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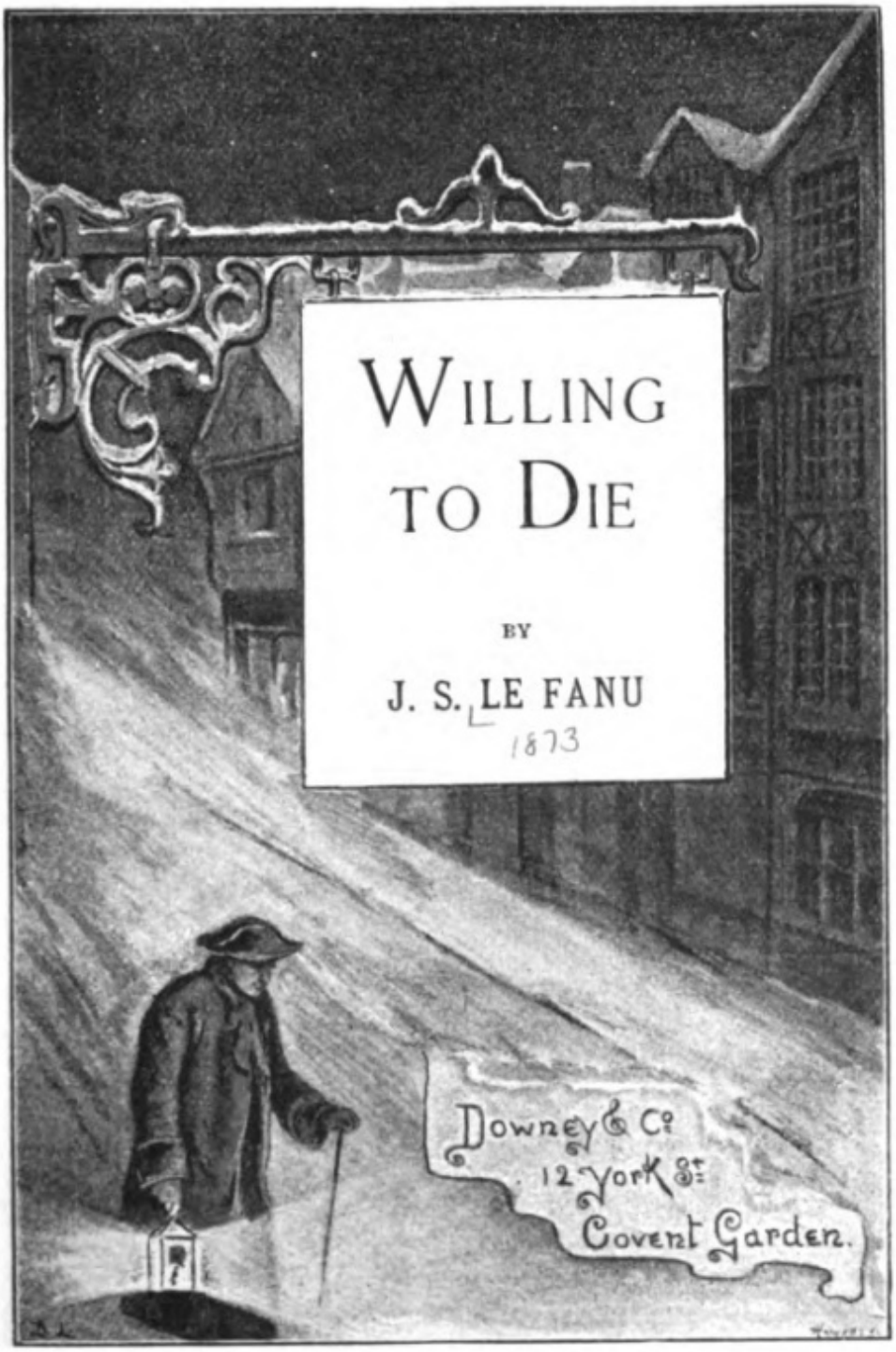

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CHAPTER I.

AN ARRIVAL.

