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Mystery of Trevarrock

By Mrs. OLIPHANT.
CHAPTER IV.
THE WITCH OF TREVARROCK BAY.



The old woman presented a strange, weird appearance.

Harold Carrington had to own, when he entered old Dinah's tumble down hut, that Madge's fears of her were somewhat justifiable.

Its one room was browned and blackened by the smoke of ages, which found its way through a hole in the roof above the open hearth, where a few bits of wood and coal, there were no chairs or other furniture, but one or two battered, blue painted seamen's chests stood against the crumbling walls and did duty as seats, while another in the middle served as a table.

If they could have spoken they would have told strange things. Old Dinah Retalack knew of times when many a brave ship had been lured to its destruction by the false tale fires flickering among the jagged rocks; the booty had been rich, and the dead men, with their pale eyes staring heavenwards, told no tales. Legend said that she herself had glided in setting light to the blazing beacons, and had been amongst the most eager for plunder. Until one awful night, when the wreckers decoyed a large brig to its doom; and in the darkness of the storm which lashed and whipped the coast a small fishing boat had also mistaken the warning and had driven straight on to the Devil's Teeth, as the rugged, saw like line of rocks north of the bay were called.

And when the morning dawned there lay upon the yellow sand, half buried with drift and tangled brown bladder weed, two corpses locked in each other's arms. One was old and gray; the face of the other was marble white, and damp golden rings clung to the cold brow. As Dinah Retalack, wandering along the shore, came up to them, she stopped to see, as was usual, if there was anything worth stripping from the bodies before they were hurled back, half naked, into the maw of the sea again to be battered and bruised past recognition on the cruel, jagged rocks.

One, the younger, had a pair of gold rings in his ears. At the bottom of a chest in Dinah's cottage she had a number of these, threaded on a bit of tarred sail twine. Here would be another pair to add. Old Isaac Levi, a certain working goldsmith in a back street in Penzance, bought such things by weight, and asked no awkward questions. She had a "nice few bits and scraps" to take to him next time she went into town, she reflected, complacently.

Those two rings, with white stones shining like glass, that Job brought in after the last great storm, when the merchantman was lost. Eh, poor thing! She, how white and dully a sight she was lying there, her black hair all drying in the sun—like the weeds—and he—well, he was a rare, fine man. The gold watch was not so much beaten about by the rocks, only the salt water had got into the works. But she would not sell that. Isaac should see what could be done. It was to be her present to Benjamin, the son of his father's old age, their only child. How surprised and pleased he would be, for he knew nothing about it, and should not know whence it came. Benjamin was strange in some ways, though a good lad. He did not like the wrecking, and called it blood money when any one took away and sold what belonged to—to them as had no use for the like. But the captain's gold watch he could not stand against that, for he sorely wanted one, Dinah knew. Well, it was no good wasting time. She knelt down by the bodies of the drowned men and turned the face of the younger, which lay against the wet, brown weed, to the light. Then happened that which was not forgotten in Trevarrock for many a long year, and every one who saw it was destined to remember it till the grave closed over them.

A terrible, an awful cry—a shriek so wild and fierce that those who heard it shuddered—went up from the kneeling woman. It echoed round the crags and far along the bay, bringing hurried footsteps to the spot. Dinah Retalack lay senseless on the sand—beside the dead forms of her husband and son.

And since that day she had dwelt apart; an outcast, the brand of Cain upon her, shunned by her fellows for her morose, strange ways, and bitter, stranger words. How she lived, none knew; that she was somehow leagued with the powers of darkness, all believed. Wrecking had died out along the coast, though to this day the laws of flotsam and jetsam are loosely enough interpreted on the wild Cornish shores.

But Dinah Retalack still remained, and old Dinah Retalack still remained, the old woman of the old, old, old, of the terrible old times. Her brown face

was a mass of net like wrinkles, and two fierce black eyes blazed from under slanting, white brows. Once she had been tall, but now she was bent almost double, and always walked with a crutch handled with stick. From Madge's childhood she had had a secret terror of Dinah.

