

The Tregethan's Curse;

Or, The Weird Woman

By Anonymous

At the time, forty years ago, to which I am about to refer, my brother Oswald and I had long been orphans. Our parent—of good position, but small means—having succeeded in placing us tolerably well in life—I, as an officer in the Indian army, my brother as a barrister—died, leaving us little more than their blessing.

We had no nearer relation to us than ourselves—neither sister, sweetheart, nor wife—and our mutual affection was great. In fact, we were all in all to each other, having no more family ties than Cicely Mostyn, a cousin, who dwelt in Scotland, and an eccentric rich, old bachelor uncle, the head of the Tregethans, the possessor of Holme Grange, North Wales, an estate which, though not entailed, had belonged to our rave for centuries.

Having stated that Uncle Jaffery was rich, old, and a bachelor, it follows, as a natural sequence that we nephews paid him much deference and regarded with veneration as with curiosity, the iron safe, which, on our visits to the Holme, our worthy relative, with a gloating chuckle verging on a snarl, informed us held his last will and testament.

“It *must* come to one of you—to one,” he ever concluded. “Wouldn’t you, like to know which? There’ll be rare fighting and scratching. You are true Tregethans. I only regret dying, because I shan’t see it!”

In vain we strove to discover which of us he most favoured. He was alike crabbed to all—so much so, that had we not felt his pride of family would prevent it, we might have feared his bequeathing his wealth to a hospital, and cutting us off *without* a shilling.

As is was, we never got a penny from him while living, but struggled on as we could, I, with my pay, Oswald with his briefs, till the joyous—yes, I own that was how we regarded it—intelligence reached us that Uncle Jaffrey had died suddenly in his bed.

No sooner, however, was the breath out of the old man’s body, than his eccentricity and dislike to his kin began to display themselves. Only Oswald and I (who chanced to be in town) were to attend his funeral; not a woman was to be present, while his coffin was to be kept above ground till twelve o’clock, midnight, of Christmas Day, when it was to be deposited in the family vault. In conclusion, he peremptorily ordered that his will should not be opened nor read till an exact twelvemonth, to the very hour, after that date, when a ball was to be given, and all the neighbouring gentry invited. During the intervening period, Holme Grange was to be shut up, the old housekeeper, who had been in the Tregethans’ service from childhood, being left in sole charge. A month, however, before the prescribed year expired, Oswald, myself, and our cousin Cicely were to make the Grange our home.

To uninformed ears the latter command appeared simple enough, but to those who knew the ancient traditions of our race it bore a deep significance; for those ancient traditions affirmed that no two Tregethans, after they had reached man or woman’s estate, could dwell many weeks together under the roof of Holme Grange without dire quarrels ensuing, which, in past ages, had ended in a life’s enmity, or death. “The oldest inhabitant” knew it as “The Tregethans’ Curse.”

Oswald and I, conscious of the strong affection binding us, had frequently laughed at these old women’s tales, and as the eventful Christmas drew near, jestingly wrote that, if we quarrelled with any one, it must be with Cicely Mostyn, whom we remembered as a bright-eyed, fair-

complexioned, golden-haired lassie of six, who had termed us “rough laddies,” and who had needed high bribery and corruption, in the form of fruit and sugar-plums, before she would consent to be kissed.

You will say I am long coming to the end of my prologue and the commencement of my story, but I beg to state I am at it at last, and that it opens on a bleak, wintry, November night; when, just returned from India, I was being carried express through the English counties to Wales. The allotted time had expired, and I was hastening to the dead man’s appointed rendezvous for the living.

The snow had fallen heavily during the day—so heavily as often to impede our progress, and once or twice even threatened to extinguish the engine fires. Trees and hedge-rows, bare of leaf, were laden with it; but, like a bride-cake prepared too soon, November had covered it from view by a veil of fog, till the arrival of December, and the keen north wind, as the bride’s coming, should make it seasonable.

At the station I found the carriage waiting to drive me to the Grange, four miles distant. The horses, like the coachman, were fat from long idleness, and dragged slowly through the heavy country lanes, till—the fog everywhere, the snow only glinting occasionally through it, and the wind whistling over the bleak hills—I thought the Grange would never come in view. I knew the turn of the road at which it generally could be seen; but now we had proceeded more than half-way up the oak avenue before it loomed forth from the dull gray night.