ONE of the earliest scenes I can remember with perfect distinctness is this. My sister and I, still denizens of the nursery, had come down to take our tea with good old Rebecca Torkhill, the Malory housekeeper, in the room we called the cedar parlour. It is a long and rather sombre room, with two tall windows looking out upon the shadowy court-yard. There are on the wall some dingy portraits, whose pale faces peep out, as it were, through a background of black fog, from the canvas; and there is one, in better order than the others, of a grave man in the stately costume of James the First, which hangs over the mantel-piece. As a child I loved this room; I loved the half-decipherable pictures; it was solemn and even gloomy, but it was with the delightful gloom and solemnity of one of Rebecca Torkill's stories of castles, giants, and goblins.

It was evening now, with a stormy, red sky in the west. Rebecca and we two children were seated round the table, sipping our tea, eating hot cake, and listening to her oft-told tale, entitled the Knight of the Black Castle.

This knight, habited in black, lived in his black castle, in the centre of a dark wood, and being a giant, and an ogre, and something of a magician besides, he used to ride out at nightfall with a couple of great black bags, to stow his prey in, at his saddle-bow, for the purpose of visiting such houses as had their nurseries well-stocked with children. His tall black horse, when he dismounted, waited at the hall-door, which, however mighty its bars

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CHAPTER III.

THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

OF what happened next I have a strangely imperfect recollection. I cannot tell you the intervals, or even the order, in which some of the events occurred. It is not that the mist of time obscures it; what I do recollect is dreadfully vivid; but there are spaces of the picture gone. I see faces of angels, and faces that make my heart sink; fragments of scenes. It is like something reflected in the pieces of a smashed looking-glass.

I have told you very little of Helen, my sister, my one darling on earth. There are things which people, after an interval of half a life, have continually present to their minds, but cannot speak of. The idea of opening them to strangers is insupportable. A sense of profanation shuts the door, and we "wake" our dead alone. I could not have told you what I am going to write. I did not intend inscribing here more than the short, bleak result. But I write it as if to myself, and I will get through it.

To you it may seem that I make too much of this, which is, as Hamlet says, "common." But you have not known what it is to be for all your early life shut out from all but one beloved companion, and never after to have found another.

Helen had a cough, and Laura Grey had written to mamma, who was then in Warwickshire, about it. She was referred to the Cardyllion doctor. He came; he was

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CHAPTER V.

THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK.

OUR eyes met, I said; they remained fixed for a moment, and then mine dropped. I had been, as it were, detected, while meditating upon this capricious person. I daresay I even blushed; I certainly was embarrassed. He was repeating his salutation, "How d'ye do, Miss Ware?"

"Oh, I'm very well, thanks, Mr. Carmel," I answered, looking up; "and—and I heard from mamma on Thursday. They are very well; they are at Genoa now. They think of going to Florence in about three weeks."

"I know; yes. And you have no thoughts of joining them?"

"Oh! none. I should not like to leave this. They have not said a word about it lately."

"It is such a time, Miss Ethel, since I had the pleasure of seeing you—I don't mean, of course, at a distance, but near enough to ask you how you are. I dared not ask to see you too soon, and I thought—I fancied—you wished your walks uninterrupted."

I saw that he had observed my strategy; I was not sorry.

"I have often wished to thank you, Mr. Carmel; you were so very kind."

"I had no opportunity, Miss Ethel," he answered, with more feeling than before. "My profession obliges me to be kind—but I had no opportunity—Miss Grey is quite well?"

"She is very well, thanks."

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"What relation, Laura?"

"Borrowing books and discussing them."

"But we need not discuss them; I won't—and you are so well up in the controversy with your two books of theology, that I think he's in more danger of being converted than you. Give me the book, and I'll find out something to read to you."

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CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGER APPEARS.

NEXT day Miss Grey and I were walking on the lonely road towards Penruthyn Priory. The sea lies beneath it on the right, and on the left is an old grass-grown bank, shaggy with brambles. Round a clump of ancient trees that stand at a bend of this green rampart, about a hundred steps before us, came, on a sudden, Mr. Carmel, and a man dressed also in black, slight, but not so tall as he. They were walking at a brisk pace, and the stranger was talking incessantly to his companion.

