stature, entered, paused beside his bed, and seized his wrist with a tremendous gripe.

For a time, unable to stir, he remained passive under its pressure. Then with a horrified struggle he awoke. There was no figure visible, but his wrist was actually compressed in a cold grasp, and, with a ghastly ejaculation, he sprang from his bed, and was released.

He had no means of lighting a candle; he

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had nothing for it but to bounce to the window, fling curtains and shutters wide, and admit the full flood of moonlight, which revealed the contents of the room, and showed that no figure but his own was there. But there were the marks of the grasp that had held him, still visible. He secured his door, and made search, in a state of horror, but was convinced. There was no visible intruder in the chamber.

Now William got back into his bed. For the first time in his life he had experienced a paroxysm of that wild fear with which it had been so often his delight to trifle. He heard the clock at the stair-head strike hour after hour, and at last, after having experienced every stage in the subsidence of such horrors, fairly overcome by fatigue, he sunk to sleep.

How welcome and how beautiful shone the morning! Slanting by his window, the sunbeam touched the quivering jessamine leaves and the clustering roses, and in the dewy air he heard the chirp and whistle of the happy birds. He threw up his window, and breathed the perfumed air, and welcomed all the pleasant sounds of morning in that pleasant season.

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"The cock he crew,
Away then flew
The fiends from the church-door."

And so the uncomfortable and odious shadows of the night winged their foul flight before these cheerful influences, and William Maubray, though he felt the want of his accustomed sleep, ran down the well-known stairs, and heard with a happy heart from Winnie Dobbs that his kind old aunt was ever so much better.

Doctor Drake had withdrawn from his uncomfortable bivouac, carrying with him his night-cap and slippers, and hastening to his toilet in the pleasant town of Saxton, where, no doubt, Miss Letty cross-questioned him minutely upon the occurrences of the night.

I have said before that the resources of Gilroyd were nothing very remarkable; still there was the Saxton Cricket Club, who practised zealously, and always welcomed William, whose hit to leg was famous, and even recorded as commendable in the annual volume of the great Mr. Lillywhite; where he was noted, in terms that perplexed Aunt Dinah, as a promising young bat, with a good defence. He

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fished a little; and he played at fives with young Trevor of Revington, whom nobody very much liked—the squire of Saxton, who assumed territorial and other airs that were oppressive, although Revington was only two thousand five hundred pounds a year; but, in that modest neighbourhood, he was a very important person, and knew that fact very well.

He had of late distinguished Violet with a slight admiration, that ought to have been gratifying. Once or twice he paid old Miss Perfect a little neighbourly, condescending visit, and loitered a good deal about the garden, and that acre and a half of shrubbery, which she called "the grounds." He sometimes joined in the walk home from church, and sometimes in other walks; and Aunt Perfect was pleased and favourable, and many of the Saxton mothers and daughters were moved to envy and malice.

"I played to-day," said William, giving an account of his hours at tea to the ladies, "two rubbers of fives; with whom do you think?"

He stopped, smiling slily on Violet, who was stedfastly looking down on Miss Perfect's crest on her tea-spoon.

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"Well, I'm sure you know, by that unerring instinct that poets speak of," said William; "but it is hardly fair to ask you to name him."

Violet looked up, having blushed very prettily, but not very well pleased.

"Of course I mean Trevor—Vane Trevor—of Revington. It sounds very well. Trevor was two years my senior at school; he left at the end of the third half after I came; that makes him nearly twenty-five now. How old are you, Vi,—you'd make a very pretty mistress of Revington; yes, indeed, Vi, or anywhere else. Don't be vexed, but tell me exactly how old you are."

He tapped with his pencil on the table to hasten her answer, as he looked at her, smiling a little sadly.

"How old?" she repeated.

"Well?"

"Past seventeen. Why do you want to know?" she added, laughing.

"Well, he's not quite five-and-twenty yet; only twenty-four to your seventeen. Seven years is a very pretty difference."

"What *are* you talking about, William?

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This kind of thing is thought very funny: it is very disagreeable. If people will talk nonsense, do let it be amusing. You used to be sometimes amusing."

"That was long ago, when I told you 'Sinbad the Sailor,' and 'The Romance of the Forest;' before the romance of the shrubbery commenced."

"Folly!" exclaimed Violet.

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CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH MISS VIOLET SAYS WHAT SHE THINKS OF MR. VANE TREVOR, AND IS VIOLET NO LONGER.