It was a vast building of red brick, somewhat of the Elizabethan style, with modern additions added quaintly here and there, as the pride, purse, or need of the several owners had deemed it necessary. The roof was gabled, the chimneys eccentric, while, above all, rose a bell tower.

The bell yet remained, though the rope had long rotted away; and when the rushing hurricanes from the hills swung it creakingly to and fro, occasionally the ponderous clapper striking the rusty sides, sent forth a low, hollow groaning sound, especially ghostly in the night season.

The reception-rooms were in the front—the more homely at the back; thus, as the carriage drew up, not a light broke the vast frontage to bid me welcome, while the footman’s knock reverberated mournfully in the large hall within.

In a moment, however, many lights gleamed, and the door opening, the old housekeeper, attired in black silk, white muslin apron, and lace cap, stood curtsying to receive me.

“And so you are the first at the old place, Master Frank? You are the first, and you are welcome!” she remarked, as—I having warmly shaken her mittened hands—taking a tamp from the servant, she led the way to the back of the house. “Mr. Oswald comes by the last tram, and Miss Cicely does not arrive until to-morrow.”

We are traversing a long, high corridor; and the light, casting our shadows in ghostly proportions on the walls, dark with age, gave an awesome, chilling aspect to one returning after years of absence to the home of his forefathers. The place, too, owing to its being so long shut up possessed a damp, musty smell, which crept through the blood as did the fog without.

“It’s been a dull time here, Master Frank, and I’m glad it’s over, and that Tregethan voices are again to sound in the old rooms. I’ve made everything as comfortable as I could.”

In speaking, she threw wide a door, disclosing beyond the family dining apartment—the ceiling low, the walls oak-panelled, that reflected the glorious fire of logs which crackled on the spacious hearth, while a lamp burned brightly on the centre table.

The aspect, so different to the other portion, cheered me, as wine cheers a fainting man; and, advancing, I exclaimed, “Ah, this looks like home indeed! Now, my dear old friend, come and tell me all the news; it’s long since we two had a chat together”

Always the same—always the same, Master Frank,” replied the housekeeper, highly gratified—“ever ready to flatter an old woman by listening to her chattering. But there, I’ll do your bidding. True the place was your ancestor’s, and must interest you. So there is the mulled claret, and now, Master Frank, you sit down and get warm, while I sit here.”

We each took our seat, and garrulously the old lady talked, while I listened.

Meanwhile the wind, which had risen in fury, with violent and sudden gusts rattled the windowpanes and the fog began to lift—not without a struggle, though growing brighter one moment, to be denser the next.

“I should think Oswald will scarcely risk the road tonight,” I abruptly remarked. “The wind is a tempest; while once or twice I fancy I have seen snow-flakes”

“May be, he’ll stop the night at Llandudyn; and perhaps it’s better, though we at Holme count nothing of these storms. We are used to them, and the Grange, is strong enough to stand their fury,” rejoined the housekeeper. Then, with a cough, as if to dismiss the subject, she continued some domestic piece of intelligence which I, thinking of my brother, had interrupted.

Another hour passed. The Grange clock had beaten out ten; and, owing partly to the heat of the fire, partly to the rather prosy talk of my companion I was, I fear, dozing in my chair, when I was aroused by a sharp, startling cry.

I glanced quickly up, and my surprise changed to alarm, as my eyes rested on the housekeeper.

She sat erect in her chair, rigid as in death, her head half-turned over her shoulder to the window, her face corpse-like in hue, her lips parted, her gray eyes dilated, and one hand raised as to arrest attention. Her attitude was that of attentive listening; her expression denoted unspeakable horror.

Had she gone mad?

Pulling myself up on my seat, I gazed at her in wondering perplexity. Was it a case of catalepsy? Should I address her? Should I summon aid?

Before I could decide, she had sprung to her feet, her horror increasing; and darting to my side, as I also arose, clinging to me in mortal terror, her face still bent on the large recessed lattice window, she cried, “Oh Master Frank, did you not hear it? Heaven aid us! Listen, listen! There—it’s there! Ah, woe to the house of Tregethan! Blood—blood is again to stain its threshold!”

I stood utterly bewildered. What did the old woman mean? Had she, indeed, lost her reason? She was trembling like a leaf.

“My good Mrs. Lloyd,” I ejaculated, “what, in heaven’s name, is the matter?”

“Matter? What, are you a Tregethan, and cannot hear it?” she asked, lifting her white face to mine. There—there, it is coming again! Listen!”

Leaning forward, I instinctively obeyed.

