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GUY HILLIARD'S SKELETON.

From People's Home Journal.

CHAPTER II.

BY EMMA GARRISON JONES.

They had a cozy little cottage on the outskirts of the town, all embowered in eglantine, with great shade trees, and a flower-garden in front; and the young schoolmaster must have regarded it as the sweetest, happiest spot on earth, judging from the briskness of his step and the brightness of his face, as he returned of evenings from his school house. Violet was always at the gate to meet him, robed in some pretty, fresh apparel, her curls looped back with roses and her blue eyes full of tenderness, ready to lead him to the tidy, well ordered parlor and waiting supper table. No wonder Guy was happy—he would have been a monster if he had not been so. But after a while as if fortune was bent upon running his cup over, something else came to make him still happier. A small, dimpled, crowing babe, with eyes like its mother, and rings of hair that looked like spun gold. Violet was in raptures, and Guy could scarcely wait for night to come in his eagerness to get home. What a happy couple, every one said, even the wisecracks, in spite of their prophecies but there never was a paradise, perhaps, that the serpent did not enter in some form or other. It even came to this perfect home, trailing its slimy ugliness amid the blooming flowers. It was after this wise: One evening, Guy chanced to come home a trifle earlier than usual, and Violet and baby were not at the gate to meet him, as was their custom—but he hurried on, eager to surprise them by being so early. Just as he reached the outer enclosure of the garden, he heard the cottage door open, and saw a man, a real, living man, young and very distinguished-looking, come out and pause on the porch for a moment to talk with Violet—his Violet. He saw her plainly laughing and chatting, and tossing her ringlets; and then the stranger bowed himself out, and left the premises by a side path.

"Don't fail to come," called Violet, after him; "I shall expect you." Guy Hilliard looked on in amazement. Violet was dressed, as he had never seen her before, in a magnificent blue silk robe, all covered with laces and roses. What did it mean? Who was that man that she urged to come again so cordially? A sharp, swift pang of jealousy and mistrust wrung his heart—mistrust of the woman he held a thousand times dearer than his own life; and he hurried on to the cottage, his brow, for the first time since his marriage, looking lowering and moody. Violet was nowhere to be seen below—so he went up to her chamber. The door was closed, but he heard the babe wailing within.

"Violet, Violet," he called.

"Yes, dear," came the pleasant answer, "in one moment; as soon as I get my frock on."

He waited impatiently until she came out, and then he scanned her face with keen, anxious eyes. She looked flurried and confused, and ran back almost immediately to put the blue robe, which she had thrown on the bed, into the wardrobe. Guy followed her into the chamber.

"Have you been out, Violet?" he asked, making a great effort to appear unconcerned.

"Out? Oh, no!" she replied.

"Why do you ask?"

"Nothing, only I saw you putting away your dress; and you've got baby out in all of her finery."

Violet blushed and averted her face.

"Oh, yes!" she said, catching up the little mass of embroidery, "I've been fixing the sleeves of her slip, you know, but come, let's go down and look after supper."

He followed her down with a weary step and a heavier heart than had ever lain in his bosom before. But he determined to say nothing; he would not question her, but wait and see for himself what it all meant. Violet bustled about, making herself unusually pleasant; but somehow a gloom hung over the whilom happy home, which all her gaiety could not dispel. Long after she retired with her babe, her young husband sat on the porch, with his head bowed in his hands and his soul tortured by a nameless fear.

The next afternoon he returned home at the usual hour, and found Violet and the babe awaiting him at the gate, her face all brightness and tenderness. His heart began to lighten—she was true to him. What a fool he had been; he was glad he had not let her know it. Laughing and playing with baby, they proceeded to the cottage; and Guy went running up stairs for his dressing-gown with his old, buoyant alacrity. On the topmost step he picked up a glove—a gentle man's glove—but not his. A trifle truly; but it awakened the old jealous pang with redoubled pain. Still, he did not question his wife, but kept up a silent, cunning watch on all her movements. The next evening, and the next, he came early; and in both instances, concealing himself in the shrubbery, he saw the tall, fine looking stranger leaving his house, and Violet flitting about in the azure robe she had never worn for him. Suspense became torture; he could bear it no longer, he must know the worst. Had the wisecracks of Readsville prophesied the truth after all? He approached his wife, at twilight, as she sat in a low chair, hushing her baby to sleep.

"Violet," he said, gently, but very seriously, "I'm afraid we are getting to have a skeleton in our closet."

She looked up inquiringly.

"A skeleton, dear—how so?"

"Haven't you secrets from your husband, Violet?" he asked, solemnly.

She blushed deeply and dropped her eyes; and her voice was faint and irresolute, as she replied, "Oh, no, Guy! What makes you think I have?"

"Because," he answered, gravely, "I have seen a young man—a stranger—leaving my house every evening during the past week; and yet you have not even alluded to such a visitor to me. What does it mean, Violet?"

She averted her face; it wore a troubled, anxious look, yet there was a dancing, mischievous sparkle in her blue eyes.

"Violet," he went on, seeing she did not reply, "you can't tell how this thing has troubled me. Can't you trust me, Violet—me, your husband? Explain it all, I entreat you, and end my torturing doubt."

She looked up, her eyes full of tears.

"You doubt me, Guy?" she said, mournfully.

"I don't want to doubt you, Violet—God knows I would sooner die; but it is strange, to say the least, that you should have such a visitor every evening, yet never mention it to your husband. But I believe you can make it all clear and satisfactory; do so, Violet, and let us be happy again."

Still she said nothing.

"Violet, won't you speak?"

She shook her head sadly.

"No, Guy, I have nothing to say."

He started to his feet, white with excitement.

"Nothing to say, Violet? Will you not tell me who that man is, and what he wanted?"

She shook her head slowly, repeating, "I have nothing to say."

Then he rushed from her presence, down the stairs, out into the open air, his head throbbing as if it would burst.

"Oh, God!" he moaned, sinking down on the turf, "how shall I ever endure it! My wife—my darling wife—my Violet, that I loved so much; can it be true—is she false to me?"

But no one answered him; only the little birds chirped and cooed amid the green leaves, making him envy their happiness. He remained there, wrapt in solemn thought, until the stars came out. He would not be rash; he would bear with her to the very last. Perhaps she would change her mind, and tell him the whole truth. He was ready and willing to forgive her, and love her all the same, no matter how deeply she might have erred. He arose and returned to the cottage. Violet looked a little pale and was a trifle more serious than usual—that was all. The night passed—another evening came.

He dismissed his school at noon and came home, concealing himself in the shrubbery. Hours went by and at last, instead of seeing the stranger coming, as he had expected, he saw him leaving the house. He had been there the entire afternoon, in his cottage, with his wife. His face grew white with anger and he cleared the hedge at a bound. He would overtake him—force him into an explanation. But the stranger was too quick for him: he had crossed the lawn and was out of sight in the wood beyond before Guy could overtake him.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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