

The Bright Room of Cranmore

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"A MIXTURE of a lie doth ever add pleasure," saith Bacon. Once at least in thy lifetime, imaginative reader, thou wouldst have granted the truth of the aphorism hadst thou spent the closing hours of a summer's day in rambling through the manor-house and vast old pleasure-grounds of Cranmore, under the bewitching influence of the Scheherazade, from whose lips the following traditionary tale was gathered.

No one need apologize for telling a ghost story—no one can be so sure of a good reception (in theory) as a probable ghost. Amid the number of modern conveniences, comforts, and luxuries, it is truly amazing that no speculative man has set up as purveyor of ghosts and goblins for the advantage of those proprietors (*nouveaux riches*, for example) who, having purchased an ancient and noble-named house, find themselves unprovided in the way of a dignified family spectre, to whom they could safely entrust the terrifying of the country neighbours by any of the different modes adopted by ghostly personages for the perfecting of that end.

Cranmore has all the requisites for the scene of a strange old legend and tradition. "She of the seraph tongue" has richly embellished and enhanced its picturesque interest by weaving around real family records a web of romantic fiction, and thus making of truth and falsehood that "mixture of a lie" which thou hast been assured, reader, *doth* give pleasure.

IT was about six o'clock in the afternoon of one twenty-seventh of July that I sat down with my companion beneath the ample shade of the two lime-trees that stand a few hundred yards from the front entrance of the manor-house. The sunset lights were stealing lovingly round the grey walls, and peering into the latticed and ivied windows that face the west. By degrees each diamond-shaped pane glittered like gold, and at last the illumination was complete, and the pale, deserted dwelling, seemed of a sudden to have assumed an air of festal life.

"What a pity that we cannot get in!" I said, for the thirty-first time since my eyes had rested on the interesting face of the old house. "I should like to hear more of its history. There must be a legend, a story, a prophecy, a something connected with it, surely."

"Look up," said my companion, drawing me a few paces to the left of the lime-trees. "Do you see that window beneath the turret now in shadow? Well, that is the Bright Room of Cranmore! A bright room lit by no earthly candle. Every night a supernatural radiance gleams on the oak-panelled walls. By the last proprietor everything was done to find out the trick (everything must be supposed trick nowadays), but night after night the ghostly gleam returns, and—"

"Who is the proprietor?" I said.

"You shall hear! My mother knew this place well in youth. She knew the heroine of the story that I mean to tell you; but get up, walk with me round the quaint old gardens. Look at the long, sharp lights that dart through the grand, wide shadows. Look down the dim, tangled walk, overarched with ever-greens flourishing in the untrimmed glory of neglect. See beyond there, over to the pleasant meadows—further to the wide old woods and ferny dells of Baronsward—and let your eye wander round till it reaches the sudden silver gleam of the many-winding river. Follow the bright lacing of the water through the low, rich fields, till it is spanned by a three-arched bridge, and then look along the white road that leads to the village with a gilt-tipped spire shining in the sun; and let your eye and fancy wander onwards to the wide-roofed, tree-shrouded dwelling, that has stood there for three hundred and twenty years. That is Hallwood—the place belongs to the Herberts. But it is of the manor here that we must now speak."

CRANMORE belongs to the H___ family. About five-and-thirty years ago Lord H. lent it to a widowed relation, who, having been left almost penniless with six children, was very glad to sit down at Cranmore rent free. The place had been once a stately old dwelling of the family to whom it still belongs; but when Mrs. D. took possession thereof it was almost devoid of furniture, though the walls and windows were in sound repair. Lord H. had kindly and considerately replaced a good many missing things, and early in the autumn of the year 1804 Mrs. D. took possession of her new home. She was a woman of strong nerve—no imagination, and blessed with plenty of cheerfulness and vigour. Her establishment consisted of

a nurse, a cook, and a girl of eighteen, who acted the part of housemaid; this last-named servant had only been hired about six weeks before Mrs. D.'s arrival at Cranmore. From her last place she had brought a good character for sobriety, honesty, and veracity, and there was no reason to suppose from her manner that there was about her any flightiness or excitement of mind; on the contrary, she was a quiet, steady, and industrious servant, and in as large a house as Cranmore it may be supposed that her time was fully occupied by her daily work.