That did not prevent his observing us, for I saw him slightly touch Mr. Carmel's arm with his elbow as he looked at us. Mr. Carmel evidently answered a question, and, as he did so, glanced at us; and immediately the stranger resumed his conversation. They were quickly up to us, and stopped. Mr. Carmel raised his hat, and asked leave to introduce his friend. We bowed, so did the stranger; but Mr. Carmel did not repeat his name very distinctly.

This friend was far from prepossessing. He was of middle height, and narrow-shouldered, what they call "putty-faced," and closely shorn, the region of the beard and whisker being defined in smooth dark blue. He looked about fifty. His movements were short and quick, and restless; he rather stooped, and his face and forehead inclined as if he were looking on the ground. But his eyes were not upon the ground; they were very fierce, but seldom rested for more than a moment on any one object.

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Laura Grey stopped short, and laid her hand on my wrist for a moment, thinking.

"Perhaps it would be as well if we were to turn about and walk a little further, so as to give him time to get quite away."

"But if he wants to take me away in that carriage, or whatever it is, he'll wait any time for my return."

"So he would; but the more I think over it, the more persuaded I am that there is nothing in it."

"In any case, I'll go back," I said. "Let us go into the house and lock the doors; and if that odious Mr. Droqville attempts to force his way in, Thomas Jones will knock him down; and we'll send Anne Owen to Cardyllion, for Williams, the policeman. I hate suspense. If there is to be anything unpleasant, it is better to have it decided, one way or other, as soon as possible."

Laura Grey smiled, and spoke merrily of our apprehensions; but I don't think she was quite so much at ease as she assumed to be.

Thus we turned about, I, at least, with a heart thumping very fast; and we walked back towards the old house of Malory, where, as you have this moment heard, we had made up our minds to stand a siege.

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CHAPTER IX.

AWAKENED.

WE do these proselytising priests great wrong when we fancy them cold-blooded practisers upon our credulity, who seek, for merely selfish ends, to entangle us by sophistries, and inveigle us into those mental and moral catacombs from which there is no escape. We underrate their danger when we deny their sincerity. Mr. Carmel sought to save my soul; nobler or purer motive, I am sure, never animated man. If he acted with caution, and even by stratagem, he believed it was in the direct service of Heaven, and for my eternal weal. I know him better, his strength and his weakness, now—his asceticism, his resolution, his tenderness. That young priest—long dead—stands before me, in the white robe of his purity, king-like. I see him, as I saw him last, his thin, handsome features, the light of patience on his face, the pale smile of suffering and of victory. His tumults and his sorrows are over. Cold and quiet he lies now. My thanks can never reach him; my unavailing blessings and gratitude follow my true and long-lost friend, and tears wrung from a yearning heart.

Laura Grey seemed to have lost her suspicions of this ecclesiastic. We had more of his society than before. Our reading went on, and sometimes he joined us in our walks. I used to see him from an upper window every morning early, busy with spade and trowel, in the tiny flower-garden which belonged to the steward's house. He used to work there for an hour punctually, from before

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At length, in spite of all, we stood on the little platform, from which the view of the rocks and sea beyond was clear. Williams, the boatman, was close to me, at my right hand, holding his low-crowned hat down on his head with his broad, hard hand. Laura was at my other side. Our dresses were slapping and rattling in the storm like the cracking of a thousand whips; and such a roaring was in my ears, although my handkerchief was tied close over them, that I could scarcely hear anything else.

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CHAPTER XIII.

MEETING IN THE GARDEN.