Strange tales were abroad respecting her. Did not Jenny Polwhele, the staid, fish of a fever after he had refused to give her a lift on the road to Penzance? Had not she cast the evil eye on Farmer Westman's cattle last year, after his cow had thrown a stone at her? And when Thomas Beale, the Baptist minister, more daring than the mild curate of St. Oystin's, had bearded her in her den, she had torn the good books he had offered her into shreds before his face and had driven him from her door with curses. So people said.

Perhaps Madge Trevilian carried things to an extreme; but it was certain that no one in Trevarrock liked old Dinah, and many feared her. Even Mrs. Trevilian, with all her plain, good sense, was not free from the prevailing feeling. That Dinah was a witch was of course nonsense; but that she had been a very wicked woman was certain.

With trepidation Madge had awaited the result of Harold's knock, and when old Dinah, after a long delay, slowly opened the door, she shrank back affrighted.

The old woman presented a strange, weird appearance. A soiled red and yellow bandana kerchief was tied over her floating, white elf locks, and she wore a fisherman's coarse blue jersey above her short linsy petticoat. A black cat sat on her shoulder and glared with fierce, round green eyes at Madge and Harold, then with a spring leaped down and disappeared into the darkness of the cottage.

Dinah moved her toothless jaws from side to side, as if to speak, then a cackling, uncanny laugh made Madge shrink still further back.

"You'm no call to be afeared, pretty chicken. Come in, come in. Neither old Dinah Retalack nor her cat, Pixy, would harm Passon Trevilian's daughter. I knowed the time when he was a good friend to the likes o' me. Passon would give his coat off his back to a poor man—though his wife's nobbut a proud madam. Poor and proud, nothing but trouble ever came o' that. Ay, she's had her troubles; but you don't know on, I reckon."

The old woman had seated herself on the chest nearest the fire, and was rocking to and fro, mumbling to herself, apparently forgetting the presence of her visitors.

"What can she mean? Oh, don't let us stay here. She frightens me with her strange words," Madge whispered, shivering. Harold pressed her hand closer to his side, but did not move.

"Why, come, Mrs. Retalack, that is not a very cheerful greeting to travelers who want to ask a favor and are willing to pay well for it, too."

He pulled a handful of loose silver out of his pocket and jingled it temptingly. The old woman's black eyes shot a covetous glance towards it, but she still crouched over the fire and did not speak.

"May we put up our pony and trap in your shed for a few hours? You shall have this," holding up half a crown, "if you will consent."

"Ay, ye may use the shed. But gi me the money now, chiel; it's long since I had so much in my hand, and the feel o' it will warm me like. And who be you? I'm thinking a fine, well spoken gentleman. But there's trouble i' the air, ay, trouble."

She shook her head and looked gloomily into the fire. The cat crept from its corner and began to rub itself against her chair.

Harold drew nearer and seated himself opposite to the old woman. Madge remained standing in the doorway.

"Trouble! For whom? Do you mean for me, mother?" he said half earnestly, half jestingly. He had used the last word only in the general sense in which it is applied to the aged, but it had a strange effect on the witch of Trevarrock. Her dull eyes flashed and her lips quivered.

"Mother! No tongue ever called me that but one. Ah! had he lived he might now have been like you. He was only 19, but a proper man. Well, he's gone! I'm alone—alone. I killed him! He do be hear that? But I've been judged; ay, that have I! Again she rocked herself, in unutterable woe and despair, over the dying embers.

"Come, cheer up, Mrs. Retalack," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder. "You are too much alone and give way to gloomy fancies. I shall come and see you again some day and bring a few things to make you a little more comfortable, if I may," he added, looking with pity round the bare, dilapidated hut.

"Ay, ye can come if ye've a mind and ben't afeared o' the Witch o' Trevarrock," she answered, a sardonic smile fitting over her gloomy brow. "They call me that. Well, whether I be or beint, never mind. I know a few things, and I'm sorry to say it, for ye've spoken kind words to me this day. There's trouble in store for you, sir; ay, and for her."