It must be mentioned that Mrs. D., on coming to Cranmore, had fixed on a small suite of rooms fronting the south which she intended to occupy; the other apartments were many of them locked up to prevent the chill draughts, from open doors and windy corridors, sweeping through the great building to the discomfort of the inmates. One or two large state rooms were, however, left open to serve as play-ground to the children on wet and wintry days when they might not be able to get out. These rooms were above those inhabited by Mrs. D. and her children. Two stairs led up to them; one with a wide and handsome carved oak balustrade, the other was a winding and narrow ascent, with nothing but a rope to hold by as you went up or down. This stair led further up, also, to the attics; but few of the family had curiosity sufficient to take them all through the house more than once after their first day at Cranmore.

ONE afternoon in November Mrs. D. was sitting at the window working, when her attention was attracted by seeing Margaret, the girl who acted as her housemaid, wandering alone, with her eyes fixed on the upper windows of the house, as if intently watching something within the casements. Mrs. D. was surprised at the length of time she stayed in the walk alone; standing quite still for ten minutes, although the day was very cold, and she had only wrapped a light shawl over her head and shoulders. Mrs. D., knowing that the girl had been suffering from rheumatism, opened the window and called out, "Go in—what are you staring at there so long?" The girl turned away, saying, "Nothing, ma'am; I was afraid that the chimney was on fire." She turned and went in, and Mrs. D. thought no more of the circumstance.

The country round Cranmore is of a lonely and wild character; there are few gentlemen's seats near, and the sequestered manor-house had been inhabited for two months by Mrs. D. before any one had broken in upon her solitude by visits or invitations.

Hallwood is the nearest place of any consequence. It is an Elizabethan house. A pleasant, cheerful family then occupied it; people who were always ready to see their friends, and rejoiced in new neighbours provided they were tolerably presentable. The Herberts found out the merits, name, and family connexion of Mrs. D., and lost no time in calling and proposing that she should spend a day with them about Christmas time, when all the brothers and sisters were at home, and an aunt and uncle came from Sussex to enlarge the circle. Mrs. D. agreed to spend one afternoon there. She was to walk if the day proved fine to Hallwood, and the Herberts were to send her back in the carriage before ten o'clock.

The evening passed over, and she left her friends about a quarter of an hour later than she had intended. The road was covered with the snow that had fallen about an hour before, the clouds were still heavy towards the south, and only a

star or two shone clearly now and then from behind thick masses of vapour. The house at Cranmore can be seen from a considerable distance; but as you descend the hill half a mile from the entrance you lose sight of it again until you enter the grounds. Mrs. D. had never before approached the manor-house by night, and she leant forward to notice with some surprise how brightly the light shone from one of the upper windows. She tried to remember the relative positions of the rooms, and thought that the brilliant illumination must proceed from the window of her own bedchamber. Meanwhile the carriage swung down the hill, and she lost sight of the building. Soon after she reached her own door in safety, and on entering her bedroom she was surprised to see that the shutters were closed.

IT was about a month after this event that Lord H. received a letter from Mrs. D., stating that for various reasons she wished to give up living at Cranmore, and that she proposed leaving it in the course of a week or two. There was something peculiar in the tone of the letter; so much so, indeed, that Lady H., a person noted for her kind and generous benevolence, determined to inquire more particularly what these reasons were, in case that something might be done by Lord H. to make his tenant more comfortable, and perhaps, even then, persuade her to stay. Her circumstances made her an object of pity; and, moreover, she was connected by marriage with Lady H., although, from various causes, they had scarcely ever met.