"Now, I tell you," continued William Maubray, and he glanced at Aunt Dinah; but she was reading, with her gold spectacles on, the second of a series of old letters, which she had in an old stamped leather box beside her, and had forgotten all else. "You really must tell me what you think of Vane Trevor?"

Miss Vi fixed her glowing eyes full upon his for a moment, and then dropped them suddenly. His were full of their old, gentle, good-natured mirth.

There was a little pause, and, suddenly looking up, she said, rather petulantly:

"Think of him? Why, I suppose I think

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what every one else does. I think him handsome; I think him agreeable; I think he has an estate; I think he looks like a gentleman; and I think he is the only man who ever appears in this neighbourhood that is not in one way or other a bore. Shall I sing you a song?"

And with heightened colour and bright eyes, this handsome girl sat down to the piano, which had a cracked and ancient voice, like the reedy thrum of a hurdy-gurdy, contrasting quaintly with her own mellow tones, and she sang—nothing to the purpose, nothing with a sly, allegoric satire in it, but the first thing that came into her head—sweet and sad as a song of old times; and ancient Miss Perfect, for a verse or so, lowered her letter, and listened, smiling, with a little sigh; and William, listening also, fell into a brown study, as he looked on the pretty songstress, and her warblings mingled with his dreams.

"Thank you, little Vi," said he, rising with a sudden smile, and standing beside her as the music ceased. "Very pretty—very sweet."

"I am glad you like it, William," she said, kindly.

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"*William*, again!" he repeated.

"Well—*yes*."

"And why not *Willie*, as it used to be?" he persisted.

"Because it sounds foolish, somehow. I'm sure you think so. I do."

It seemed to him, as, with a sad smile, he looked at her, thinking over the words that sounded so like a farewell, so light and cruel, too, that there yet was wisdom—that precocious wisdom with which nature accomplishes the weaker sex—in her decision; and something of approval lighted up his sad smile, and he said, with a little nod:

"I believe the young lady says wisely; yes, you are a wise little woman, and I submit."

Perhaps, she was a little disappointed at his ready acquiescence; at all events, she wound up with a loud chord on the piano, and, standing up, said:

"Yes, it sounds foolish, and so, indeed, I think, does *William;* and people can't go on being children always, and talking nonsense; and you know we are no relations—at least, that I know of—and I'll call you—yes, I *will* —*Mr. Maubray*. People may be just as

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friendly, and yet—and yet call one another by their right names. And now, Mr. Maubray, will you have some tea?"

"No t hanks; no more tea to-night. I'm sure it has lost its flavour. It would not taste like tea."

"What's the matter with the tea?" asked Miss Perfect, over the edge of her letter. "You don't like your tea, William? Is not it strong enough?"

"Quite; too much; almost bitter, and a little cold."

"Fancy, child," said Aunt Dinah, who apprehended a new attack on her tea-chest, and hated waste. "I think it particularly *good* this evening," and she sipped a little in evidence of her liking, and once more relapsed into reading.

"I can add water," said Violet, touching the little ivory handle of the tea-urn with the tip of her finger, and not choosing to apprehend William's allegory.

"No, thank you, Vi—Violet, I mean—Miss Darkwell; indeed, I forgot. What shall I read to-night?" and he strode listlessly to the little book case, whose polished surface flashed

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pleasantly to the flicker of the wood fire. "'Boswell's Johnson,' 'Sir Charles Grandison,' 'Bishop Horsley's Sermons,' 'Trimmer's Works,' 'A Simple Story,' 'Watts' Sacred Songs,' 'Rasselas,' 'Poems, by Alfred Tennyson.'"

His quiet voice as he read the names on the backs of Aunt Dinah's miscellaneous collection, sounded changed and older, ever so much, in Violet's ear. All on a sudden for both, a part of their lives had been cut off, and a very pleasant time changed irrevocably to a retrospect.

"I think 'Tennyson.' What do you?" he asked, turning a smile that seemed faded now, but kindly as ever, upon her.

As the old name was gone, and the new intolerable, he compounded by calling her by none; and she, likewise, in her answer:

"Oh! yes, Tennyson, Tennyson, by all means; that is, if Miss Perfect wishes."

"Yes—oh! to be sure; but haven't you read it before?" acquiesced Miss Perfect.