The last words were spoken in a whisper, as the ancient crone jerked her head in the direction of the door. Madge was standing outside, and did not know what they were saying.

"Well, I'm sorry to hear it," said Harold, still cheerfully. "But, for that matter, life is full of sorrow. Since, however, you have told me so much, can you not help me out of the special trouble you mean, eh, mother?"

He intended but to soothe and humor this poor, half crazy creature, but the next moment he drew back with a feeling that was almost awe.

The shrunken form became erect, her black eyes shone with almost supernatural luster as Dinah Retalack spoke these strange words:

"The mouse may gnaw the net for the lion; the weak help the strong. Who knows the secrets of the air and the winds? Those who live alone hear and see curious things; and more, I was the seventh daughter of the seventh, as all Trevarrock knows. But some things they do not know. Yes, if you are in trouble come to Dinah Retalack; she may have ways and means, undreamed of, to avert the storm. Go now, but remember the Witch of Trevarrock."

Dinah's tone was almost like that of some ancient sibyl, her gesture grand and commanding, as she motioned Harold to the door, showing that the interview was at an end.

Silent, impressed more than he cared to own to himself, he joined Madge, who seemed heartily glad to see him emerge from the cottage. Despite all his efforts

to be gay, an odd, uncomfortable feeling remained with him.

Mrs. Trevilian looked rather grave when Harold told her what had passed, which he did in a manner exonerating Madge from all responsibility or blame.

"Dinah Retalack is a wicked woman. You do not know her past history—it seems hard, but I can never forget it!" Mrs. Trevilian related the story briefly. Harold gazed out seaward, a strange expression on his face.

"She sinned, but she has suffered; is not that an atonement?" he said in a low, earnest tone of deep feeling.

Mrs. Trevilian and Madge were busy arranging a picnic tea under the shadow of the rocks. Only Olive heard the quietly uttered words, though she appeared to be deep in her book. A flash came into her dark eyes, unseen under her thick, black lashes. Another link in the chain! What could such words mean? They had escaped him unawares and bore additional proof that her suspicions were well grounded. Had he then sinned? And, if so, in what way? True, he might have a secret, but it did not follow that it was a disgraceful one.

Yet Olive's growing hatred and jealousy were so great that this idea brought almost disappointment with it. To unmask Harold before her aunt and Madge, to dash from the lips of the latter the cup of happiness, was now the only thing she longed for.

"Olive, how lazy you are! Here, mother, this is a comfortable place for you. Mr. Carrington, I shall put you opposite the chicken pasty—you must carve it. I made it, so I shall be awfully offended if you do not eat a large piece."

Madge had regained her good spirits, and was busy and happy as a child as she waited on every one, her merry tongue going all the time.

"Eat some? Rather! I'm as hungry as a hunter—besides, my life is insured," he whispered slyly. "No, no! Miss Madge, I'm only joking," as she made a raid on the pie, in pretended punishment for his insolence. "It looks sumptuous, delicious—the very prince of pasties!" As he spoke he placed a liberal portion on his plate, having first helped the ladies.

"Now, you know, to carry out all traditions of well regulated picnics, some one ought to have forgotten the salt. By-the-by, where is it? If I dare ask, remembering Vatel," with a feigned glance of timidity at Madge.

"Vatel! Whoever was he?" the girl asked, laughing.

"Why—at least, I am not sure if it was Vatel, or some other famous cook, who committed suicide because his master put salt in his soup, thereby intimating that his flavoring was not perfection. I do not want to see Miss Madge rush away from us suddenly and jump off the cliff, you know."

Long, long would the memory of that happy day, its golden sunshine and pleasant fooling, be engraven on their memories.

Olive wavered for a moment in her judgment. Could this man, who laughed and joked so gaily, with evidently no thought of anything but the present moment, really have a dark and guilty secret hidden in his breast?

"But all the same, where is the salt? I should like some, too," said practical Mrs. Trevilian.