As it happened, Lady H. was going to pay a visit to a friend in Devonshire; Cranmore was not very much out of her way, and she determined to go there, visit Mrs. D., and find out if possible what were the reasons of her strange and sudden change of mind with respect to living at Cranmore.

Lady H. was a woman of five-and-forty; of an eager, romantic, excitable temperament. She was the very person to enjoy a sudden scramble over the country in a chaise-and-four when no one expected her, and great appeared to be the consternation when her ladyship arrived. Mrs. D. was not to be seen at first, and Lady H. had been ten minutes in the house before her hostess made her appearance. When she entered the sitting-room Lady H. rose, extended her hand, and at once proclaimed her anxiety to do all that was possible to make Mrs. D. comfortable in the manor-house, if she could be induced to stay.

Mrs. D. expressed her grateful thanks, but stated firmly that her mind was made up—she would not, she could not stay. No more need be said: it was impossible.

"Impossible! Why?" said Lady H., in a tone of great surprise.

"It is *impossible* that I can stay," repeated Mrs. D.

"You are surely prepared to tell me why," said Lady H., kindly. "Consider what you give up."

"I *have* considered," replied the other lady; "but it is impossible—*quite*. I regret it—I regret it very much," she added, with much confusion of manner; "but things have occurred, that—"

"What! no more losses?" said Lady H. "Excuse me, but my wish to benefit you must lead you to pardon my curiosity."

"I cannot explain, because—because, really, your ladyship would *laugh* at me."

"Laugh, my dear Mrs. D.! how can you suppose such a thing? Pray trust me with what you feel on this subject. I am most anxious to arrange all for your future comfort; at least tell me what your wishes are."

After a few minutes of silent thought Mrs. D. said—

"I will trust you; I ought and I will. My dear Lady H., at the risk of being thought a madwoman, I will tell you that this house is not fit to live in. It is not what we see here, but the things that are said."

"*What!* what do you mean?" said Lady H. "Said of it."

"No, no, in it."

"In it!"

"Yes. I see that you do not comprehend me; I must, therefore, tell you all as clearly as I can."

"Pray do, for I am anxious, indeed."

"Well, then, listen to me; and pray let me first assure you that I am not a nervous, foolish, or excitable person, generally speaking. Allow me first to offer you some refreshment."

She rose as if to ring the bell; Lady H. laid her hand on her arm and cried—

"Oh, no, no! do not lose a moment, I beg of you. I want nothing; sit down; I can only stay half an hour. It is now three o'clock, I must be at my journey's end by six at latest."

Mrs. D., however, rang the bell, saying—"I wish to ring, on another account."

The bell was replied to by a girl of eighteen or nineteen. Mrs. D. ordered her to put on some wood, and as she proceeded to mend the fire she whispered to Lady H.—

"Look at her particularly."

Lady H. did so. There was nothing to attract particular notice in her appearance. She was apparently in good health, rather stout than otherwise, of middle height and fair complexion. When she had left the room, Mrs. D. said—

"That girl has been in my service for some months; she has been an obliging, honest, sober servant, but she has nearly frightened us all to death."

"How?"

"One evening, about six weeks ago, I was in the room that serves for our nursery. I had been putting one of my little boys to bed, when my eldest girl came in, saying—"

"'Mamma, did you call for a light?'"

"'No, my dear,' I replied. 'I have been in here for a quarter of an hour.'"

"'How very odd!' said the child."

"She stood for a moment or two looking at me, and then went out into the passage where the cook and housemaid were speaking together. I *thought* that I distinguished the words, 'Don't tell her'; but I made no inquiries, and I thought no more of the circumstance. I hate all mysteries, and tales of all kinds; I never think of inquiring into the truth of what children call strange noises, and such things. If they are the tricks of ill-intentioned people, they had better *not* be inquired into, and disappointed malice will soon cease to trouble itself when it finds that it attracts no attention."

