

in the room before in my many visits to Lacy Court. Diane had said at dinner that Colonel Lacy had had two or three rooms done up in this wing while they had been abroad in the spring. She had also said he had wished her to choose that wing of the house for their especial use, but she had preferred the outlook over the park and the view of the distant hills. She had said that she considered the western side too shut in with trees and hedges, and was already bored by gardens. "People have gone mad over gardens in England. I think it is one of their new crazes."

I must say that hers must have been a most discontented mind to object to that lovely view of Dutch gardens below my windows. I remembered

had hurried to the opposite seat. He flushed and looked annoyed and discontented. Altogether my harmless speech completely upset the harmony of the breakfast table. As we were leaving the room Colonel Lacy came up to me, and gently touched my shoulder.

"Forgive me, dear, for speaking so abruptly to you; the truth is that Diane is so very highly strung, and has such an intense horror of the supernatural, that I always dislike any allusion to ghosts before her. I believe, poor child, she got some fright from a stupid servant in her childhood."

"I said nothing, but thought to myself, "Fright is not temper, and it was temper I saw on her face."

Diane came slowly down the stone steps to meet us. Her beauty was enough to charm anyone who only cared for looks. As for me, no woman has ever so thoroughly repelled me, before or since. I thought, but it may have been fancy, I caught a look from her inscrutable eyes to Lucian's, and that their frankness was momentarily clouded. To my surprise her cold manner had changed to something more gently friendly. She even smiled at me, as she asked me if I had found the west wing haunted, as I had alluded to ghosts at breakfast.

"I never saw Arthur so cross before, but he is so absurdly anxious about my nerves, one would imagine I was on the verge of brain fever."

Lucian"; her lips had again their scornful curl.

"I like Lucian," I said; "he is pleasant and good-looking."

"Don't you think he is very shallow and superficial?"

"I really have not been long enough here to judge, and when people are pleasant I am never critical."

She gave me one of her odd side-long glances, and withdrew her arm from mine, ostensibly to gather up the train of her long white gown. She was very prettily dressed, and in a way to accentuate the serpentine type of her beauty, a silver snake coiled round the slight waist.

I was very anxious to investigate the mystery of the little door at the back of my cupboard, but my distrust of Diane was great, and I preferred to wait till I knew her to be safely out of the house for some hours.

That day passed without adventure. That evening was a repetition of the one before, except that Diane asked me to play, and even condescended to admire my music, languidly, afterwards. It was a fine warm night, very different from the last. I mentioned how the wind had blown the curtain out into my room, and how I had got up to shut my window.

"I suppose," said Diane, quietly, "that was when you felt nervous about ghosts?"

"Perhaps it was," I answered, "but I knew it was foolish, for, after all, Lucian's room is near, and my maid's, and neither of them have heard or seen anything."

That night I looked into my cupboard without a fear of ghosts, but no light was to be seen. So bold had I grown, that I felt for the keyhole to see if it had been filled up, but it was open. I pushed a hairpin through to be sure. My hairpin fell and dropped on the other side.

Next morning we were all more amiable at breakfast. Diane came in late, she looked wan and tired, and her silence was not sullen.

She asked me at last if I would drive with her that morning, but my plans being prepared, I said I had one of my bad headaches coming on, and thought I would be down quietly in my room till luncheon, when, if not better, I should go to bed.

"Take Lucian," Colonel Lacy said indulgently, "he has not seen half our pretty neighbourhood yet." By which I understood that Lucian was still a comparative stranger to his future home. But Diane might have a child.

I looked at her attentively as she walked up and down the terrace afterwards with Colonel Lacy. There was a languor in her steps, and I wondered if, after all—but Diane was not a woman to rush into confidence to a stranger.

At last alone! All the headache apparatus on evidence, before Diane's dutiful visit to my room enu de Cologne, smelling salts, a darkened room, and an eider-down quilt, which she had sent to cover my feet. At last alone, I got up as soon as I heard the pony-cart drive off, and locked my door.

I never felt so well in my life, and positively trembling with excitement, set to work fitting the door and wardrobe keys, and my own box keys, into that tiny, dark keyhole.

It was a long time before I succeeded in finding a key to fit, and then, after covering it with cold cream, the traditional oil of sensational stories being unattainable in this case, the door flew open, and I fell down several steps into a small, light room, twisted my ankle, and writhing on the floor in pain, but so ostentatious with surprise that I heroically put the pain aside, to be attended to later.

Still sitting on the floor, I gazed round me at the small light, room.



Sitting on the floor I gazed round at the room.

my many hours there with Godfrey in my young days, early morning strolls with the dew on the close-cut grass, and the little red tiled walks; or in the evening, when the nightingales sang, and the air was sweet with the smell of early summer flowers. Poor Godfrey! poor me! A thought came to me, which I put hastily away, but it could not be quite stifled, and as I looked into my looking-glass before going downstairs, I was glad I was still so fair to look upon.

CHAPTER II.

At breakfast I said to Lucian, "I wish you had not made me so nervous about ghosts last night."

Diane looked up quickly! Colonel Lacy said, "What nonsense! Ghosts. Who ever heard of ghosts here? I am sure I have known the house long enough to have got over such nonsense."

He was frowning, and looked thoroughly displeased. Diane sullenly furious, and Lucian uncomfortable. He was sitting opposite the windows, and I, with feminine presence of mind,

Later in the morning, Lucian, who was strolling by my side on the terrace, said, with some embarrassment of manner:

"Why did you allude to my speech about ghosts, Mrs Godfrey? Did you hear anything last night?"

"No, I heard nothing," I answered with reserve. "And, as Uncle Arthur said, I ought to have got over any fear of ghosts in this house by now; but I have never slept in this wing before. Indeed, the rooms were only half-furnished in my day."

Lucian immediately relapsed into his sympathetic manner.

"It is hard for you," he murmured, "It is almost impertinent to express my sympathy, but will you, will you take the will for the deed and believe you have all my sympathy?"

I looked at the beautiful Elizabethan house, at the park, the terraced garden, and sighed. "Anyhow, it is nice of you to express sympathy for my—bereavement," I said, but even in myself I hardly knew which bereavement. "I could have been happy here," I said, "and was happy with Godfrey."

She slipped her arm into mine, as we walked together—I felt as if a serpent had glided in. And yet the arm was soft and warm and white, and the little hand, how white it was! and how her diamond rings sparkled!

I don't know why at this particular moment a sort of second-sight came over me. I seemed as if behind the scenes of a strange drama; as yet, I was not clear as to the different parts. Instinctively I put myself on my guard against treachery. Diane's manner continued quite frigid to Lucian. He left us before long, and then she said:

"Arthur is so ridiculously fond of

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