

The Necklace of Death.

CONCLUDED.

The wedding was over. The happy pair had been duly smothered with rice and kisses, and were now standing on the platform of Paddington Station, trying their best to look like an old married couple, but greatly betrayed by the newness of their trunks, and the pretty shyness of Cora's air coupled with the smartness of her travelling gown.

The guard quite mechanically locked them into a first-class carriage, and felt as assured of the substantial trip that would await him at the journey's end as if it were already lying in his palm.

But Cora continued to gaze out of the window with an assumed air of pretty nonchalance, making observations upon the passers-by.

'It is no use, my darling,' said Douglas, catching hold of the hand nearest himself, and trying to draw her closer. 'Every one spots us; you cannot take anyone in with that grand air of yours.'

'Be quiet, sir,' said Cora, turning to him with a charming look of command for a moment. 'I am extremely interested in the passengers. Here is a fat woman, with six—no, seven—children, trying to crowd into a carriage, and I am sure the people inside do not want her, and she is arguing with them; and oh do look at that old man running as if for dear life!

'How funny people are when starting on a journey! Look at that wretched-looking creature, too, with all his belongings tied up in a red handkerchief. I suppose he is one of those miserable street scrobs you see about. I always wonder how they make a living. Well, he is not an Englishman, I am sure. Do you think he is a Hindoo, Douglas?'

'Where?' demanded Douglas, with sudden interest, getting up, and looking quickly over her shoulder.

A thin, dejected man, in the soiled gaudy dress of a street tumbler, only partially concealed by an old coat, was passing down the train towards the third-class carriages, and Douglas felt a distinct relief to see that he bore not the slightest resemblance to the madman who had attacked him on the Underground Railway.

'Oh, that! Yes, I suppose he is!' he answered, carelessly; and then the train began to move out of the station, and Cora no longer looked from the window, but turned her eyes on her husband with a wealth of love in their sweet depths that she had never before suffered him to fully see, and all thoughts of the outside world vanished from their mind for a time.

Mr. Steinway's bungalow at the tiny Oxfordshire village at Leytonbridge, would have been quite the ideal place for a honeymoon if the weather had only condescended to be fine.

But, after a glorious summer, September had come in wet and stormy; and, day after day, rain came down in torrents, until the meadows began to flood, as they often do in that low-lying country, and the bridal pair could only steal snatches of sunshine.

Mr. Steinway was a confirmed old bachelor, and his household consisted of a man who looked after the pony-and-cart, and the big mastiff Tauro in the day time, and at night retired to the bosom of his family in the village, and Hannah, cook and factotum, who reigned over a small and timid village maid when she wanted extra help.

So there were no household duties for Cora to busy herself with, beyond arranging and rearranging the flowers.

She made great friends with Tauro, who graciously returned her advances by laying a large and heavy paw on her knee, gazing at her with his small, deep-set eyes; and together she and Douglas paid many visits to a sleek cob and the cows in the paddock, feeding them with all sorts of indigestible dainties.

The days passed pleasantly enough, in spite of the weather, until one morning Douglas received a long ble letter, after reading which he looked at Cora in dismay.

'My dearest, I am awfully sorry, but I am afraid I shall have to go up to town to-day,' he said, apologetically.

'Oh! Douglas, must you?' said Cora dolefully.

'I must, darling. You know I am joint

trustee with a Colonel Majendie for Nellie Farrers, my cousin's child, and he has just come home and wants to see me about an investment we made. It seems the security is rather shaky, and he thinks we ought to sell out before there is a rash on the shares.'

'How long will you be away? You'll be back by dinner-time, won't you?' she said, in a coaxing voice.

But Douglas shook his head dubiously. 'I am afraid not, darling; but, anyhow, I will come down by the night mail. I shall get back here by one, but you must not sit up for me. I'll take the key with me, and let myself in. If you feel at all nervous, I will ask John to stop till then.'

'Of course I am not nervous, and, if I were, is there not dear old Tauro? You will take care of me, will you not, eh, old dog?' said Cora, bending down to pinch the mastiff's ear gently. 'Well, of course, you must go, dear, and so there is no use in making a fuss about it.'

'Brave little woman!' said her husband, fondly. 'You see, I naturally do not want to be let in for losing a lot of money.'

It had turned out quite a cheerful morning, and Cora came out into the garden to see him off, followed by Tauro.

She was wearing a gown of soft white serge, the white belt fastened with an old-fashioned buckle set in turquoise.

And Douglas, turning back for a last glimpse, thought what a picture she made, standing with the background of green trees, one hand on the great dog's tawny head, the other shading her eyes from the sun.

All through the day that picture kept coming back to him.

Cora, left to herself, did find the time go rather slowly.