"I should have persisted in this line of conduct, had not one or two other circumstances occurred which occasioned me considerable annoyance. One

evening, on returning about ten o'clock from Hallwood, I perceived a bright light burning in one of the upper rooms. I concluded that it came from the fire and candles in my own apartment, but on entering the house I found that the shutters were closed; and when I asked my nurse at what hour she had closed them, she said that she had done so at eight o'clock. It was then about half-past ten. I asked if any one had been with a light in the upper rooms. She said no. All the servants were in bed with the exception of herself, and that she had told them that she would sit up to let me in. I took the light, Lady H., and telling her to follow me, I went up stairs. I confess that I was suspicious then of some trick. I passed the head of the narrow stair. We were walking very gently for fear of disturbing the children. Now just as I passed the opening from the passage to the turret-stair, I most distinctly heard the words 'Bring me a light!' It was said in a faint, but clear tone."

Lady H. rose suddenly, and, going to the window, threw it open hurriedly, saying—

"I do not feel well."

She put her head out, and the fresh air seemed to revive her. She returned to her seat in a minute or two, and begged Mrs. D. to proceed. She did so.

"On hearing the words, I turned to my companion, saying, in a whisper—

"What's *that*?"

"The woman muttered—

"God knows!"

"And I saw that she was about to faint. I returned with her into the bed-room. She was so ill, that for ten minutes I could not leave her. I did not wish to alarm any one else. I did not wish any one else to know of it even. I said to her—

"Elizabeth, you are a woman of good sound sense. It is some absurd nonsense; never speak of it either to me or to any of the others. Silence is the best plan."

"When she had recovered herself a little she promised me that she would tell no one, and I believe that she kept her promise. Well, nothing happened for some little time. I resolved not even to examine the rooms particularly. I let every thing go on as usual, until one night, about a fortnight ago, when on passing much later than usual along this passage (I had been employed in writing to my sister in India), again I heard the voice—the faint, clear voice—say, 'Bring me a light!'"

Lady H. became dreadfully agitated. She said, in an anxious tone—

"What kind of voice was it?"

"A woman's voice, certainly," replied Mrs. D.

"Oh, Heaven!"

Lady H. covered her face with her hands, and remained silent. Mrs. D. proceeded:

"I confess to you, that on hearing the words great fear took hold of me for a few moments. I remained quite still, and, for a short time, I was uncertain how to act. But soon I rallied; I turned, and proceeded up the stairs."

"*What!* alone?" said Lady H.

"Yes, quite alone. I am not a nervous person, as I have said before. I went up; I reached the landing-place, and stopped. I listened attentively; I heard nothing but the wind, and at last the thumping of my own heart, I will own. Then I advanced. I went into one room; the one that you may remember has the blue hangings. It was

empty—dark. I went out. I then stopped for an instant at the door of the white room. You know it is the one—"

"I know, I know!" said Lady H., nervously.

"It is, I believe," continued Mrs. D., "the one called the bride's room."

"Yes, yes," said Lady H. "It is called so—has been for many years. Pray go on."

"I stood at the door, and I had laid my hand on the handle. I was in the act of entering, when I heard a sound, the extreme horror and strangeness of which I cannot describe. I opened the door, and, for half a second, the noise continued. There appeared to me to be light besides my own in the room: a flame-coloured light flittered for a second on the pale walls of the white room, and then I saw nothing, heard nothing more. Then, Lady H., the idea of a supernatural agency came into my mind for a few minutes. I felt no fear, only curiosity and awe. I remained with my candle in my hand for, I suppose, nearly ten minutes; at the end of that time I left the room, and went down stairs. It is strange that it was only as I drew near to the inhabited part of the building that I began to feel the common effects of fright. The joints of my limbs seemed loosened, and I could hardly reach my own room. So desperate a fear is a solemn thing to experience when you are unaccustomed to the nervous tremors common to many women, sensible and well-educated, too, perhaps. Next day I hardly knew whether to speak of what I had seen or not. I resolved, however, not to do so, and two days and nights passed in peace. On the Thursday after my midnight adventure, I was sitting in the evening alone after the children were in bed, when I heard a heavy fall, preceded by a scream. I left the room, hurried along the passage and met the nurse, who I found had also heard the noise. She was very pale, and said—

"'It's up stairs—it's Margaret!'