The next minute, after searching the provision hamper, they all looked blankly at one another. Harold burst out laughing, and the others followed his example.

"Perhaps it is in the other hamper," suggested Madge. "Mamma packed that; so if it is not, she is the culprit." She drew the basket towards her.

"Indeed, I did no such thing! I was just wondering what was in it," said Mrs. Trevilian.

Harold cut the strings, and unwrapping layers of silver paper, drew out two enormous bunches of purple grapes, black and heavy with ripeness, and a basket of velvet skinned, rosy peaches. A box of French bon bons, chocolate dragées and creams, and a quaintly shaped, rush covered flask of rare foreign liquor, completed the contents of the hamper.

"Only a little dessert I ventured to bring as my contribution to our al fresco spread. Oh, please do not thank me; it is I who owe you all the gratitude for letting me come with you," said Harold, with his usual courtliness, selecting the best peach for Mrs. Trevilian as he spoke.

"Those things never came from Penzance," Olive said quietly, with a penetrating glance at Harold. "He must have paid three or four guineas at least for that hamper; and yet he pretends to be poor. I don't believe it," she reflected. "The secret then has nothing to do with money. That is so much information gained."

"Of course not," Harold answered the spoken part of her thoughts, by placing some grapes on her plate. "Would anything so prosaic be worthy of the day and occasion? No—I did not get the basket with its contents from Penzance; but invoked the aid of a friendly spirit who brought it from fairyland."

"In other words, you got it down from Fortnum and Mason's by parcel post," said Madge, reading the label, with a mischievous gleam in her eyes.

"What a shame to spy my bit of romance! I thought you Cornish people were firm believers in fairies and witches; or should not have ventured to trade on your credulity."

Harold and she had strayed down to the water's edge, and were out of hearing of the others.

"Mr. Carrington, tell me what did that horrid old woman say to you when I had left the cottage? Was it anything bad? I wanted to ask you when I got the chance," said Madge, earnestly, unheeding his quizzical remark.

"Nothing; at least nothing of any consequence. Don't trouble your head about her. At any rate I do not feel much frightened."

Madge looked relieved, and began with light heart to collect purple and red sea weeds and tinted shells from the wet sands, in memory of this day, the happiest of her life.

"The tide is coming in. It is time we thought of returning home," said Harold, as the green waves rushed up to their feet, leaving a wreath of foam behind them in receding. But while they could they lingered. In a short time the party reluctantly left the bay, Harold having fetched the pony cart from Dinah Retalack's cottage.

The door of the shed stood open and the pony was harnessed, evidently having been fed. But Dinah herself was nowhere to be seen, and though Harold knocked many times at the door of the hut, wishing to thank her for her care of the horse, she did not appear.

And so they took their homeward way over the craggy moorland hills, the air

blowing soft and cool and the stars beginning to glimmer silvery white against the saffron tinted sky.

All seemed peace, and yet a storm cloud was gathering darkly in the far distance.

CHAPTER V.
THE PLOT THICKENS.

When Harold Carrington went to his room the night following the excursion to Trevarrock bay he suddenly remembered that Judith Penale had given him two letters, which he had thrust into his pocket in his haste to follow the pony cart, and which were still lying there unopened.

He had not hastened to open them, for he had recognized the handwriting on one envelope only too well, and the other in its filmy blue envelope appeared only a bill or a circular, the postmark being Penzance, from whence he sometimes had things sent out to Trevarrock.

With a slight frown of weariness he tore open the first, a cream colored envelope which he held in his hand, regardless of the dainty lilac and silver monogram adorning the flap.

The contents of this note were brief, and were written in a thick and dashing hand, obviously a woman's, in spite of its affected masculinity. They ran thus—

"I am getting really angry with you, and shall be glad to know when this is to end. Surely you must have received my two last letters, telling you all had blown over, and that you need not fear to return? It is not fair to leave me alone to bear the brunt of everything, and I feel I cannot carry inquiries much longer. What can you, of all men in the world, find in such an out-of-the-way corner of the earth to keep you away from London now, of all times in the year? Anyway, I ask you to come back. The next I am playing now is, as you know, foreign to my whole nature; but with you to support me, things were bearable at least. Again I say, Harold return, or I will not answer for the consequences. BEATRICE."