William smiled at Violet, and said to Miss Dinah, "I think—and don't you?"—this was to Vi, parenthetically, "that poetry is never

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heard fairly on a first reading. It resembles music—you must know it a little to enjoy it."

"That's just what I think," said Violet, eagerly.

"Very good, young people," said my aunt, with a little toss of her head. "For my part, I think there's but one Book will bear repeated reading, and that is the Bible."

"Not even 'Elihu Bung?'" suggested William.

"There—read your poetry," said Miss Perfect. "I shan't interrupt; I'm reading these, looking back for the date of a family event."

This was an exercise not unfrequently imposed on her by Henbane, who now and then made a slip in such matters, and thus perplexed and troubled Aunt Dinah, who had sometimes her secret misgivings about his accuracy and morality.

"What shall I read?" asked William in a lower tone.

"Anything, 'Mariana,'" she answered.

"The 'Moated Grange,'" repeated William, and smiled. "'The poetry of monotony.' I could fancy, if a few pleasant faces were gone,

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this Gilroyd Hall, much as I like it, very like the Moated Grange."

And without more preface he read that exquisite little poem through, and then leaned back in his chair, the book open upon the table, pretty Violet sat opposite, working at her crochet, in a reverie, as was he as he gazed on her.

"Where did she learn all that? How much wiser they are than we. What a jolly ass *I* was at seventeen, and all the fellows. What fools—weren't they?—in things like that; and by Jove! she's quite right, I could not go on *Vi*-ing her all my days, just because when she was a child she used to be here. They are certainly awfully wise in that sort of thing. Pretty head she has—busy, busy—quite a little world within it now, I dare say. What a wonder of wonders, that little casket! Pretty hair, awfully pretty; and the shape of her head, so pretty, and yet the oval reminds me, right or wrong, of a serpent's head; but she has nothing of that in her, only the wisdom; yes, the wisdom, and, perhaps, the fascination. She'll make some fellow's heart sore yet; she'll make some great match, I dare say;

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but that's a long way off, eight years; yes, she'll be twenty-four then; time enough before her."

"Is there any cricket for to-morrow?" asked Vi on a sudden.

"No match, no. I'm going up to look at Revington. Trevor said he'd call for me early—eleven o'clock—for *me*, mind; and you know I begin to feel an interest in Revington."

"Oh! it's very pretty, great old timber," she said, "and a handsome place, and a good estate—three thousand a year, only it owes some money. What an ambitious, audacious person I must be. I'm certain you think so, because it is quite plain I covet my neighbour's house, and his ox, and his ass, and everything that is his; and coveting, Dr. Mainwaring tells us, is the fountain-head of all iniquity, for how could a person so poor as I ever obtain all these fine things without fraud and chicanery?"

Miss Violet was talking a little recklessly and angrily, but she looked unusually handsome, her colour was so beautiful, and there was so strange a fire in her vexed eyes. What

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was the meaning of this half-suppressed scorn, and who its real object? How enigmatical they grow so soon as the summer hours of fascination, and of passion with its disguises and sorrows, in all their transient glow and beauty, approach — the season of hope, of triumph, and of aching hearts.

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CHAPTER X.

VANE TREVOR IS DISCUSSED AND APPEARS.

It was in this mysterious turbulent frame of mind that old Winnie Dobbs, bearing the Bible and book of family prayers, surprised Miss Violet Darkwell, and recalled Aunt Dinah from the sound and fury of forty years ago, now signifying no more than the discoloured paper on which they were recorded.

"Dear me! can it be a quarter to ten already?" exclaimed Miss Perfect, plucking her watch from her side and inspecting it. "So it is; come in."

And fat Mrs. Podgers, the cook, and Tom, with his grimmest countenance, and the little girl with a cap on, looking mild and frightened.

So, according to the ancient usage of Gilroyd

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Hall, to William's lot fell the reading of the Bible, and to Aunt Dinah's that of the prayers, and then the little congregation broke up, and away went Vi to her bed-room, with old Winnie.

William was not worse, nor, I dare say, much better than other young Cambridge men of his day and college; but he liked these little "services" in which he officiated, and they entered into his serene and pleasant recollections of that sequestered habitation.

"Well, William dear, I thank God I am spared to be with you a little longer."

"Amen," he said, "you dear aunt, dear, dear old Aunt Dinah."

And they kissed very lovingly, and there was a silence, which Aunt Dinah in a few minutes broke by mentioning the very subject at that moment in his mind.