"We went as quickly as we could up the turret-stair, and along the passage: at the door of the white room we found the girl Margaret lying on her face in a faint. Her candle had been extinguished and broken by the violence of her fall: nothing else was to be seen. We raised her up; she could not speak, and we were obliged to call up the other servant before we could manage to carry her to her own room. We laid her on the bed. It was fully an hour before she was able to speak. When I found that she had regained her senses in some degree, I sent the others away, cautioned them to say nothing before the children, and I sat up the rest of the night alone with the girl. She lay silent for some time. At last I said,

"'What frightened you?'

"She then began to cry violently, and did not reply. I let her go on crying: it is a great relief to some temperaments. Then, when she became calm, I repeated my question. She replied—

"'I saw strange things to-night.'

"'What things did you see?'

"'Ah!' was all she said.

"'We do not know what things have gone on here in the old times,' she added, in a few minutes.

"'There is no necessity that we should,' I replied.

"She was silent for some time, and then said—

"'We can't tell what there is need for. It may be to make us think of what we cannot see.'

"I did not reply, for I had no intention of entering into a metaphysical disquisition with the girl, who was evidently in a very highly-excited state. Finding that she was unwilling to speak, I pressed her no further. I sat up with her till daylight, and then, finding that she was tolerably composed, I went to my own room. I own to you that I felt the whole thing to be an uncomfortable and unaccountable occurrence. After breakfast I sent for the servants. I told them on no account to mention it before any of the children. I told them that I would let them all leave in a month's time, if they wished it; but they replied that they were too much attached to the family to do so on small pretences, and they would rather wait and see what happened. Not a week after that I was sitting in the nursery. Two of my children were asleep in bed in that room. I had sent the nurse to her supper, and I meant to stay in the room until she returned. I was working, and wanted some thread that I had left in my own room. I rose to go, but my youngest boy woke up suddenly, saying—

"Don't go, don't leave us, for fear of the bright lady!"

"The bright lady!" I said.

"I turned to the bed, and putting my arms round the little fellow, I said—

"Who is the bright lady?"

"He hid his face in my breast, and whispered—

"Margaret saw her."

"I really felt very angry to find out thus the absurd gossip that was going through the house.

"Nonsense," I said; "I am the only lady in the house, you know."

"No, no, mamma; there is a bright lady, and a bright room, too."

"How did you hear such silly-stuff?" I asked him.

"I was lying, *they* thought asleep, but I was not asleep a bit, and I heard Margaret telling nurse. They were talking, and talking close to the bed-curtains: they did not know I was awake."

"What did they talk about?" I said.

"Oh, about a voice, and a light, and Margaret going up one night when she heard the voice, and her seeing such a bright lady at the glass, and fire on the wall, and something about an old face very wicked, and a strange silver light—a lamp, in her hand; I cannot remember it now, but I know it frightened me very much, indeed, mamma!"

"The fools!" I said to myself; and sat down to my work again.

"I stayed till the servants had done supper, and then I went to my own room. I did not know what to do. I thought of leaving the place, but that appeared so foolish a thing to do. To be frightened away by the tales of idle, gossiping women was really too provoking. After thinking for some little time, I resolved on making an attempt to discover the truth of the case. I took no light, and going softly up the stair—the turret-stair—I sat down on one of the steps half-way up, and wrapping a warm shawl round me, I determined to watch there for several hours. Now the act of watching in the dark is one which tests the nerves, but I had such an ardent desire to find out and put an end to the whole business that fear was for some time silent. Soon after I sat down I heard the clock strike ten, and I knew that about that time the servants went to bed. A long black gap of time succeeded, broken at last by the first stroke of eleven. It was when the chime had ceased that

I felt my solitude intensely. Still I determined to stay, and for the purpose of doing something or other I began to count the time by seconds, and so my tongue numbered two hundred and twelve; then suddenly above me I heard a faint sound, as of shuffling feet, and I remember at once seizing hold of my right wrist by my left hand that I might feel my own pulse beating: it was like a companion, I fancied. Do not laugh at me. So I sat for a few minutes. Then came a voice, faint, clear—

"Bring me a light!"

