

THE FOGGY NIGHT AT OFFORD.

CHAPTER XII.—CONTINUED. "So Henry Yorkie seemed to think. He was talking of their former acquaintance with him abroad. The nicest fellow going, he said."

"Yes, everybody liked Mr. Janson. Except?" "Except what?" asked Miss Hardisty, for Finch had stopped.

"Except master, I was going to say. He had used to be jealous of him in those old times, and I think—at least," added the woman, "he thought lately whether he is not jealous again. Master's temper, since we have been here, has been quite strange, and I don't know what should make it so, unless it's that."

"Dear me!" uttered Miss Hardisty. "Mrs. Yorkie would not give cause?" "No," indignantly interrupted Finch "she would not give cause for that, or for any other wrong thing. I don't say that she was right to encourage both Mr. Janson and Mr. Yorkie in the old days, as I believe she did, and let each think she might marry him; but, ma'am, young ladies will act so, just to show their power; and her head was turned upside down with her beauty. However, all that nonsense was put away when she married, and a better wife nobody has ever had than Mr. Yorkie. And if master has got a jealous crochot in his head, he deserves to have it shook out of him. Mr. Janson has come here to attend Master Leo, but for nothing else."

"Did they ever meet after Mrs. Yorkie's marriage until now, when they met here?" inquired Olivia Hardisty. "No, never," I asked my mistress once—I think she had been married about two years then—if she knew where Mr. Janson was, and she had no idea. I don't much like this place, ma'am," added Finch, musingly. "I shall be glad when we get back home."

"It seems scarcely worth while my telling you now the news that Mr. Janson imparted to me," observed Maria to her husband, when they were left alone. "Dead! instead of—it is so very dreadful!"

"It is dreadful enough," returned Mr. Yorkie. "He was going to be married," she continued. "But, of course, it would not do for us to speak of it abroad, after this shocking end. He thought of marrying Miss Maskell."

"And sending up you!" "The ant doing most unseasonable. Maria, subdued by the events of the evening, turned meekly to her husband. "Arthur, let this unpleasantness end; it is time it did," she said speaking firmly in her honest truth. "We may both have something to forgive each other. I was foolish, vain, careless in the old days; but I solemnly declare in the presence of Heaven, in the presence, it may be said, of that poor dead man, that never a thought has strayed from you since you became my husband. You have been bitter and angry with me lately, but it has been without cause; for not a wrong word, not a look that you could not approve, has passed between me and Mr. Janson. So help me heaven!"

Mr. Yorkie was silent. He had sat down, and seemed to be looking at his wife. "When he called here this evening to ask after Leopold, he told me he thought of marrying Lucy Maskell. I wished the union God speed from my very heart."

Still Mr. Yorkie did not speak. Maria passed into her dressing-room. She had said her say. CHAPTER XIII. THE GARDENER'S WORD AGAINST THE GENTLEMEN'S.

not immediately after he came in—I dare say he was willing to spare us so horrible a recital as long as was possible—but when Finch got home afterwards from the village, with the news that a farmer's son was killed, Mr. Yorkie said it was not a farmer's son, but Janson. You see he had heard of the one murder, and the servant of the other."

"But Yorkie could not have heard that Janson was murdered before he was murdered," obstinately protested Squire Hipgrave. "And he could not have dreamt of it beforehand," as obstinately returned the lady. "The fact must be, that he did know of the murder, though all might not."

"But it was not known at all to any one," reiterated the squire; "neither is it believed to have occurred at that time." "You must perceive that Mr. Yorkie must have known of it," coolly continued Miss Hardisty, "for he was right to encourage both Mr. Janson and Mr. Yorkie in the old days, as I believe she did, and let each think she might marry him; but, ma'am, young ladies will act so, just to show their power; and her head was turned upside down with her beauty. However, all that nonsense was put away when she married, and a better wife nobody has ever had than Mr. Yorkie. And if master has got a jealous crochot in his head, he deserves to have it shook out of him. Mr. Janson has come here to attend Master Leo, but for nothing else."

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Squire Hipgrave. "Young Louth was shot from his horse last evening, and rifled of all he had about him. That was what Crane wished to tell you of; Janson was not murdered—at least, not found—for hours afterwards."

"And Finch was right, after all when she said it was a farmer's son," interrupted Olivia Hardisty; "though you—looking at Mr. Yorkie—'indeed it, and said it was Yorkie.'" "Yorkie, where did you hear about Janson?" demanded Squire Hipgrave. "At the time you appear to have spoken of it, it was not known. In fact, I don't believe it had happened."

There was a blank, distressing pause—an awful pause. "Where did you hear about Janson, I ask?" continued Squire Hipgrave, in a voice that sounded strangely uncomplaising and clear. Still the same ominous pause. Mrs. Yorkie struggled for composure, but her breath came gaspingly through her ashy lips. Henry staid round to her side, as if by an uncontrollable impulse, and Olivia Hardisty gazed in open dismay at Mr. Yorkie.

"I heard it from Crane," said Mr. Yorkie, at length, raising himself, and speaking in a firm, deliberate tone. "Through it appears to be his purpose to deny it now."

Crane shook his head and turned to Squire Hipgrave. "The gentleman's making a great mistake, sir," he quietly said. "I never mentioned Mr. Janson's name last night, for he never was in my thoughts; and if anybody had come and told me to guess who was murdered (beside the farmer,) I should have said all have guessed Mr. Janson. I'm going back to my garden, ladies and gentlemen, and if you please to want me again, there I shall be."

The man, with a civil bow, turned away and went towards his home. Squire Hipgrave was the next to depart. A strange mantle of constraint seemed to have fallen upon them all. CHAPTER XIV. AWFUL DREAD.

Never had the insignificant village of Offord been so full of stir, excitement, and dread. Two murders in one night! it was enough to put fear into the stoutest heart. At first it was universally assumed that the same parties had been guilty of both, but this impression wore away. Young Mr. Louth had evidently been molested for the purpose of robbery. Not so Mr. Janson. His watch and chain, his pocket-book, and purse, each containing money, were all found upon his person, undisturbed—carrying out Mr. Yorkie's assertion that there had been no robbery. How did he know it? began to ask Olivia Hardisty.

Mr. Louth had a habit of going in at the back door of his house, through the garden; it was the quicker mode of entrance, since at the front he had to ring; it was surmised that his assailant must have known of this; have got into the garden, and waited for him. He was probably struck down and stunned, at the moment of entering, and was again beaten about the head one or two blows. The medical men were asked with what sort of instrument. "Was it likely to be a gun?" spoke up somebody, while they were deliberating—the question probably being dictated by the remembrance of the shot which had destroyed the farmer. They replied that they did think it likely to be a gun, as likely, or more; but, if so, they added, the gun had probably been broken by the violence of the blows. The blow which had killed him was an unfortunate one, given underneath the left ear.

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