"You saw Violet a good deal grown—very pretty figure—in fact, I think her lovely; but we must not tell her so, you know. She has been very much admired, and a good, affectionate, amiable little soul she is. There's young Mr. Trevor. I can tell you people are beginning to talk about it. What do *you* think?"

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William set down his bedroom candle on the tea table, rubbed the apex of its extinguisher with the tip of his finger, and returned an answer answerless.

"He's very good-looking; isn't he? But he thinks a lot of himself; and don't you think it would be an awful pity little Vi should be married so soon?"

"Then you think he means to ask her?" said Miss Perfect, her silver pencil-case to her chin, her head a little aside, and looking very curiously into her nephew's eyes.

"I don't know; I haven't a notion. He said yesterday he thought her very pretty; but Trevor always talks like no end of a swell, and I really think he fancies a princess, or something of the sort, would hardly be good enough for him."

"It would, of course, be a very good match for Vi," said Miss Perfect, dropping her eyes, perhaps a little disappointed, and running her pencil-case back and forward slowly on the edge of William's plated candlestick, from which they both seemed to look for inspiration; "but a girl so pretty as she may look higher than Mr. Trevor without presumption."

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"Yes, indeed, and there's no hurry, Heaven knows. I don't think Trevor half good enough for her," said William.

"Oh, I don't say that; but—but more unlikely things have happened."

"Does he—does he make *love* to her?" said William, who drew altogether upon the circulating library for his wisdom in those matters.

"He certainly admires her very much; he has been very attentive. I'm sure he likes her, and I can't hear that he is anything but a straightforward, honourable young man."

"I suppose he is," said William; "I'm sure he's that. And what does Violet—Miss Darkwell—say?"

"Say! Why, of course I can't ask her to say anything till he speaks. I dare say she likes him, as why should she not? But that's only conjecture, you know; and you are not to hint it to him, mind, if he should question or poke you on the subject."

"Oh, no, certainly," answered William, and there came a long pause. "But indeed, aunt, I don't think Vane Trevor half good enough for her."

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"Oh! that's for *them*, my dear, to settle. There's nothing, in point of prudence, against it."

"No—oh, no. Everything *very* well. Lucky fellow, to be able to marry when he likes."

"And—but I forgot you don't mind. You think there's nothing in it. Still I may tell you. I have had—old Winnie and I—some answers."

"Table-rapping?" said William.

"A little *séance*. We sit down together, Winnie and I; and some responses, in my mind, can hardly refer to anything else, and most sweet and comforting they have been."

Once on this subject, my aunt was soon deep in it, and told her story of the toad which turned into a hand; whereupon William related his dream, and the evidences afforded by his waking senses of the reality of the visitation. My aunt was at once awe-struck and delighted.

"*Now*, William, you'll read, I've no doubt, the wonderful experiences of others, having had such remarkable ones of your own. Since my hand was held in that spirit-hand—no doubt the same which seized yours—I have

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become accessible to impressions from the invisible world, such as I had no idea of before. You need not be uncomfortable or nervous. It is all benevolent—or, at worst, just. I've never seen or felt that hand but once; the relation is established for ever by a single pressure. I have satisfied Dr. Drake—a very intelligent man, and reasonable—convinced him, he admits. And now, dear William, there is another link between us; and if, in the mysterious ways of Providence, you should after all be taken first, I shall have the happiness of communion with you. Good night, dear, and God bless you, and be careful to put out your candle."

So William departed, and notwithstanding Miss Perfect's grisly conversation, he slept soundly, and did not dream of the shadowy giant, nor even of Trevor and Violet.

Pleasant, listless Gilroyd Hall! thought William, as, after breakfast, he loitered up and down before the rich, red-brick front of the old gabled house, with its profusion of small windows, with such thick, white sashes, and casings of white stone; and the pointed gables, with stone cornice and glittering weather-vane

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on the summit. That house, somehow, bore a rude resemblance to the old world dandyism which reigned in its younger days, and reminded William of the crimson coats, the bars of lace and quaint, gable-like cocked hats, which had, no doubt, for many a year passed in and out at its deep-porched door; where I could fancy lovers loitering in a charmed murmur, in summer shade, for an enchanted hour, till old Sir Harry's voice and whistle, and the pound of his crutch-handled cane, and the scamper and yelp of the dogs, were heard in the oak hall approaching.