"Lady H., I shall never forget the dread, the horror of that instant. I rose, and in desperation meant to make my way up stairs; but my ankles seemed to give way, my eyes became dim, I fell head foremost down the stair. I lay there till the servants, hearing the noise of my fall, came and raised me up, and put me into bed. I said nothing, but I saw from their faces that they suspected the cause of the accident that had befallen me. The nurse sat with me till daylight, and I asked her at last what all these stories meant. I told her what Charlie had said the night before, and I begged her to repeat to me the whole of the description given by Margaret to her and the cook that night. The woman was unwilling to speak on the subject, but I drew from her by degrees the confession that the girl Margaret, being of a curious and daring spirit, had one evening said—"I'll go and give her a light the first time she asks for it;" and that she had stationed herself on the stairs, intending to wait till the words were pronounced. "She had asked one of the other women to come, but she refused to have anything to do with it. She went, and the account she gave was that she rushed quickly up immediately on hearing the words. She went to the door of the blue room and saw nothing, and stopping to listen heard a sound proceeding from the white room. She stole softly to the door, and kneeling down looked beneath the door, which fits badly, if you remember. She said that she saw a sudden and brilliant light in the room, but nothing else. She rose, and hurried down the stair, and that first time said nothing of her adventure, being afraid that if I knew it I should prevent her repeating the experiment. It was after that night that I saw her one day in the garden attentively examining the windows of the house, the upper windows especially. "A few nights after, she had gone about ten o'clock to the stair. She had seated herself on the uppermost step, and had the patience to wait there till within a few minutes of eleven. All was still until that instant, but then she heard the rustling of silk, a very light footstep, and she looked round towards the top of the stair. All was dark, but this time she had taken a dark lantern with her, and she made the light flash out. She saw by that light an old and wrinkled face, with a ghastly pallor, and a patch of paint on each cheek. It looked round the wall, as if to call down the stair; the pale lips moved, and the words were pronounced. Margaret bounded up two steps, and saw the figure swiftly skim and glide along the passage; it seemed to *melt into* the door of the white room—that was the odd phrase of the girl—and she went forward to the door. In an agony of fright she threw it open, and, lo! there she declared she saw—remember, I am only repeating what the servant said—she saw—oh, I can't tell what! a lady—a girl, standing in a white dress—a long, white dress, before a mirror: then she appeared to be in flames. The figure turned its face, and then the girl remembered nothing more but the sound of her own shriek and fall. There we found her, as I told you; and you know the rest. On learning

that from the nurse, I resolved on leaving the house. I wrote next day to Lord H., and my letter I think you read."

"Yes, I did," replied Lady H., rising.

She took hold of Mrs. D's hand, adding—

"I must go now; I can say nothing more at present, but I promise that you shall hear from me in the course of a day or two. I will see what can be done."

She hurriedly took leave and drove off, having stayed nearly an hour altogether.

IN the course of three days Mrs. D. received from her ladyship a packet, sent carefully enclosed in a parcel by coach. It contained a roll of paper closely written, and a note from Lady H. herself. It was as follows:

My dear Mrs. D.—

I cannot resist the strong inclination I feel to send you a manuscript relating to the affair of which we spoke on Tuesday last. You know that Lord H. and I were cousins. Our grandfather was a man of strange and peculiar habits. From the age of thirty-five he was afflicted with blindness, and, in consequence, he kept a secretary, who wrote for him, read to him, and was for many years his constant companion. This man, a Frenchman by birth, was an intelligent and kind-hearted person. I knew him well when I was a child at Effingham: Cranmore was never inhabited by my grandfather—within my recollection, at least.