There certainly was a singular sound in the storm—a strange, floating, moaning, weird-like shriek—blending with the tempest, yet not of it.

I hear what you mean,” said I; “but it is only the wind among the hills. The storm is terrific.” She shook her head with a smile.

Wind?” she repeated. “No, no; I’ve lived long enough among the hills, and heard tempests enough to know the difference between them and that cry. I tell you, when it is heard, evil and bloodshed is coming to the Tregethans. I am seventy now, hut only once have I heard it before: then its warning was verified. It was before you, Master Frank, were born.”

“Do you mean,” I asked impressed, despite myself, and catching so much of her awe as to speak in whispers “when my uncle Jaffery and my father quarrelled?”

“Yes; it ended in a foolish, boyish duel in the plantation. Still, blood was shed; but, praise to heaven, that time life was spared. Ah, hark! It comes; three—three times— and nearer, nearer!” cried the old woman, frantically wringing her hands. “The Lord be with us! Perhaps *she* will come; then bitter is the woe indeed!”

“She—whom?” I asked.

“The Weird Red Woman.”

Despite the effect the singular scene was beginning to have over me, I could not prevent a smile; but it speedily vanished. The housekeeper, approaching the table, had extinguished the lamp; then, returning, knelt crouching on the hearthrug at my feet, as if for protection, as, extending her aged, wrinkled hand towards the casement she said, in a low, thrilling whisper, “Look, Master Frank, at the window. Never move your gaze from it, if you would see her, for the Woman with the Dead Eyes goes by like a flash. Wait.”

Carried away by her strange manner, as though my will was subservient to hers, I complied.

A death-like silence reigned in the apartment, illumined only by the fire-light, which threw grotesque forms on the dark panelling, gave movement to the pictures of my ancestors suspended upon it, and darted bright, shifting lights on the broad lattice, beyond which was darkness, and the beating, howling wind.

I kept my eyes riveted upon the window. I no longer seemed to have a will of my own. A spell was on me. Minutes were as hours, marked by the quick, breathing of the old housekeeper at my feet.

As I looked, the pall of darkness was abruptly broken; and—yes—I swear it—amid the gloom, there swelled out the floating form of a woman, her trailing garments of a dull red brown, saturated by rain, clung about her limbs her long, red hair, streamed over her partly exposed shoulders. Her face was turned towards the room—towards us.

What a face!—cold, colourless, densely white, as the hueless lips—with two large, dark, awful eyes gleaming forth, dilated as by some unearthly horror—blended with malignant triumph. But what was more awful yet, the eyes were dead fixed, staring, as if carved in marble—or, rather, plucked from the face of a corpse—a face to freeze the blood of the strongest—to overturn the brain of the weakest.

The housekeeper shrieked aloud, and buried her face in her hands while with an ejaculation of fear, I sank into my chair.

The whole had passed in a few seconds. The Weird Woman, with the Dead Eyes had indeed flashed by; but, ere she vanished, the long, bony, narrow hand had been directed at *me*; and, shivering as with an ague fit, I covered under the icy stare.

The logs falling together aroused me; and angry, both with myself and the housekeeper, I leaped up, exclaiming, “Why, Mrs. Lloyd, what an absurd donkey you have been making me by these old tales; listening to such stories the mind’s eye could conjure up anything. Pray, let us have the lamp again?”

She looked fixedly at me, as quietly she arose.

“You *saw* it, Master Frank,” she said. “There is evil coming. Pray heaven it is not to you!”

“Nonsense!” I retorted, irritably. “I could swear you had been reared among the hills. I gazed long enough to people the air with phantoms, and make my eyes ache to bursting. There, take off the glasses. Here is a light?”

“Stay, Master Frank”—and she laid her hand impressively on my arm, as I bent to the logs—“promise not to tell a soul of this. It will be better not.”

“Tell! not very likely, my good old lady, that I shall seek to make myself a laughing-stock,” I rejoined. “Your claret was rather too abundant, I imagine, for its fumes to create such visions.”

Mrs. Lloyd shook her head.

“You are trying to deceive yourself, Master Frank. You wish *not* to believe it; but mark my words, before the year is out, you’ll have cause to recall this night. Hark! here comes your brother.”

Carriage wheels were sounding in the avenue. Flinging down the paper with which I had just re-lit the lamp, and seizing the latter in my hand, I hastened to the entrance door.

It had been already opened as I reached it.

