

THE THORN TREE.

A ragged thorn tree in a pasture bare,
With leafage scant and sere,
Stretch'd its gnarled branches to the restless
air.
Year after fruitless year.

Year after year a checkered shade it cast
On each stray passerby,
And braved with rugged strength the winter
blast.
As unsafe to die.

No summer robin yet had built its nest
Where every twig grew strong
With rugged life, lest in its tender breast
The thorn should kill the song.

It bore some sparse sad apples, darkly red—
Strange as a soul born mute,—
"Ashes of life," our sweet Elaine had said,
The only Dead Sea fruit.

There was a fancy in our gossip rife—
Or romance but a bitter part—
That the tree's thorns had wounded its own
life.
Draining to death its heart.

Our merry maid then, with a rough branch
crowned,
With rzn of singing words,
Pulled the dark fruit and cast it on the ground
To woo the winter birds.

Then all at once, upon that mountain place,
A vesper thrush began its hymn,
Its sweetness melting in our maiden's face,
Making our cold eyes dim.

THE OLD MILL MYSTERY

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CHAPTER XXI.—CONTINUED.

"Why?" asked the girl. "Why serious or desperate? What is known to anyone? What is suspected except by you?"

"You don't mean that unkindly, I hope; though you are strange to me to-night," he said. "How can I be anything else than suspicious? Think for a moment. There was the quarrel with Mr. Coode, the breaking into the mill, the finding of the neckerchief, the taking of the papers, the discovery of that steel bar wrapped in one of the missing papers, the flight, and now the unwillingness to give any intelligible account of his movements."

"I didn't say there was any unwillingness," said Mary, frightened by the staggering accumulation of facts.

"No, you did not say so, lass, I know. But can I suppose you would not have been ready enough with the explanation if he had given you one? What I have said has frightened you; and you are pale at the mere mention of these facts. But I have not wished to terrify you; only to try and let you see how other people will look at them when they are known."

The girl hung her head and bither lip in agitation for a minute, yet thinking deeply and intently. Then she lifted her face and looked at her companion.

"When they are known, Will they ever be known?" she asked, in a voice that was uneasy and low. "Why need they be known?"

"What do you mean?" asked the man by way of reply.

"Most of these things are known only to you," she said. "Why, then, is it necessary to speak of them?"

Reuben Gorringe rose from his chair and walked once or twice with hasty steps up and down the little room. Then he stopped by the side of the girl.

"You would have me continue to keep all this as a secret?" he asked, and bent over her as he spoke.

"You have said you are our friend—Tom's friend and mine." She looked up in his face, and spoke in a pleading, supplicating tone. "Can you not do this out of your friendship? I know he has never done what is said against him. I know it; I feel it in my heart. I would not ask this if I did not know that Tom's heart in this is as innocent as my own. He could not do such a thing. There can be no harm therefore in not increasing the difficulty of proving his innocence. You are not bound to speak out what you think. Ah, Mr. Gorringe, do help us. For God's sake, help us."

She rose at this, and, standing by him, took his hand and carried it to her lips, and looked imploringly into his eyes.

"Do you know all that you are asking me to do?" he asked, rather hoarsely.

"I am asking you to help one who is innocent from the dangers of injustice and wrong," she said.

"What if he be guilty?" he asked. "Then think what I am doing. I am helping to set at liberty a man who could do such a deed as this—and to put you into his power." His voice sank to a whisper as he said this, and his eyes avoided her troubled gaze for a moment. "That is asking me to do what frightens me," he said. "If I know that he were innocent—if I knew it, I say; if all were explained to me—it would be different. But the fear that you, whom of all women on this earth I would give my life to keep from danger, might possibly have to encounter such a risk, stays me. If he is not innocent, and my silence sets him at liberty, I am the instrument of putting you into the power of a man who could do a deed of this awful character."

"I am not afraid," said Mary, with a smile which was eloquent of her confidence in her lover's innocence. "So you need not be."

"You do not look at these facts as I do. No, Mary, it cannot be. Until I know that you would not be endangered I cannot keep silence. Listen; my belief is this: He went to the mill wishing to convince Mr. Coode of his innocence of the other charge. They discussed it, quarreled, and probably in sudden fierce and violent wrath he struck the blow which proved fatal. I will not even to save Tom Royston, subject you to the risks which similarly sudden violence might mean."

"Would you rather that an innocent man suffered?"

"No, only I would rather that the

whole case were fully inquired into and the truth discovered."

"You are hard, very hard to move," she cried.

"If I am hard, it is for you," he said, bending over her. "You know why I have taken this interest in Tom. It is not for him, or for his sake. He is no more to me than the click of a shuttle. It has been for you, and for you alone, my lass. You know how I love you; you know I am a man who never changes, and that that love I will never alter. It is my life. When I saw him neglecting you, I said never a word; though I hated him for the misery I knew he was causing to you, and I would have hounded him from the place. But I held my hand for your sake, lass. I had schooled myself till I could wish and plan and scheme for your happiness, even with another man. I meant well by Tom; and then that ugly business of the sick fund money cropped up. I smoothed it over—for your sake, lass, not his. Then the mill accounts were wrong, and I tried to make things right with Mr. Coode. It was never my fault that things went as they did. The moment there was a chance I meant Tom to come back; and still it was all for your sake, Mary. I would have done fifty times, aye, five hundred times as much, if it meant your happiness. For I loved you, my lass, ah, as a lass has rarely been loved in this world."