Under the old chestnuts, clustered with ivy, Violet joined him.

"Well, how are we to-day? I think we were a little cross last night, weren't we?" said William, with his old trick of lecturing little Vi.

"We! One of us may have been, but it was not I," she answered.

"I think my watch is wrong. Did you happen to look at the clock as you passed?"

"Half-past eleven."

"Ah! so I thought. How many hours long, Miss—" (Vi he was going to say)—

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"Darkwell, are contained in half an hour's waiting? The spirit of Mariana has come upon me:

'She only said, "My life is dreary,"
"He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am a-weary, a-weary,
I would that I were dead!"'

Can't you a little understand it, too?—not, of course, quite like me, but a little?"

Vi was not going to answer, but suddenly she changed her mind, and said—

"I don't know, but I think you were a great deal more agreeable when you were a schoolboy. I assure you, I'm serious. I think you've grown so tiresome and conceited. I suppose all young men in the universities are. 'A little learning is a dangerous thing,' you used to tell me, and I think I can now agree with you—at least, it seems to make people vain and disagreeable."

Maubray answered looking on her gently, but speaking as if in a pensive soliloquy, and wondering as he went along whether he had really turned into a coxcomb; for he was one of those sensitive, because diffident souls on

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whom the lightest reproof tells, and induces self-examination.

"I don't know," he said, "that I've even got the little learning that qualifies for danger. I don't think I am vain—that is, not a bit vainer than I used to be; but I'm sure I'm more disagreeable—that is, to you. My babble and dull jokes were very well for a child, but the child has grown up, and left childish things behind; and a young lady in her teens is more fastidious, and—and, in fact, is a sort of an angel whom I am not formed to talk to with a chance of being anything but a bore. Very unlearned, and yet a book-worm; very young, and yet not very merry; not a bad fellow, I think, and yet, with hardly a friend on earth, and—by Jove! here comes Trevor at last."

And Trevor entered the gate, and approached them.

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CHAPTER XI.

UNDER THE CHESTNUTS.

VANE TREVOR was rather good-looking; a young gentleman of the slender and delicate type; his dark hair curled, and on his small forehead one of those tresses, twisted, barber-fashion, into a neat little Ionic volute, and his glossy whiskers were curled on each cheek into little rolls like pistol barrels. There was in his toilet something of elaboration and precision which was uncomfortable, and made one fear to shake hands with him, and wish him safely back again in his band-box.

He approached simpering. There was a general air of May Fair—cameo studs, varnished boots, and lavender gloves—that had nothing of the rough and careless country in it.

"How do, Miss Darkwell—charming day,

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is not it? Everything really so fresh; you can't imagine—as I came along, and a—this, now really this little—a—*place*, it looks quite charming—quite, really, now—a—as you turn off the road, there's *every* thing you know to *make* it charming."

This latter period was delivered in a low tone, and with a gracious significance.

"How d'ye do, Maubray?"

"Quite well, thank you," said William, with a smile that had a flicker of unconscious amusement in it. Perhaps without knowing it, he was envying him at that moment. "He's a worse fool, by Jove! than I thought he was," was his mental criticism; but he felt more conscious of his clumsy shoes, and careless get-up. "That's the sort of thing they admire—why should a fellow be vexed—they can't help it—it's pure instinct."

"What delicious ground for croquet; positively I never saw anything so beautiful in my life. Do you play, Miss Darkwell?"

"Sometimes, at the Rectory—not here. The Miss Mainwarings play, and once or twice I've joined their party."

"But they have no ground there," insisted

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Mr. Trevor; "it's all on a slope. I happen to know it very well, because, in fact, it belongs to me. Old Mainwaring pays me a pretty smart rent for it, at least he thinks so. Ha! ha! ha!" and Vane Trevor cackled gaily over his joke, such as it was.

"Do you play?" demanded Violet of William.

"Croquet?—no, not much—just a little—once or twice—I'll do to fill a place if you want a very bad player."

"Oh, never mind, we'll pull you through, or push you—ha, ha, ha!—we will, indeed. You'll learn it a—in no time, it's so simple—isn't it, Miss Darkwell? And then if you can get up one of those Miss Mainwarings—awfully slow girls, I'm told, but they'll do to play with *you*, Maubray, just by way of ballast, he's such a fast fellow—ha, ha, ha! You'll want a—a slow partner, eh?"