Oswald was coming up the broad steps, the snow falling about him.

“My dear Oswald!” I exclaimed, hurrying forward. “So, here you are, old fellow!”

“Yes,” he laughed, “like a certain personage, when he quits the lower regions—in a perfect whirlwind.”

He extended his hand. As I took it in mine, the bell in the tower gave one prolonged boom, which, echoing dolefully, fled away to the hills, where it was broken and lost.

I could not suppress the start it caused me. There appeared something ominous in the occurrence. As I turned to conduct Oswald to the dining-room, my eyes rested on the housekeeper’s features. They were perfectly white. She, too, had noticed the chill boom of the bell in the tower.

I found Oswald much changed; study, and the hard fight for gentlemanly subsistence, seemed to have bitten into his nature like aqua fortis in copper. Two wrinkles had sprung up from the eyebrows to the forehead, adding to the intellectuality of the countenance. The small mouth was graver, while the dark eyes were less mirthful, with an inner look, as of one brooding on silent thought. This, however, seemed to wear off as we conversed together on past, present, and future, enjoying the sumptuous supper prepared by the housekeeper, who did not appear again that night.

The hour was late before we separated; and soon after, wearied by my day’s journey, I was sleeping heavily.

Towards morning, when slumber grew lighter, I was troubled by a strange dream. It seemed to come in rapid snatches—nothing was continuous. All I felt certain upon was, that Oswald and the Weird Woman played parts in it.

Once I was battling my way over a barren waste, the wind and rain dashing full in my teeth. Yet I never swerved. It appeared compulsory that I should hurry on, though my feet felt bound with lead. Abruptly, a river was before me; there was no way to cross it, save by swimming. I plunged in. The water pressed so warm and heavy about my limbs that, with difficulty, I could move. Then the moon broke forth, and with a scream of horror, I saw that the river was one of blood, whilst Oswald, his face white, his dark eyes hateful, was regarding me with fiendish malice from the bank.

I scrambled out, sick and dizzy. My brother had vanished, but I hastened on. Then came a fearful rushing of waters in my ears; again Oswald and the Woman with the Dead Eyes were there; but a mist enveloped what took place. I only know it banished sleep. When I awoke, I could remember nothing. I was merely conscious that, despite the water being frozen in the caraffes and ewers, I was bathed in perspiration, and hanging half out of bed, my head within a few inches of the floor.

As my eyes opened, I was trembling violently, like one seized by panic. Speedily recovering myself, and assuming a more comfortable position, I drew the clothes about me, for I soon began

to shiver, and exclaimed, "Confound that old housekeeper, for giving me the nightmare! Whatever was I dreaming about?"

But all my efforts to recall it were vain. During the ensuing morning—nay, for *days* after—the dream haunted me, bringing with it a vague dread; but at the very instant I believed the subject of it was becoming lucid, a cloud enveloped it, giving it the shape of a reflection in a blurred mirror.

By the next morning the fog had disappeared before the hurricane wind, which, proud of its victory, had subsided into a low, purring breeze, and the sun shone out with a warmth that recalled the sweet-smelling, fallen leaves of autumn. It was just the right day for the advent of youth and beauty, and Cicely Mostyn was to arrive that morning, under the chaperonage of an elderly connection on the father's side, a Mrs. Kenith Bruce.

Oswald and I had gone on the terrace to await her, but by some mistake the ladies missed the carriage sent to the station, and, taking a fly, had dismounted at the lodgates to walk up the avenue. Thus the first sight we had of Cicely Mostyn, was when—while we were chatting carelessly, cigar in mouth, listening for the carriage-wheels she suddenly emerged from under the shadow of the oaks, into the full sunlight, within a few paces of the terrace—Mrs. Kenith Bruce leaning on her arm.

Was this the prim, staid little "lassie, wi' the lint-white locks," about whom Oswald and I had been recalling many a childish incident? This young, beautiful girl, her soft cheek dimpled like a summer brook, who, stopping abruptly, half-shyly, half-curiously, regarded us?

Ah, Cissy, Cissy! that was the moment to me, which a man never forgets, whatever be his allotted span. It was the joy of heaven comprised in one delicious, earthly second.

Cicely Mostyn was about middle height, and only eighteen. Her form was slim and graceful; every move, every pose displaying new charms. Her complexion was transparently clear, flushed with a delicate rose tint. Her eyes were dark, arch, mirthful, yet tender; her mouth a Cupid's treasury of smiles and man-traps; her hair like threads of brightest shimmering gold. But why describe her? Suffice it, that from that moment Cicely Mostyn was all the world to me.