He stopped as though his emotion had overcome him.

"This will be for my happiness," said the girl, awed by the strength of passion which had inspired the man's words.

"Nay, nay; if Tom has done what I fear he has, it might mean, not happiness for you but constant danger. There is but one thing that would let me do what you ask."

"What is that?" cried the girl, a quick, eager light flashing from her eyes and illuminating her face, as she rose and stood by his side.

"If you consent to have his guilt or innocence left unsettled by keeping these facts concealed, you must be ready to accept the consequences of leaving the issue in doubt."

"What do you mean by consequences?" asked Mary.

"You must act as if he could not prove his innocence." The man's voice was hoarse and hollow with nervousness as he said this.

"Well? What does that mean?"

"That in the first place you two must keep apart." Then came a long silence. The girl broke it.

"You mean that the price of your silence is to be our separation?"

She spoke in a hard, clear, cutting monotone.

"I mean that if he cannot prove his innocence, I dare not trust you to his keeping," answered Reuben Gorringe.

"Is there anything more?"

"I love you, Mary," he burst out. "I love you with all my heart and strength and soul. I will give up my life to make you happy. If you are parted from him, I can offer you shelter in my heart. You shall never know a shadow of care or misery. I will give up my life to you, my love. Trust me, my darling, and I swear that you shall never repeat it."

He shook with the force and rush of his passion, and as he bent over the girl the sweep of her hair as it touched his face made him tremble with excitement.

"Would you marry a girl who cannot love you, and who might grow to hate you for the manner in which you had won her consent?"

He knew from the words that she had seen his purpose. But he cared nothing for that now.

"I love you," he said. "Such love as mine must find its counterpart. But I care nothing for that. I love you. That is enough for me. Give me yourself. Let me have you with me always. To be able to see your face, to listen to your voice, to try and win your love. That is enough. My God, I would be content to marry you though you hated me like sin or shame."

Mary was silent. Not because she doubted herself, or doubted what her answer would be. But instinctively she began to feel that there was something she did not understand—something that was not on the surface.

"I cannot answer now. Give me time to think, and leave me now," she said.

Reuben Gorringe took her hand and pressed it to his lips, and when she did not seek to withdraw it his heart beat quick with exultation.

CHAPTER XXII.

TOM'S STATEMENT.

All that night Mary wrestled with the problem which Reuben Gorringe had set her. Strong as her faith in Tom's innocence was, what Gorringe had said had been sufficient to make her understand the extreme danger in which he stood, and the dire need for his having a shrewd and clever man to defend him. She saw, too, what a vast difference it would make if the evidence which Reuben Gorringe alone possessed were kept secret.

Yet, what a price was that asked for silence. Could she pay it? If there were no alternative—if no other means remained for saving Tom's good name and honor—she would do it.

But there was no time in which that issue could be put to the test. It was the most hopeless feature of the whole plan that she had to say at once what course she would take. It was not to be a last and desperate course; but she had to judge for herself what would be the probable results of a trial in which the evidence would be produced, and to decide before it could be tried.

Out of all the confusion of thought one determination came. She would see Tom, get the whole of the facts from him and then try to judge of the chances.

Early the next morning she went to the police station, and succeeded in making arrangements to see him before the case came on before the magistrates.

To her dismay, however, she was not permitted to see him alone. She spoke to the police sergeant who was to be

present, asking him to leave them together.

"We are lovers," she said, simply; and she looked so piteous that the man—who himself was unmarried and in love—was touched.

"I must carry out my instructions; but—" and here he looked cunningly at her—"I ain't got eyes in the back of my head, and whispering ain't forbidden."

Thus Mary gained her way despite the law, and when the lovers met they had an eager, whispered conference. She told him what Reuben Gorringe had said about a lawyer. Then she questioned him.

"You must tell me what passed on that Friday night, Tom."

"I told you I would rather not, Mary," he answered.

"But my dear, I must know. It must all be made known. You will have to account for all your time on that Friday night."

Tom hung his head, as if ashamed to speak.

"You'll hate me, lass, when you know, and may be turn from me; and then I won't have a friend left in the whole blessed world."

"Tom, Tom, don't even hint such a thing. Who should be your friend if not I, your promised wife? Tell me all."

"I was with Savannah all that evening."

The words came out slowly and reluctantly, as if dragged against his will.

"With Savannah!" cried Mary, in astonishment.

"I'd best tell you the lot, my lass, and then you'll see why I've been ashamed to mention it. After you and I parted, and I had promised to stop and face out the matter of the money, I meant to keep my word. I did indeed—" Mary kissed him to let him feel that she believed and forgave him—"I waited a bit, and then started to go to the mill, as I told you I would, to have a talk over the matter with Mr. Coode. I was going there when I met Savannah. I don't know how it is, but she has always had a sort of influence over me. I don't know what it is. When I'm away from her, I can't understand myself; but when I'm with her, she can make me do pretty much what she pleases."