He read the letter twice through, with an expression of irritation on his face. The last stern mouth relaxed again and softened into a kind smile.

"Poor Beatrice! A good creature, but I wish she would not be so tragic; it is hardly necessary in private life. Still, she is right; I ought to be getting back, and it is—as she says—hard on her. Next week, then, I must pack up my traps."

He sighed as the vision of Madge's gentle, childlike face rose before him; and he thought how the bright tears would gem her lashes at the news.

He still held the letter he had just read between his fingers. Then starting from his reverie he tore it across, and crumpling it into a ball threw it into the empty grate.

He had almost forgotten the blue missive, which lay on the table at his elbow, but as he rose his eyes fell on it. He opened it carelessly and without interest.

The contents of the envelope were a half sheet of soiled paper, with a few words penciled on it, and a newspaper cutting.

But as Harold Carrington read them, his face became blanched to ashen whiteness and cold drops of dew started to his brow.

"At last—at last! It has come to this! I always feared, I always thought that one day it would be so. If he had only trusted me; he knew I could not be hard on him—and yet, even while I am talking, I am losing time. Something must be done, but what? Ah! merciful Heaven, what?"

Utterly stunned and crushed, he stood looking in a dazed way at the piece of paper in his hand. He had been in daily dread of receiving the tidings it conveyed, had known that at any hour they might come upon him thus. The thought had been the hunting nightmare of his life, and in his proudest, happiest moments had often come to torment him. Yet the blow was none the less hard to bear.

Taking out his watch he saw that it was about a quarter to 11. The inhabitants of the cottage breakfasted at 8; he had, then, nine good hours before him in which to think and act.

Fortunately for him his bedroom was on the first floor. To open the front door would be too great a risk; the lock was old and clumsy and creaked with a jarring sound when the key turned. But his window was within easy reach of the ground, and could be opened and closed without any noise.

He began to take off his white linen suit, then paused irresolutely, ending by drawing on his coat again. He took from a hanging press a long, dark ulster and wrapped himself within its heavy folds. It covered him almost completely.

"Yes, that will serve my purpose best," he muttered. Then, his eye falling on a small box at the top of the press, he exclaimed under his breath, "The very thing! What a fool I was not to think of that before! It seems almost providential, and yet how enraged I was when I found that ass, Jean, had sent them by mistake! I little dreamed for what purpose I should one day use them."

He stood motionless an instant, a look of excessive pain on his face, and then, rousing himself, unlocked the box and took from it a wig and beard, most exquisitely made of the finest soft white hair; also some small pots of pigments—rouge and grease paints.

With unusual skill and dexterity he altered his face, and put on the false hair and beard, which fitted him admirably. No one would have recognized him, so extraordinary was the change in his appearance.

He murmured a few words, imitating the toothless mumbling of a very old man, and stooping slightly, looked at himself in the glass. The whole thing was perfect, and a shabby felt hat, having the brim well bent down, completed the disguise.

Harold took up the letter and put it in his breast pocket, then, opening the window, he swung himself lightly out, closing it softly behind him.

The little garden was flooded with vivid moonlight. He crossed it stealthily, keeping well in the shadow of the trees, and managed to reach the gate, which opened with a click that made him start nervously, but the cottage remained wrapped in darkness and slumber. Not till he was well on the road to Penzance did he stop suddenly, with a stifled exclamation of anger.

In his agitation he had forgotten one thing—to lock his door from the inside, which would have been a prudent measure for many reasons. But it was too late now to go back.

Olive St. Maur had gone to bed on her return from Trevarrock bay, pleading a headache.

To bed, but not to sleep. She tossed about on her snow white pillow, her mind full of suspicious and restless fancies, and found the night oppressively hot, in spite of the open window, through which the night fragrance of the jasmine

stole subtly.