I could not remove my gaze from her, not even to note the effect her loveliness had had on Oswald; but, side by side, we advanced to give our cousin greeting.

Cicely was muffled up in plaids and furs; her face peeping from beneath a coquettish hat, trimmed with blue ribbons, and when she spoke, it was with the most delightful hint of the Scottish accent imaginable. Winningly, yet bashfully, she returned our salutation, then introduced her companion.

It must be owned that Oswald and I had rather stood in awe of the advent of the Highland chaperone, which sundry scraps of paper, now carefully destroyed, had that morning represented as tall, somewhat of the grenadier type—angular, with brick-dust, prominent cheek-bones, sandy locks, and a voice like a rasp.

In place of this flattering representation, Mrs. Kenith Bruce was stout, with a matronly dignity; had soft, gray hair, bright happy eyes, and a face to smile at youth's innocent follies, as if the fleeting years had not wholly made her forget that period in her own existence. In fact, she was no dreaded Cerberus, but a kindly adviser and friend.

With two such pleasant additions to the Holme Grange household, it need scarcely be said that the days passed rapidly. We talked, we played, we sang, we walked, rode, drove, and skated, when the weather permitted it. All the while, Christmas came creeping towards us—the Christmas that was to proclaim to whom the Holme should belong, and as each moment of the present became past, my love grew stronger.

I made no effort to hide my passion. It was as open as the natural timidity of a man truly in love, unless he be the greatest egotist going, experiences in the presence of her he adores, will permit; especially when indifferent persons are by. What my faltering tongue refused to utter, however, I left with full confidence to my eyes and fingers. The one was eloquent in ardent glances, the other in trembling touches.

There was, though, a circumstance which gave me considerable uneasiness. I had a presentiment—nay, more—than a presentiment—that Oswald and I were rivals—that he, too, loved Cicely Mostyn. His disposition was the reverse of mine. The more strongly he felt, the more grave and silent he became. This it was which aroused my suspicions. I knew that did he love, it would be with all the secret intensity of a studious, rather morbid, mind, which had the habit of brooding—brooding over joys as well as griefs. I was aware, also, that jealousy formed a strong portion of my brother's character.

All absorbed in my love for Cicely, it was not at once that I suspected our being rivals; then, as I pondered upon the probability, the idea flashed across my brain.

Did Uncle Jaffery know of our cousin's surpassing beauty? Had he, in his dislike to his brother's children, planned this month's compulsory residence together, in hopes that enmity might spring from it? Had he not hated women? Was it not said a woman had been the cause of that duel in the plantation—the wound received in which Uncle Jaffery had never forgiven?

I have stated I loved Oswald dearly; therefore, there may be some persons who, believing in the generosity of strong affection, were they writing this story as a novel, might make me, out of my feeling for my brother, seek to overcome my passion for Cicely. But *I* don't believe in love's generosity. When analysed it is, on the contrary, one of the most selfish passions in creation. It absorbs us entirely within its influence; and I would sooner have died than yield Cicely—even to Oswald.

Indeed, after the suspicion, I the more openly paid our cousin court, hoping, by being the first in the field, it would make the right mine to bid him withdraw. It may here be hinted that the lady herself was the fittest person to decide that matter. Well, I know it; and she had decided. Yes; though not a word had been spoken, though she mirthfully rather held me off when I sought to touch upon the subject, I felt instinctively Cicely returned my love.

Christmas at last arrived—the eventful Christmas. It had lost much interest to me; I seemed to care little whether I was left a full share or nothing of my uncle's wealth, so that I could call Cicely wife; and I resolved that on this night, which was to decide so much, this also should be decided.

According to Uncle Jaffery's singular will, invitations had been issued to all the neighbouring gentry, and the Holme ball-room was crowded, its old walls echoing to the spirit-inspiring sounds of music and women's silvery laughter. Every window was a blaze of light, and cast bright reflections on the snow laying thickly without, till, at a certain radius, the darkness and the pine-trees closed it in.

To look at the old place, which for a year and more had been so dull and tenantless, it reminded one of a desolate old age being suddenly re-endowed with youthful vigour. The casements winked from beneath their heavy ivy brows; mirth floated on the night air; all seemed happiness. It was to be a merry Christmas, indeed.