When I was a girl of sixteen I happened to ask Mr. L. what was the reason of my grandfather's dislike to Cranmore: I had then seen the old manor for the first time in my life, and its antique beauty had made a deep impression on me. The old man—he was then about seventy, though full of acuteness and vigour—the old man told me that it was in consequence of some melancholy family catastrophe of which Cranmore had been the scene. At that time he would tell me no more, but shortly before his death he sent me the papers which I enclose to you. Read them and return them to me. I must just add that, on his death-bed, my grandfather exacted a solemn promise from Lord H. and me that we would never on any account sleep at Cranmore. You know how faithfully we have kept that promise, which was the sole cause of my refusing your kind offer of accommodation for the night.

Believe me, dear Mrs. D.,

Yours very truly,

Ellen H.

There were some explanatory notes in the margin of the MS. in Lady H.'s own hand.

As may be supposed, Mrs. D. lost no time in reading the packet, which was entitled—

Papers relating to the family of H.,
collected and transcribed by
Mr. L. for her ladyship. Dated 1788.

The noble family of H. have been possessed of the lands and manor of Cranmore since the reign of King John—of their other properties I need not speak—it is of Cranmore that I am, I feel, required to say all that I know.

Your ladyship, without doubt, remembers having expressed considerable anxiety to know why the late lord never inhabited the beautiful manor-house of Cranmore. With his reasons I was well acquainted; but I was at that time under a promise not to reveal to your ladyship the rumours and tales current in the country about fifty or sixty years ago.

About that space of time has elapsed since a large party was assembled to celebrate the Christmas at Cranmore's manor. From the late lord's own lips I heard the following account of what occurred there at that time. The family who were present on the occasion consisted of the late lord, then Mr. ____, his half-brother who then had the title, two sisters of the latter, and a young lady to whom he had been married about three months before. She was the daughter of a man of low birth, and no property. It was a marriage that had caused most deep grief and concern to the step mother of the young lord.

The Dowager Lady H. had been one of the most ambitious women of her day—haughty, beautiful, capricious, vain, and cruel where her ambitious wishes were concerned.

The young lord himself, then a man of seven-and-twenty, was handsome, brilliant, excitable, and just the man to throw himself away on the first handsome woman who could contrive to captivate him.

This young person, young Lady H., was, however, worthy of his affection. She has been described to me as a creature of surpassing loveliness, gloriously fair, with eyes full of the dew of the morning, so pure and childlike was her expression. She was a remarkably good dancer, and a beautiful singer; in short, just the one to attract an elegant young man like Lord H.

It had been a matter of some surprise to every one concerned when the elder Lady H. invited the young lord and his bride to Cranmore. [*The manor was the jointure-house of the H. family.* These words were written as a note on the margin by Lady H. herself.] There were a good many guests, and several of the family connexions—all having assembled on the 23d of December, in order to spend the Christmas and new year together, as was and is still so much the mode in England.

The late lord has frequently told me that he and the ladies of the family were all prepared to dislike and disapprove of the young bride before her arrival; but that she had not spent one evening in their society before all were charmed into love and favour, so sweet and enchanting a creature was she. The late lord told me that the first night of her arrival, after supper, which was then at nine, they played at some Christmas games, and her playful grace was a thing that pursued him in his dreams; so much so, that next morning he said to the dowager lady—"We have been wrong in our judgment. I think Edward has done well." She smiled only in reply. Things went on very smoothly, till the day before the new year. There was to be a dance in the hall on New Year's-eve, and a masqueing, and dressing up. While all were deciding on their different disguises, the young lord turned to his step-mother saying—"You must let us have the point lace and

diamonds." He had never asked for them before; and the jewels and lace (heir-looms they were; and very precious too)—the jewels and lace still remained in the possession of the dowager. It was, in short, a civil way of asking her to give them up. The dowager bowed, saying—"Lady H. shall have them." The young lord was of an impatient spirit. He said that he wished to see how they became his lady, and, in fact, requested that the dress and jewels might be immediately produced. The dowager gave a key to one of her attendants, and shortly after the things were taken into the bride's room. It was a chamber of state, hung with white satin draperies embroidered in rosebuds. The toilette was of remarkable magnificence; an antique silver-rimmed mirror stood on the carved table; there were chased silver candlesticks, and a lamp of curious, ancient pattern, to burn for the night.