"She shall never do that again, Tom," whispered the girl, pressing his arm.

"She stopped me going and made me go with her instead. We stayed near her cottage for a time, and presently we walked away—I don't know what time—and went along the Presburn road half-way to the town, I should think; and then—well, I can't tell you all that passed. I don't rightly know myself, I fancy. But the old idea and longing to run away came over me. She said she knew about the robbery of the money and that I was disgraced if I stayed in the place; and—well, my lass, it'll hurt you to hear me say it, maybe; but you wanted me to tell the truth—she made me promise to go away with her for good, and I was that beside myself that I was hot and eager for her to do it."

"What, then?" asked the girl, who was trembling in dread of what had yet to come.

"I must have been mad, lass, I think. Anyway, I did just what she told me, and asked never a question. She told me to go back and get such things as I cared to have with me, and then to walk over to meet her at Presburn and to go on to Manchester by the early morning train."

"Yes," said Mary, again in the same low, trembling voice.

"We parted at a spot close about three-quarters of the way to Presburn—it must have been somewhere about ten o'clock. I was home this side of midnight—and I've never seen her since!"

"What?" cried Mary, in a very different voice.

"I've never seen her since," he repeated. "I hurried home, said a few words to my father to prepare him for what he would hear of my running away from the charge of theft, and with Savannah—for I knew it must all come out—and got away out of the house as quick as possible. I thought you might be coming, and I durstn't face you—mad though I was—and I rushed back as quick as my legs would take me to Presburn. But I could see nothing of Savannah. I lingered about the streets all through the night until the dawn, and with the earliest train was away to Manchester. But I saw nothing of her, and have seen nothing since. That's the truth, lass, on my honor."

The telling had been painful enough for them both; and at the close Mary remained buried for a minute in deep thought. Then she lifted her arms suddenly and threw them round the man, embracing him with such passion and fervor as he had rarely known.

She clung to him thus until she recovered her self-command.

"Time's nearly up," said the police sergeant at this moment, and without turning his head to look round.

This served to quicken the girl's thoughts.

"There are some questions I must ask," she said. "We must try to keep calm. How came you to place a small steel bar behind the books in your parlor? I found it on the Sunday after you had gone away."

"A small steel bar," he said. "There's not such a thing in the house that I know of. Where do you mean?"

She told him all, except that she had found blood stains on it; he repeated his denial of any knowledge of the thing, and was full of surprise at what she said.

"Did you ever get hold of the papers relating to that money affair?" she asked him. "One of them was around the bar."

"I never saw them except in Mr. Coode's hands on Friday afternoon, certainly I never took them."

"It is strange, very strange," replied Mary. "Another thing I told you—that a witness swears you were close to the mill on Friday night. You were seen breaking in somewhere about ten o'clock, and that a handker-

chief of yours was found close by the very spot. Can you suggest anything to show where this mistake can be cleared up?"

"Certainly, I can. Savannah herself will prove that I was not near the mill. I did not leave her on the Presburn road until past ten; and then I'd six miles to walk back to Walkden Bridge. That is clear enough."

"And the neckerchief?"

"I gave it to her," he said, "I gave it to her some days before—one night when we were walking together—he made the confession shamefacedly and reluctantly—and she had not returned it."

"You gave it to Savannah?" cried Mary, somewhat excitedly. "But if you gave it to Savannah, now came it in the mill that night?" she asked.

"It is reckoned as proof of your having been there at a wrong time on a wrong errand. What about Savannah?"

Tom looked at his companion, and his face was pale.

"I have been asking myself that question ever since you told me yesterday at Manchester about the scarf having been 'found,'" he said.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you two," said the police sergeant, turning and coming to them; "but time's more than up."

"Good-by, Tom, then," cried Mary, throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him passionately and hastily. "Keep heart, dear, and we'll soon have things all cleared. God bless you, sweetheart," and with a smile of loving confidence she hurried away.

The thief thought in her mind was that at last all fear of Savannah's influence was at an end, and being a woman that assurance gave her infinite pleasure.

Then she puzzled over what could be the meaning of that neckerchief being found where it was. If it meant anything serious to Savannah, she would be sure to deny that Tom had ever given it to her. The same reasoning applied to her evidence about their having been together in the evening and until so late; and Mary pondered long and anxiously over the best way of approaching the girl with the view of getting from her the truth.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Badly Broken Up.

Some very amusing testimony was introduced a few days ago in one of the numerous "sidewalk cases" against the city being tried before a referee. The plaintiff, who had slipped on an icy sidewalk some time during last winter and had received quite severe injuries about the back, was a colored man, and one of the witnesses was a companion of his. This witness, it seems, had assisted the plaintiff to his home after the fall and had also assisted in nursing him back to health. At the request of the plaintiff's attorney the witness gave something of a detailed statement concerning the appearance of the injuries which the man had received.