Even Oswald appeared affected by the general good fellowship the season ever brings. For the few days previously he had kept much to his own room, had been silent and thoughtful in company, and on being addressed, returned but short replies, especially when I was the interlocutor. On being questioned, he gave as the reason that his mind was engaged by a difficult

brief, containing a point of old law, which, could he fully master, would not only win his cause, but make him a high name in his profession.

This day, however, his bearing was totally changed. He laughed and jested with the best, though in an excited way, he hung about Cicely's skirts wherever she went.

"Confound him! would he have her all to himself?" I mentally exclaimed, in some annoyance. Then added, compassionately, "Poor fellow, does he not also love her—and he, hopelessly? Poor Oswald! for—as surely as if her own sweet lips had uttered it—I know Cicely is mine!" Nevertheless, however certain of his mistress's favour, a lover does not like to see his rival, though unsuccessful, engrossing all her attention; and I rejoiced at my determination to speak that night; for, on our engagement being *un fait accompli*, none could dispute with me the place by her side. The evening was at its merriest, when, a dance being held, I led Cicely from the ball-room, for the ostensible purpose of showing her the northern lights, which were flashing brilliantly. As we passed through an ante-room, I wrapped a huge, thick plaid about her, and insisted on her putting her little feet in a pair of snow boots belonging to somebody—I did not care whom.

Then, opening the glass doors, we stood on the terrace together, watching the dancers. I cannot say I saw them much; for my heart was beating right up in my throat, my brain felt confused, and my usual easy flow of speech was wanting. I yet feared to begin my confession, lest I might be interrupted—for the servants were passing to and fro in the inner room; so, declaring we should see the aurora borealis far better from the rising ground at the other side of the plantation, I drew her small hand through my arm, and led her down to the path, which had been well swept from snow. I do not in the least imagine she believed anything about the better view. I think she divined my purpose; for she could no longer meet my glance. She trembled, just a little, and I own her few sentences were not uttered with much wisdom.

Of course, you are all aware of what ensued. At the other side of the plantation, we stopped and regarded the moving columns of light, as we had intended; but Cicely's little head now nestled confidingly close to my shoulder, and my arm encircled her waist. She looked at the heavens; I preferred to see their reflection in her eyes. The avowal had been made under the pine-trees—and I was not rejected. At that moment, Cicely and I were the happiest beings in all creation.

I don't know whether it is the same with every one as with myself; but I never feel my face near a pretty woman's, but some magnetic influence attracts my lips to hers. The law of adhesion, I suppose. In my betrothed's case, I saw no reason to suppress the impulse; so stooped just a little, and the deed was done.

She instantly broke away, her dimpled face suffused with mirth and blushes.

"For shame, sir!" she exclaimed; "for such rudeness, you must do penance. So stay here, while I return to the Grange; I would not be seen entering the house with such a monster for worlds. Now, mind, do not move for five minutes, at least."

She shook her pretty finger authoritatively, bent her dark eyes, radiant with love, upon me, then the tree-trunks closed about her graceful figure.

I never again saw Cicely Mostyn alive!

Determined to obey her, to prove how I heeded her every word—I waited, literally, not stirring from the spot but once, when I knelt to kiss her tiny foot-print in the crisp snow. Then, as strictly as a devotee, I took out my watch to count the minutes. What a fund of exquisite happiness was centred in my being; my veins were dancing; my temples throbbing with it. I dreamed of seeing

Cicely speedily in the ball-room; of beholding the conscious blush dye her cheek when our eyes met, and she recalled the stolen kiss.

The imaginary meeting made me forget our present separation. My eyes were still fixed on the watch, its hands having moved over ten minutes unnoticed—for the sweet face floated between me and it—when the stillness of the Christmas night was broken by a fearful shriek.

Oh, heavens! I recognized it as Cicely's. In an instant, I was dashing in the direction. It did not come from the path we had traversed, but deeper among the trees. She had, no doubt, in her flight, taken the wrong way.

"Cicely! Cicely!" I shouted, as I ran; but no answer came. I searched the paths, the bushes; I called again and again—not a trace, not a sound. Could I have been deceived? I had begun to imagine so, when I reached a small, open space, where, upon the white snow, which had been scattered as by restlessly-moving feet, I saw—a dark, red stain! It was blood!

My brain reeled; my heart grew sick with a dread I dared not trust myself to analyse. I sought for other marks. Heaven help me! I found them. Found to lose, to find them again, till I emerged upon the broad expanse of snow before the front of the Holme. Here they were more distinct; but I needed them no longer as a guide.