I WAS a little shy, as country misses are; and, curious as I was, rather relieved when I heard that the shipwrecked stranger had been ordered to keep his quarters strictly, for that day at least. So, by-and-by, as Laura Grey had a letter to write, I put on my hat, and not caring to walk towards the town, and not daring to take the Penruthyn Road, I ran out to the garden. The garden of Malory is one of those monastic enclosures whose fruit-trees have long grown into venerable timber; whose walls are stained by time, and mantled in some places with ivy; where everything has been allowed, time out of mind, to have its own way; where walks are grass-grown, and weeds choke the intervals between old standard pear, and cherry, and apple-trees, and only a little plot of ground is kept in cultivation by a dawdling, desultory man, who carries in his daily basket of vegetables to the cook. There was a really good Ribston-pippin or two in this untidy, but not unpicturesque garden; and these trees were, I need scarcely tell you, a favourite resort of ours.

The gale had nearly stripped the trees of their ruddy honours, and thrifty Thomas Jones had, no doubt, carried the spoil away to store them in the apple-closet. One pippin only dangled still within reach, and I was whacking at this particularly good-looking apple with a long stick, but as yet in vain, when I suddenly perceived that a young man, whom I recognised as the very hero of the

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"Warn her of what?" said the stranger, sternly.

"Warn her that a villain has got into this house."

The interesting guest sprang to his feet, with his fists clenched. But he did not strike. He hesitated, and then he said:

"Look here; I'll not treat you as I would a man. You wish me to strike you, you Jesuit, and to get myself into hot water. But I shan't make a fool of myself. I tell you what I'll do with you—if you dare to injure me in the opinion of any living creature, by one word of spoken or hinted slander, I'll make it a police-office affair; and I'll bring out the whole story you found it on; and we'll see which suffers most, you or I, when the world hears it. And now, Mr. Carmel, you're warned. And you know I'm a fellow that means what he says."

Mr. Carmel turned with a pale face, and left the room.

I wonder what the stranger thought. I have often pondered over that scene; and, I believe, he really thought that Mr. Carmel would not, on reflection, venture to carry out his threat.

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CHAPTER XVII.

LEMUEL BLOUNT.

NEXT morning, at about half-past ten, as Laura and I sat in our breakfast-room, a hired carriage with two horses, which had evidently been driven at a hard pace, passed our window at a walk. The driver, who was leading his beasts, asked a question of Thomas Jones, who was rolling the gravel on the court-yard before the window; and then he led them round the corner toward the steward's house. The carriage was empty; but in another minute it was followed up by the person whom we might presume to have been its occupant. He turned towards our window as he passed, so that we had a full view of this new visitor.

He was a man who looked past sixty, slow-paced, and very solemn; he was dressed in a clumsy black suit; his face was large, square, and sallow; his cheek and chin were smoothly shorn and blue. His hat was low-crowned, and broad in the brim. He had a cotton umbrella in his big gloved hand, and a coloured pocket-handkerchief sticking out of his pocket. A great bunch of seals hung from his watch-chain under his black waistcoat. He was walking so slowly that we had no difficulty in observing these details; and he stopped before the hall-door, as if doubtful whether he should enter there. A word, however, from Thomas Jones set him right, and he in turn disappeared round the corner.

We did not know what to make of this figure, whom we now conjectured to have come in quest of the shipwrecked stranger.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

IDENTIFIED.

IT was a gloomy day; I had left Laura Grey in the room we usually occupied, where she was now alone, busy over some of our accounts. I dare say her thoughts now and then wandered into speculations respecting the identity of the visitor who, the night before, evaded her recognition, if indeed he was recognisable by her at all. Her doubts were now resolved. The room door opened, and the tenant of the steward's house entered coolly, and approached the table where she was sitting. Laura Grey did not rise; she did not speak; she sat, pen in hand, staring at him as if she were on the point of fainting. The star-shaped scar on his forehead, fixed there by some old fracture, and his stern and energetic features, were now distinctly before her. He kept his eye fixed upon her, and smiled, dubious of his reception.

"I saw you, Miss Grey, yesterday afternoon, though you did not see me. I avoided your eye then; but it was idle supposing that I could continue even a few days longer in this place without you seeing me. I came last night with my mind made up to reveal myself, but I put it off till we should be to ourselves, as we are now. I saw you half guessed me, but you weren't sure, and I left you in doubt."