"Yes, and *you'll* want a clever one, so I surrender Miss Darkwell, just to—to balance the game," answered William, who was a little combative that morning.

"Egad, I should like uncommonly to be balanced that way, I can tell you; much

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better, I assure you, Miss Darkwell, than the sort of balancing I've been at the last two days, with my steward's books—ha, ha, ha! Awful slow work, figures. A regular dose of arithmetic. Upon my honour you'd pity me if you knew; you really would."

"You really would," echoed William, "if you knew how little he knows of it."

"Come, now, old fellow, none of your chaff, but get the balls and hoops, if Miss Darkwell will allow you, and we will choose the ground."

"Lots of ground—I'll choose that if you like—only *you'll* just run and get the hoops and balls, for we have none here," answered Maubray.

"No croquet!" ejaculated Mr. Trevor, expanding his lavender kid fingers, and elevating his eyebrows. "I thought every one had croquet now—I mean, you know, the mallet-things, and hoops, and balls,—and—and those little painted sticks, you know—and what are we to do, Miss Darkwell?"

"I really don't know. It's quite true; and besides we have not got Miss Mainwaring, you forget."

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"Oh! you'll send Maubray, won't you, to fetch her?"

"Yes," said Maubray, "I'll go with great pleasure, if Miss Darkwell wishes; but as I never saw the young lady before, I'm not quite sure that she'll come away with me."

"Well no—ha, ha, ha!—I don't think she'd run away with Maubray at *first sight*."

"Particularly to come to *you*," replied Maubray.

"There now, let's be serious—there's a little fellow I saw at your gate—yes, there he is, Miss Darkwell. Suppose you let me send him to Revington. I've no end of those things there; and I'll give him a note to Sparks, and we shall have them in no time."

"A long time, I'm afraid," objected Violet.

"No, I assure you; a mere nothing; not twenty minutes. Do, pray, allow me."

And he wrote with a pencil on the back of a card, an order to Sparks for the croquet apparatus, and away trotted the messenger.

"Three can play, you know, or two for that matter, as well as twenty, and so we can do quite well without troubling Miss Mainwaring."

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There was now a knocking at the drawing-room window, where William had seen dimly through the glass, the form of Aunt Dinah at her knitting, with Psyche in her new collar, seated by her. All looked towards the signal, and Miss Perfect threw up the window and said :

"How do you do, Mr. Trevor? what a sweet morning."

"Perfectly charming," responded the master of Revington, with a tender emphasis which Violet could not fail to understand, and smiling toward Miss Perfect with his hat in his hand ; and Aunt Dinah smiled and nodded again in return.

"William, I want you for a moment—here, dear, you need not come in."

The instinct which makes old ladies afford a dole now and then of a few minutes to lovers, is in harmony with the general rule of mercy and mitigation which alleviates every human situation.

As soon as Miss Dinah raised the window, William saw standing in the chiaroscuro of the apartment, a tall and rather handsome old clergyman. A little rusty was his black suit—

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a little dust was on his gaiters. It must have been he whom William had mistaken for the attorney who was to have visited his aunt that morning. He had seen him walk his nag up to the door about an hour ago, and dismount.

The old clergyman was looking observantly and kindly on William; and, nodding to him, and with her thin hand extended toward her nephew, she said, "This is he!" with a proud smile in her old eyes, for she thought William the handsomest fellow alive.

"Happy to make your acquaintance, sir," said the cleric stepping forward and shaking William's hand. "I knew your father, and grandfather, and your aunt and I are very old friends; and I've just been telling her how happy I shall be"——

"This is Doctor Wagget, my very good and kind old friend; you may have heard me speak of him often, I dare say," interposed my aunt.

"And your reading, sir, has been rather desultory, your aunt tells me, like my own, sir—ha, ha, ha! We had rather give our time than pay it; read what is not exacted of us than what is. But I don't know, Miss Perfect," continued the doctor, turning to that

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lady, as if they were in consultation upon William's case, "reading—that is in the case of a man who thinks, and I am sure our young friend here thinks for himself—resembles the browsing of cattle: they choose their own herbage, and the particular flowers and grasses that answer their special conditions best, eh? and so they thrive. Instinct directs us creatures, in the one as in the other; and so we read, he and I—ha, ha! what best nourishes, you see—what we can assimilate and enjoy. For plodding fellows, that devour the curriculum set before them—neither more nor less—are, you see, stall-fed, bulkier fellows; higher priced in the market; but they haven't our flavour and texture. Oh, no—ha, ha!—eh?"