Her ears, preternaturally sharpened, caught every echo without—the distant roar of the sea against the low, red cliffs, the sleepy chirp of a bird in its nest, the tinkle of a sheep bell in a far meadow. Then, suddenly, an unwonted sound made her start up with a thrill of something very like terror, though her nerves were of iron.

A step, slow and stealthy, in the garden on the gravel; the noise of the gate latch being softly raised.

She jumped out of bed and ran to the window, raising the blind cautiously and peeping out at the side. What she expected to see she could hardly have told, but what she did see almost stunned her with surprise and bewilderment.

A tall figure, apparently muffled in a long, black cloak, had just stolen out of the gate, and by the outline sharply defined against the moonlight Olive knew it to be Harold Carrington.

The light was too uncertain to see the wig and beard; could she have done so, she would have been still more mystified. Her brain whirled as she strained her sight to watch his movements. What could be his motive for thus leaving the house stealthily in the dead of night?

With bare feet she stole quietly downstairs and listened at the door of Harold's room. All was silent. Had he been in it and asleep she could have heard his breathing, for the head of his bed was close to where she stood.

With a heart beating to suffocation she opened the door gently and looked in. A flood of white moon rays lit up the room and shone on the bed. One glance told her it had not been slept in. The chamber was empty.

A candle and match box stood on the table. She struck a light and made a sharp inspection. There was nothing to repay her curiosity, for Harold had locked up and put away the rouge and other things after using them.

"I must make haste up stairs again, for if I were to be caught it would be too dreadful," Olive muttered, moving away, her dusky cheek crimsoning.

As she turned to go her eye fell on a crumpled ball of paper in the fender, and she picked it up quickly, attracted by the writing she saw on it.

"Part of a letter—and in a woman's hand!" she said to herself, and she deliberately unfolded it, but, looking round with a shiver, decided to return to her own room before reading it. There she straightened the bits of paper and soon mastered their contents.

"All has blown over." What could be the secret of such strange words? And "Beatrice" who was she—a sister? No. Olive was certain of that, though she knew nothing of Harold's family history. A sweetheart? Hardly; there was something in the tone of the letter inconsistent with that theory. Only a man's wife would write to him in such a vein—familiar, half affectionate, yet censorious. The red blood rushed to her brow.

"How he has lied to us! But he shall be punished. I hold one strand of the clew in my hands now; it shall be hard if I do not track the thread to its end."

Noting the address stamped on the paper, a fashionable street in Kensington, she carefully looked up the letter in her desk. Then putting on her dressing gown, she seated herself at the window and watched for Harold's return with the patience of a tigress crouching for a spring.

Hours passed. The morning dawned gray and cold, and the fresh chilly breeze made her shiver, but she did not relax her vigilance.

At last it was rewarded. Harold Carrington—pale, haggard, with the dragging steps of a man much fatigued—came slowly in sight, and treading softly over the dewy grass, got in at his bedroom window, and closed it after him.

But at every step the mystery seemed to deepen. When he went out he had been enveloped in a thick dark ulster; now he wore only the white linen suit he had gone out in on the previous day, and (though Olive did not know this) wig and beard were gone, and all traces of his disguise removed from his face.

He little thought, as he flung himself, half stupefied with weariness and sorrow, on his bed of the wakeful eyes that had spied upon his secret movements.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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THE CRY OF MILLIONS, OH, MY BACK!

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I have been troubled many years with disease of the kidneys and have tried many different remedies and have sought aid from different physicians without relief. About the 15th of April I was suffering from a very violent attack that almost prostrated me in such a manner that I was bent over. When I sat down it was almost impossible for me to get up alone, or to put on my clothes, unless kind Providence sent Dr. Henley, with the OREGON KIDNEY TEA, to my hotel. I immediately commenced using the tea. It had an almost miraculous effect, and to the astonishment of all the guests at the hotel, in a few days I am happy to state, that I was a new man. I would recommend the tea to all afflicted as I have been.

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