It was impossible to persuade herself that the flowers wanted renewing, her books all seemed uninteresting and dull, and John respectfully entreated her not to give the cob any more green apples for his health's sake.

She wandered into the kitchen, where Hannah was making cakes, and talked to her from sheer ennui.

Hannah was unusually gracious, and by-and-by remarked that it was a pity Mr. Stewart had had to go up to London.

'Oh, yes, of course I miss him!' said Cora, ingenuously, blushing a little.

'Well, it was not that exactly I was thinking of,' admitted Hannah, with a prodigious sniff, 'though there is no denying that, when first folks are married, they do think a mighty lot of each other, soon as it wears off afterwards; but, if you had not been alone this evening, I was going to ask you to allow me to go over to Mattingley to see my sister for a while. She has a little tea-party on, and put it very particular that I should come, but, of course, I would not like to inconvenience your arrangements.'

Cora was secretly in no little awe of Hannah, and made haste now to reply—'Certainly you may go. Mr. Stewart will be back by one o'clock, so you would not be keeping me up.'

'Well, I cannot deny but that I should be obliged to you,' said Hannah, rather in the manner of one conferring a favour than accepting one. 'I suppose you would not care for Jane to stay up here till I come back?'

'Oh, no, I think not!' said Cora, with an involuntary smile at the idea of Hannah's little drudge as a companion. 'I shall manage all right. But what is the matter with Tauro?'

She sprang up from her perch on the edge of the table, and dashed out into the garden, from which came the sound of Tauro's deep bay, and a high pitched voice trying to quieten him.

The big dog was standing menacingly in the path, every bristle up, his eyes bloodshot, and a man, just inside the gate, was holding out his hand to him, and speaking in an insinuating manner, which Tauro only seemed to take as a fresh insult.

'Down, Tauro, down!' cried Cora catch him by the collar. 'Why, you foolish dog, what are you making such a fuss about? The man was advancing doubtfully along the path, his thin face wreathed in an obsequious smile.

'Will the gracious lady permit that her slave show her little conjuring trick?' he said, fawningly. 'Her slave ver' good conjurer.'

Cora looked at him with a sense of recognition, and then in a flash it came upon her that this was the man she had seen get into the train at Paddington.

He looked more poverty-stricken and wretched than then, and his dark skin had a sort of ashen pallor upon it.

Cora was a charitable little soul, and she felt pitifully over this miserable exile.

'No, I do not want to see any conjuring tricks, but here is sixpence, and, if you will come up to the house, I will give you something to eat,' she said, kindly. 'You must feel very miserable over here in such weather as we have been having.'

'Your slave is a poor man, and he must go where destiny permits him,' said the man, in an expressionless manner. 'Your honor will see how even the dogs of the mighty spurn him'—for here Tauro had begun to growl again.

'Never mind, I will shut him up. You need not be afraid of him,' said Cora, and, greatly against that animal's wishes, she dragged him to the dining-room, and locked him in, where he kept up a dismal howling.

When she returned to the conjurer, he was still standing in the porch with that air of imperturbable waiting that only an

Asiatic can assume.

For all his thinness and wretchedness, she noticed that his features were good and intelligent, and his deep set eyes were like coals of fire.

Hannah was a good deal scandalized at the idea of giving to a beggar and particularly to a 'heathen black' as she put it, but at length Cora coax a plateful of food out of her and brought it to the man.

'Your slave is your debtor through the ages,' he said, bowing himself to her feet, and he tied the food up in a corner of the handkerchief he carried.

'Are you not hungry? Will you not eat something now?' urged Cora, but he shook his head.

'It is not custom to eat except at certain times, and after due prayers,' he answered, with a touch of loftiness, and, with another lowly bow, he turned and walked away down the garden path and out into the road, Cora watching him, almost sorry that he was gone.

Talking to him would have helped to pass the day.

If she could have seen the conjurer, when he was about three-hundred paces from the bungalow, she would have been surprised, and, perhaps, alarmed, for both the food and the money she had given him were thrown disdainfully into a brook that ran by the side of the road, and he spat on the ground with an expression of the greatest contempt and loathing.

'May dogs defile the graves of the unbelievers! Surely it shall be counted unto me for righteousness that I, a high priest in the third degree, polluted myself by accepting alms of them!' he said, fiercely, and then he laved his hands and face in the brook, as if to rid himself of the contagion.

Cora ate a little lunch, but felt very disconsolate without Douglas' cheerful face opposite her, and afterwards tried to read a little, but the day had grown dark and heavy, and she felt as though she could settle to nothing.

She was quite willing to agree to Hannah's proposal that, as there would be only tea instead of dinner to serve that night, she might as well be going to her sister's. Jane could stay and help her get that; so, accordingly, about four o'clock, Hannah reëntered in her best bonnet and shawl, set out for Mattingley.