The ecclesiastic was cheery and kindly, and in his manner was a curious mixture of energy and simplicity, which William Maubray liked.

The conclusion of this little harangue he had addressed to William Maubray; and I am afraid that Miss Perfect was more interested by the picture on the lawn; for, without reference to the doctor's subject, she desired to know, looking with a pleased inquisitiveness at the young people, whether they were going

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to take a walk, or *what?* And prolonged her little *tête-à-tête* with William over the window-stool.

When William Maubray looked up again at Doctor Wagget, that divine had picked up a book, a trick of his, like that of the cattle from whom his illustration was borrowed, and who employ every moment's pause at the wayside, in a pluck at the nearest foliage or tuft of grass; and with the intimation, "you may as well join them," Miss Perfect dismissed her nephew.

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CHAPTER XII.

CROQUET.

WHILE William Maubray was thus employed, Mr. Trevor agreeably accosted Miss Violet.

"Now we are to choose the ground, you know Miss Darkwell—you are to choose it, in fact. I think, don't you, it looks particularly smooth just there. By Jove it does!—really, now, just like a billiard-table, behind those a—those a—what-d'ye-callem's—the evergreens there."

"I think it does, really," said Miss Vi, gliding very contentedly into his ambuscade. "There's a little shade too."

"Yes, lots of shade; I hate the sun. I'm afraid my deeds are darkness as Dr. Mainwaring says. There's only one sort of light I really like, now, upon my honour—the light—

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the light you—you know, the light that comes from Miss Darkwell's eyes—ha, ha! upon my honour."

The idea was not quite original perhaps, but Miss Darkwell blushed a little, and smiled as it were, on the leaves, and wondered how soon the messenger with the croquet things would return. And Mr. Trevor consulted his watch, and said he would allow him a quarter of an hour more, and added that he would willingly allow the poor little beggar an hour, or any time; for his part, the—the time, in fact, went only too fast for him.

Miss Perfect, looking over her spectacles, and then with elevated chin through them, said:

"Where have they gone to? can you see?"

"Yes—that is, I don't know—I suppose sauntering about—they can't be very far," answered William, looking a little uneasily. And somehow forgetting that he was in the midst of a dialogue with Aunt Dinah, he strode away, whistling a little air, anxiously, in the direction in which he had left them.

"We have such a charming piece of ground here," exclaimed Violet, on whose cheeks was

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a flush, and in whose beautiful eyes a light which Maubray did not like.

"First rate; capital, by Jove! it is," exclaimed Trevor in corroboration.

"I don't see anything very wonderful about it. I think the ground on the other side of these trees better, decidedly; and this is out of sight of the windows," said William, a little drily.

"We don't want a view of the windows—do we?" asked Mr. Trevor, with an agreeable simplicity, of Miss Darkwell. "The windows? I really did not think of them; but, perhaps, Mr. Maubray wishes to be within call for lunch."

Mr. Trevor laughed pleasantly at this cruel sally.

"Well, yes, that, of course," said William, and, beside, "my aunt might want to speak to me again, as she did just now; and I don't want to be out of sight, in case she should."

This was very bitter of William; and, perhaps, Miss Violet was a little put out, as she certainly was a little more flushed, and a short silence followed, during which, looking and walking slowly toward the gate, she asked, "Is that the boy with the croquet?"

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"Yes—no—*yes*, by Jove, it *is*! What wonderful eyes yours are, Miss Darkwell?"

The latter remark was in a tender undertone, the music of which was accompanied by the long-drawn screak of the iron gate, as the boy entered with a holland bag, mallets, and hoops.

The hoops were hardly placed, when Miss Perfect once more knocked at the window and beckoned.

"Aunt Dinah wants me again," said William, and he ran to the window, mallet in hand.

The old clergyman had gone away, and I think Aunt Dinah only wanted to give the lovers a few minutes.

"Villikens and his Dinah," said Mr. Trevor, and exploded in repeated cachinations over his joke. "I vote we call him Villikens—capital name, isn't it—I really do. But, by Jove, I hope the old lady won't go on calling him up from his game every minute. We'd have been a great deal better at the other side of the trees, where we were going to play, don't you think?"

"He is coming at last," said Miss Violet.

"Shall we be partners, you and I? Do let

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