

tention of taking advantage of the spring-like warmth of the weather to fix up Morris' grave.

Already the brown of the mountain side was showing through the snow in many places, and the little stream was tinkling a swelling protest against the icy barriers that so reluctantly let go their hold upon it.

It was almost evening when I returned from town; a light drizzle pervaded the atmosphere, and the mist of clouds hung low above my mountain nest, so that the lesser features of the scene did not stand out with distinctness; but as I passed around the cabin, before entering, to take a peep at my lonely Damocles, I glanced up at the bank of the stream to where, only a few yards away, was Morris' grave.

"Ah," I thought, "Mason has indeed worked well in my absence."

A loosely-built wall of stone, about two feet high, surrounded the grave, and the freshly-hewn surface of a rustic cross gleamed white in the twilight. I went a little closer, and bent down to decipher the inscription, painted in lampblack, on the cross.

At a first glance I started violently, then shaded my eyes with the belief that those hitherto faithful orbs had deceived me. But no—there it was, in plain black and white—

ROY MASON,

Died November 27, 1859.

Great heavens! Was I dreaming, or had Roy Mason descended to the sacrilegious coarseness of perpetrating a jest above the last resting place of a comrade!

In a whirl of disgust and bewilderment I turned and strode into the house. Mason was sitting by the table, quietly writing. He lifted his head and smiled as I entered.

"Ah! you are a little earlier than I expected, or I would have had a fire started, and the kettle boiling," he said.

Without noticing his remark, I walked straight to him and demanded—

"Mason, what does it mean—that inscription out there above poor Morris?"

"Oh, you've been to the grave already?" he answered, as if surprised, but without lifting his eyes from his manuscript; and I noticed a peculiar set expression about his lips that I had seen on two former memorable occasions. But my finer sensibilities had been shocked, and I could not pause without some explanation of the strange inscription.

"I have been to the grave, and I repeat—what does it mean? Surely, Mason, you can not have been capable of—" I paused, because he had suddenly lifted his eyes to my face, and there was some-

thing in their depths that checked my very thoughts.

"Of what, Blake? What is it of which you think I can not be capable?"

There was a tremor in his voice, and a look in his eyes which went to my heart; but I answered—

"Forgive me, Mason, but if it be a ghastly jest, it is unworthy of you."

He arose from his seat, and laying a hand gently upon my arm, said, slowly—

"It is no jest—it is a bit of necessary scene-shifting in one of life's tragedies."

I was silent, feeling that the time had come when Roy Mason was going to reveal to me something of his past life. That the story would be one worth listening to, I did not doubt; the inner history of such a man, I thought, could not be otherwise. In a moment he spoke again.

"Sit down, Blake, and rest, while I make a cup of tea. After that, with your permission, I will have something to say to you."

Half an hour later, when the lengthening spring twilight had settled into night, and the pine knots were blazing on the hearth, I sat within the circle of their varying light and listened to what Roy Mason had to tell me.

"Blake, I know you like me," he began, abruptly. "In the first moment of our acquaintance, when you turned impulsively and grasped my hand, my trust went out to you, and I felt that in you I should have a life-long friend. I know that, week by week, ever since that first meeting, your liking for me has grown and strengthened, until now your heart aches, as does my own, at the prospect of parting. Knowing your feelings thus, and judging of their strength by my own, is it strange that I venture, in this last hour, to ask at your hands a favor of very peculiar nature, and one I could ask of no one else in all the world?"

In silence, I held my hand to him, and in silence he clasped it. No words were needed. When he spoke again, the words came slowly, as if each was being well weighed before finding utterance.

"Blake, I am going to ask you to leave that cross standing out there, with its inscription, and never reveal to living mortal that the name does not belong to the poor body lying beneath it."

At these strange words I turned, with a nervous start, and scanned the speaker's face. He smiled, the saddest smile imaginable, and said—

"No, Blake, I am not demented, though I do not blame you for the thought. I know that, from your standpoint, my request must seem an outrageous one; but you will not refuse me, will you?"

I arose, turned my back to the fire, and stood facing him, the better to read the meaning in his eyes. It almost seemed to me I could not have heard aright.