Little Jane seemed overwhelmed with the honor of being allowed to aid 'the young lady' to get tea and make toast, and the slice of one of Hannah's rich cakes, with which she was presented, would have made that sage housekeeper wonder 'What in the world gals would expect next?' Hannah having a fixed idea that it was good for the young to be repressed and snubbed on every possible occasion.

Tea came to an end in due course, and then Jane also departed, Cora standing at the door to watch her off, but not feeling at all nervous at being left alone.

It was not for long, after all. Hannah was to be in by ten, and, after that, it would seem no time until Douglas was home again, and had she not Tauro?

It came on dark early that night, and Cora had hardly lighted the lamps before there was a heavy dash of rain against the windows, which made her think, with dismay, of the wet walk poor Douglas would have from the station.

How very quiet it was here! It had never struck her before, when Douglas was about, and there was the cheery sound of household preparations from the back regions.

Except the dash of the rain, there was not now a sound to be heard, and Cora began to think, almost regretfully, of the hum of the London streets, that never quite dies away, even from dark to dawn.

It was about nine o'clock that Tauro suddenly raised his head from the rug, where he had been peacefully slumbering, cocked an alert ear, and gave a low, rumbling growl.

'What is it, good doggie?' said Cora, patting his head. 'I can't hear anything. You must have been dreaming.'

But Tauro got up, and showed such signs of uneasiness that she finally opened the front door, thinking he would settle down peacefully after a prow round.

The rain beat in so sharply that she could not stay there, and, closing the door she went upstairs, thinking she would take off her gown and put on a tea-gown that Douglas especially admired.

It was a very pretty collection of white alpaca, with many insertions of lace over an under lining of pale mauve silk, and Cora looked at herself in the glass with an innocent pleasure in the fact that she was so fair for Douglas's sake.

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Her head ached a little, and she let down her hair, which fell about her in a shining glory of ruddy tints.

She would bring Tauro in now, and they would settle snugly down by the wood fire she had lighted for cheerfulness until Douglas returned; but when she opened the front door and called the big dog, no Tauro appeared in his usual prompt obedience to her summons.

'Tauro, Tauro!' she cried, peering out into the darkness, the wind blowing the long strands of hair into her eyes, and dashing a cold spurt of rain against her face.

There was a sound of some heavy body shuffling slowly along, she could dimly discern Tauro's tawny shape looming through the darkness.

'Here, here, good old boy! Whatever made you so long?' she said, reproachfully.

The dog followed her in; but, when she turned to look at him after closing the door, she saw he had fallen over on his side his legs drawn up convulsively, and that he was panting heavily.

'Oh! Tauro, Tauro, what is it, you poor old dog?' she cried in dismay, dropping on her knees by his side and laying her hand on his head.

Tauro looked up at her with a dumb agony that was infinitely pitiable, and made a feeble attempt to lick her hand; but another convulsion overtook him, and a sharp howl of pain escaped him.

It was evident that he was very bad indeed, and Cora racked her memory for a suggestion as to what she could do for him.

Brandy was the only thing of which she could think, and, running to the dining-room, she got a little, and, putting it in a spoon tried to pour it down his throat, but it only ran out of the side of his mouth, and his kindly eyes were glazing fast.

Cora wrung her hands in despair. Should she make her way down to the village, and get the man up, to see what he could do?

But, even as she thought of it, a strong shudder ran through Tauro's mighty limbs, a foam gathered on his lips, and, with a sort of smothered groan, he was dead.

A sudden horror seemed to seize on Cora when she realized it.

Someone must have poisoned the dog; a quarter of an hour earlier, when he had gone out, he had been quite well.

Nothing else could account for such a sudden death.

And what object could anyone have in poisoning him but a sinister one.

Springing to her feet, she made a hasty tour of the bungalow, seeing that every lock and bolt was secured.

Moved by an impulse she could hardly have explained, she also lighted every lamp and candle, and then sat down on the couch, by the fire, shaking from head to foot.

Every dark and unwholesome tale she had ever heard seemed to recur to her memory, and she was almost afraid to glance over her shoulder, lest she should see some fearful shape emerging out of the shadow.

Twenty times it seemed to her as if she heard a stealthy step in the little passage and to have gone out into the kitchen regions again was a feat of courage beyond her.

It seemed to her that she must have been mad when she consented to being left alone in this isolated cottage, and even now it was not half-past nine.

Hannah was not due until ten even then if she were punctual, and who could tell what might not detain her?

Hark! what was that noise? Some one forcing the flimsy lock of the front door?

No, no; it was only the wind against a loose sash, but her heart was beating so furiously that she could not hear distinctly. The ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece, which she had never noticed before seemed almost more than she could bear, and yet, ah! how slowly the hands were moving.