An object extended on the white ground, just within the brilliant light from the ball-room windows, at once attracted my attention. With a heart as chill as the icicles on the trees about me, I sprang forward; then, with a great cry, sank on my knees by it.

It was Cicely—Cicely Mostyn—my beloved—my darling—*dead!* She laid her face and bosom on the snow; one fair arm extended to the house, as if she had fallen in the very act of summoning aid. The dark, red stain was all about her now; and, as with passionate words, lifting her, I turned her towards me, the plaid falling away, I beheld the crimson life-stream welling forth from a ghastly wound that disfigured her soft, white neck.

Again I shrieked for help, and this time so loudly, that no music could drown my voice. But, impatient in my frenzy, starting up, with my clenched hands I dashed in the panes of the glass doors upon the startled guests.

I need not enter fully into the scene which ensued, the mirth that had so rapidly been turned to mourning. Rapidly I recounted what had transpired; aid was summoned, and the awe-struck guests, all in their bright, festive attire, grouped around, waiting it. A change had come over me. I no longer raved. I did not even speak. A dumb, stony expression of horror on my face—I stood, with folded arms, mutely gazing at the beautiful corpse at my feet. The night was about us; the dark pine-trees shut us in like a pall. Light was nowhere but in the holly-decorated ball-room, which, in yellow rays, streamed forth on the dead, on me, upon the guests, and the aghast servants huddled at one side, with the old housekeeper in the front.

They had once attempted to move the body, but, with a ferocity that alarmed them, I had bade them desist. Medical help was coming, but I knew my darling had been dead, even before I reached her.

Suddenly I looked up, not noticing how all shrunk away from my wild, haggard countenance.

"My brother," I said, hoarsely, for my lips felt glued together. "Where is Oswald?"

There was a pause, then I saw one of the servants, a groom, whispering to the other.

"Stand forth!" I exclaimed, in a tone he dared not disobey. "Tell me—where is Oswald Tregethan?"

They now guessed what I had known from the first—that my brother was the murderer!

In evident trepidation the groom complied, but hesitated to speak. Striding forward, I seized him by the throat. I had no thought of consequences. In my fury at his silence, I could have killed him.

“Speak, hound!” I cried, “or, by heaven, this night shall witness two murders instead of one!”

Terrified for his own safety he spoke; and I learned that, about a quarter of an hour previously, Oswald, with a scared, ashen face, had dashed into the stables, ordered a horse to be saddled, and at a break-neck pace, had, evidently heedless as to the direction, plunged through the darkness towards the hills.

What had taken place between him and Cicely, I never knew; but I suppose he must have met her, and avowed his passion, when, finding its fruitlessness—that I was the successful suitor—he, in the moment of jealous, disappointed passion, must have dealt her that death-blow.

My lips compressed more and more, as I listened, but on the man’s ending, I said, quietly releasing him, “Go instantly, and saddle a horse, the fleetest, for me.”

He rose to obey, and I was about to follow, when the old housekeeper, dropping on the snow, and clinging to my knees, cried, “No, no, Master Frank; there is that on your face fearful to look upon. This must not be—it must not—there has been blood enough shed this night. It was destiny, you nor he could not have prevented it. Remember, the Weird Woman of Tregethan! Wait!—wait, at least, till morning!”

I did not stay to answer. Flinging her aside, I hurried to the stables. At the housekeeper’s entreaty, some of the guests sought to stay me; but the expression of the features I turned upon them, startled them back.

Aiding in the saddling of the horse, I led him out. Taking a stable lantern, I tracked the feet of Oswald’s horse to the road. As the groom had stated, he had gone towards the hills. Throwing down the lantern, I leaped into my saddle, and plunging my spurs deep in the animal’s side, pursued. It was a blind—a fearful ride; but I never hesitated. I blessed the moon for rising. I cursed the dark, floating clouds she brought with her. I cursed the snow, which hindered my hearing Oswald in advance.

An hour, and I was still riding on, now among the hills. I never thought whether I might be wrong—I *knew* I was right! Strange, too, but the country I was traversing—even the occurrence seemed as one acted long, long before, in that past which appears to have been another life in another world before our birth; and this was but the mechanical repetition of it? What was that? That sound amid the silence? His horse’s feet? No; it was but the dashing of water. I was approaching some cataract or fall among the hills; there were many such. It was distant yet; but I was nearing it. Was I ever to overtake him?