The young bride ran up stairs and decked herself in the gay lace robe. It was of inestimable value, I have been told; of most exquisite point, worked in a foreign nunnery: the jewels I need not describe, as your ladyship now possesses them all.

The late lord told me that he was standing in one of the windows of the eating-room; the door was open, so that he could see a figure come down the stair, and along the great hall. He heard voices and looked up. He told me that he saw her come down the great staircase, her train held up by two of the young ladies; they went into the hall, and she stood there, the diamonds gleaming in her pale, golden hair. Sun-light shining on her bright head, she looked all white, radiant, transfigured into an extreme glory of loveliness. Her husband approached; she held out both her hands, and sung a short measure, dancing as she moved towards him. The dowager was looking on; jealous wrath flashed over her face; she turned away.

That night all were busy dressing themselves to the best advantage. Oh! for the truthful memoirs of a mirror—a long mirror—a wide mirror—my lady's mirror, at which she has powdered, painted, patched, and mended her face for fifty years. Ah, vanity of vanities! on thy smooth surface there is no change, yet how many a bitter change doth there appear! Thou smooth deceiver; thou long-trusted confidant, so gradually dost thou reveal thy unpleasant truths, that they lose the horror of their novelty, and we slip from youth to age, from beauty to deformity, without the sharp consciousness of rapid change and sudden decay!

Lady H.'s attendant had left her almost dressed; all was adjusted save her diamond necklace. The clasp was clumsy, and the snap difficult to close. She stood alone, her door was open. The late lord, your grandfather, had just left his own room, having finished his toilet. His apartment was the one next to the bride's. He saw the elder Lady H. coming along the passage. He drew near to speak to her, and as he did so, he heard the young lady say—"Who will help me with this?" She turned to the door and he saw her. The delicate lace fell round her slender and beautiful form; there were jewels in her tiny ears and in her yellow hair; her arms were half bare, and hanging sleeves fell from her elbows. The dowager looked round sharply but steadily into the room, and then turned in. Her son saw no more, he went down the stair. He heard a wild shriek—another, another, a flaming figure dashed

past him, there were people hurrying to and fro—screams, sobs, then silence.

She died that night. An hour before her death she begged to be left alone with her husband: with great difficulty this was granted. No one knows what she told him; but after her funeral he left the manor. A month after he was heard of in France; but though the late lord went in search of him he could not find him. A twelvemonth passed, and a letter arrived by an express to inform the family that Lord H. was in confinement in a madhouse at Paris. The step-mother of the unfortunate young man immediately set out. She travelled night and day; and when she reached Paris she went to the place from which the letter was dated. She saw the young man, but he cursed her to her face, and flying on her almost strangled her.

Very disagreeable reports were spread about the country. It was said that the young lord lay for nights on the bare ground, screaming that he saw a figure that scorched him as she passed; that flames shone perpetually on the wall; that she came with taper fingers tipped with fire, and passed them over his brow that burnt like brimstone. He died raving mad about six months before the dowager. She never recovered her long attendance on him; she never left Paris till after his death, then her own son became Lord H., and she returned to the manor.

The night before she died she was sitting up in her bed when her woman came in with the composing draught that she had been preparing. She cried—"Oh, Hannah! Hannah! look there—there! See, their faces shine through the walls on me; their eyes are hell-hot, and their breath burns me. Help! help!" She screamed on so till she died.

I HAVE often stood beneath the elm-trees of Cranmore, listening to the wild liquid strains of the nightingales that sing there the whole of the summer nights, and then I have wondered more than ever how in so sweet a home a deed so diabolical could be conceived and perpetrated.