But any great strain on the nerves brings Nature to the rescue, and at last, in spite of—or rather, because of—the tumult of her emotions, Cora's head dropped among her pillows, and she fell asleep.

She awoke with a start that made her heart stand still, and sent the blood racing furiously to her brain.

There was a step in the passage—a step that was not Hannah's, nor Douglas's, but the tread of naked foot.

It was coming nearer, but a sort of paralysis had seized upon her. She lay back among the pillows, unable to stir hand or foot, waiting with wide op-

ened eyes for the fate that was coming to her.

A couple of seconds, that were an eternity of sickening apprehension, and then she caught the gleam of a pair of keen eyes, set in a dark face, and the Indian juggler of the morning stood in the doorway, looking down at her as a snake may look at the prey, lying helpless before him.

Cora made no effort to escape. She felt absolutely certain that this man had come to murder her, and just as certain that resistance was useless.

It seemed to her even as if her life was ebbing away from her under the grip of that awful horror of death approaching her.

The murderer said no word, nor did she utter a sound until just as he was upon her, and then something seemed to break the spell that held her.

Nature made a last despairing stand against the adversary that is, in the end, always the victor, and she sprang to her feet with a wild, inarticulate cry, but too late!

Something soft and light was flung over her head, she fell among her pillows, there was an intolerable pressure round her throat, lights danced before her eyes, her very brain seemed on fire.

Oh! she had never dreamt that death was such anguish, and then her head fell back, and, like a helpless bird in the hands of a cruel boy, her harmless life flickered out under the deadly cord of a murderous fanatic.

CHAPTER V.

Douglas' journey to London was performed without incident.

Nevertheless, it was not a pleasant one. Immediately following the last glimpse he had of his wife, a feeling of utter depression had seized upon him.

He could in no way account for it, and tried his utmost to shake it off.

In vain, however.

Somehow, it seemed to be associated with Cora.

She was continually in his thoughts.

And, by degrees, another object came to share with her the troubled workings of his mind.

The emerald necklace.

That string of dull green stones, which he could not dissociate, in his mind, from his cousin's awful death, and the murderous attack that had been made upon himself on the Underground railway.

But why should the recollection of all that force itself so persistently upon him now?

Nothing had occurred to bring it to his mind.

Nevertheless, there it was, and he could not get rid of it.

It seemed fairly to haunt him.

And, presently he found that his mind was dwelling also upon the mentally-pictured face of the Hindoo student.

He seemed to see the gleaming black eyes fixed menacingly upon him.

And then, most unaccountably, another Asiatic face flashed into the radius of his mental vision—the face of the conjurer whom he and Cora had seen at Paddington station.

Why should this be? Why should the one suggest the other? What connection could there possibly be between them?

And why was it that, in spite of all his efforts to get rid of the notion, the latter should come more and more to be associated in his mind with Cora?

He began to feel most horribly uneasy, and every mile of the railway journey that increased the distance between him and his wife added to the feeling.

He wished now, with all his heart, that he had not left home, and resolved that he would return at the very earliest opportunity.

In the compartment he occupied it so happened that there was one else throughout the journey, and to this fact, he tried to persuade himself, was due, in a large measure, his inability to shake off this awful depression, which sat upon him like a nightmare.

But even when he reached his journey's end, the bustle and animation of the busy London streets did not decrease it in the slightest degree.

On arriving at his lawyer's, he found he had to wait some time before his co-trustee, Colonel Majendie, put in an appearance, and, as the colonel turned out to be a sun-dried old Anglo Indian, with very strong ideas on the subject of having things done formally, it was late in the afternoon before their business was finished, when they adjourned to the latter's club for a cigar and a whisky-and-soda.

'Well, I think we have put matters pretty well in the right way now, Mr. Stewart,' said the colonel, looking cheerfully at the tip of his cigar. 'By the way, I do not think I ever told you that I used to know your cousin pretty well out in India. Queer mania he had for travelling.'

'Poor Edwan! he met with a horrible fate,' said Douglas. 'No; I never knew you were a friend of his.'

'I did not say I was a friend of his,' said Colonel Majendie, significantly; 'I do not fancy he had many of them; but, if I had been in England at the time, I fancy I could have thrown a good deal of light on the matter of his death.'

'What do you mean, Colonel Majendie?' said Douglas, rather sternly. 'If you know anything on the subject, it is certainly your duty to speak out, and bring the murderer to justice.'

'My speaking out would not do that,' said the other, dryly. 'The murderer is probably thousands of miles away from this now, in a region where our laws could hardly touch him. It is ugly work publishing tales of dead men; and, after all, Ste-

(CONTINUED ON FIFTEENTH PAGE.)

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