He approached till his hands rested upon the table opposite, and said, with a very stern and eager face

"Miss Grey, upon my honour, upon my soul, if I can give you an assurance which can bind a gentleman, I

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serious a situation has suddenly overtaken. Marston turned, as I said, the other way, and without entering the town again, approached Malory by the narrow road that passes close under the castle walls, and follows the line of the high banks overlooking the estuary.

If there be courage and mental activity, and no conscience, we have a very dangerous devil. A spoiled child, in which self is supreme, who has no softness of heart, and some cleverness and energy, easily degenerates into that sort of Satan. And yet, in a kind of way, Marston was popular. He could spend money freely—it was not his own—and when he was in spirits he was amusing.

When he stared in Jennings' face this evening, the bruise and burning of an old jealousy were in his heart. The pain of that hellish hate is often lightly inflicted; but what is more cruel than vanity? He had abandoned the pursuit in which that jealousy was born, but the hatred remained. And now he had his revenge in hand. It is a high stake, one's life on a match of pistol-shooting. But his brute courage made nothing of it. It was an effort to him to think himself in danger, and he did not make that effort. He was thinking how to turn the situation to account.

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I remained this day a little longer before my glass than usual. Half an hour later, I stood at the heavy stone doorway of Plas Ylwd. It is one of the prettiest farm-houses in the world. Round the farm-yard stand very old hawthorn and lime trees, and the farm-house is a composite building in which a wing of the old Tudor manor-house of Plas Ylwd is incorporated, under a common thatch, which has grown brown and discoloured, and sunk and risen into hillocks and hollows by time. The door is protected by a thatched porch, with worn stone pillars; and here I stood, and learned that "the gentleman upstairs" was very well that afternoon, and sitting up; the doctor thought he would be out for a walk in two or three days. Having learned this, and all the rest that it concerned Rebecca Torkill to hear, I took my leave of good Mrs. Prichard, and crossing the stile from the farm-yard, I entered the picturesque old wood in which the inmate of Plas Ylwd had received his wound. Through this sylvan solitude I intended returning to Malory.

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ment of the situation, this lawless man interested me. Like many whimsical young ladies, I did not quite know my own mind.

On the step of the stile that crosses the churchyard wall, near Malory, I sat down, in rather uncomfortable rumination. I was interrupted by the sound of a step upon the road, approaching from the direction of Malory. I looked up, and, greatly to my surprise, saw Mr. Carmel, quite close to me. I stood up, and walked a few steps to meet him; we shook hands, he smiling, very glad, I knew, to meet me.

"You did not expect to see me so soon again, Miss Ware? And I have ever so much to tell you. I can't say whether it will please or vex you; but if you and Miss Grey will give me my old chair at your tea-table, I will look in for half an hour this evening. I have first to call at old Parry's, and give him a message that reached me from your mamma yesterday."

He smiled again, as he continued his walk, leaving me full of curiosity as to the purport of his news.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT CAN SHE MEAN?

WE had promised to go and see Lady Lorrimer again next day at the same hour. My head was still full of her. Mamma did not come down to breakfast; so I interrupted papa at his newspaper to sound him, very much as I had sounded her.

"Why doesn't she stay at home, and go out?" he repeated, smiling faintly as he did so. "I suppose she understands her own business; I can't say—but you mustn't say anything of that kind before her. She has done some foolish things, and got herself talked about; and you'll hear it all, I daresay, time enough. She's not a bit worse than other people, but a much greater fool; so don't ask people those questions, it would vex your mamma, and do nobody any good, do you see?"

Shortly after this, Miss Pounden came down to tell me that we were not going to see Lady Lorrimer that day. I was horribly disappointed, and ran up to the drawing-room, where mamma then was, to learn the cause of our visit being put off.

"Here, dear, is my aunt's note," she said, handing it to me, and scarcely interrupting her consultation with her maid about the millinery they were discussing. It was open, and I read these words:

"My dear Mabel,—I must say good-bye a little earlier than I had intended. My plans are upset. I find my native air insupportable, and fly northward for my life! I am thinking at present of Buxton for a few days; the weather is so genial here, that my doctor tells me I may

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