Yes.

Even as I mentally put the question, the clouds abruptly drifted from the moon, and fifty paces before me, on the same road, was Oswald.

Uttering a cry of joy which was fiendish in its rapture, I urged my horse to greater speed. My brother heard me—looked once behind—then also increased his pace; but I shudder now at the satisfaction I then experienced when I noticed his horse flagged, and, indeed, was already dead beat. I *must* reach him—nothing could prevent me!

The road, too, was a steep incline; its course being over a hill; consequently I gained rapidly on Oswald. The dash of waters sounded to me now very close, but I did not heed them. “Where he goes,” I thought, “I can follow!” Though each second I shortened the distance between us, yet he was far enough in advance to reach before me the crest of the hill, over which he disappeared.

This drove me to frenzy. When I could not see him, dreaded his escaping. And I also rapidly reached the top. Oswald was not twenty yards off. I shouted with triumphant exultation, and spurred on.

The way, bordered by stunted bushes, was now level, and within forty paces ended in a rustic bridge, spanning the waterfall I had heard, and which I now remembered dashed down from a great height between two hills, its bed being composed of rugged boulders and huge masses of rock.

A new fear seized me. I was aware how fragile were these country bridges, and I thought if Oswald were to reach the other side and swing it from its hold, further pursuit would be impossible.

Encouraging my horse by whip, word, and hand, I resolved to prevent his doing this. A moment longer, and I was close upon him—so close that he must have heard my breathing, as I heard his. He looked quickly back. Heaven, forgive me! but if I live a hundred years, I shall never forget that white, ghastly, affrighted face. At the instant, I felt no pity.

“Murderer!” I cried—“assassin!”

Then the old, old love rushed upon me—the love of our boyhood and youth, when we had been all in all to each other; and wildly I shouted, “Oswald! brother! Come back!”

Why was this sudden revulsion of feeling? I will explain. As I had uttered the accusatory words, Oswald, with a cry had, by a rapid pressure of his knees, caused his jaded beast to spring forward beyond my reach on to the bridge. The frail, rude construction trembled under the sudden shock; but there might have been no danger, had not the over-ridden brute, stumbling, fallen with all its weight against the sapling which served for a handrail. I saw it bend—snap—and horse and rider hung helpless above the abyss!

There was a fearful moment, that seemed like whole years of compressed agony, when Oswald, perceiving his danger, struggled manfully against it; but even as I bounded forward to lend my aid, the bridge fell, and I beheld my brother’s form, blended in a confused mass with the horse, plunge down into the tumbling waters. He flung wide his arms, but yet uttered no sound. The shriek that echoed among the hills was from my lips. *My* shriek mingled with *another’s*. Yes; in the air above came that sad, moaning, yet exultant, cry I had heard on the first night of my arrival at The Grange. My blood chilled to stagnation. I looked up as I reared my horse on its haunches, to save myself from Oswald’s fate; and there, floating over us and the waters, was the Weird Woman with the Dead Eyes.

Her frightfully dilated pupils were fixed on me. The bony arm and hand were stretched down towards where my brother had disappeared. Then I knew where I had seen all this before. It had been the subject of my dream. I remembered no more. Two hours after, I was found in a fainting fit, which ended in brain fever, by my horse’s side, and in dangerous proximity to the edge of the water-fall; only by a miracle I had escaped death. My poor brother’s body, and his horse’s, were found lifeless among the rocks.

* * *

Perhaps I ought to end my story here, but I have a few words to add. It is respecting Uncle Jaffery’s will. When it was opened, his desire to keep his heirs in suspense to the very last moment was fully shown, for tediously he commenced by bequests to his servants, tenantry, horses, and dogs; then, finally, he mentioned his nephews. He left nearly all his fortune and the Grange to the one who should wed his niece, Cicely Mostyn.

“I hear,” he wrote, “that she is beautiful—the greatest curse a man can have in a wife who will marry him for money.”

To the other he bequeathed an income of only three hundred a year.

“I have stipulated,” he continued, “that the two brothers live for a month under the same roof as their pretty cousin—and if that does not revive Tregethan’s Curse, I know not what will”

His intent had been awfully carried out.

Of course, owing to circumstances, I became sole inheritor. I immediately sold out, and did yet more I sold Holme Grange, with a devout prayer that the Weird Woman—unlike the ghost of Mr. Tennyson’s poem—had remained with the fixtures.