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THE WYVERN MYSTERY.

A Novel.

BY J. S. LE FANU,

AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1869.

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THE WYVERN MYSTERY.

CHAPTER I.

SPEECH RETURNS.

THE dreaded day came and passed, and Charles Fairfield was not dead, but better. The fever was abating, but never did the vital spark burn lower in living man. Seeing that life was so low in his patient, that there was nothing between it and death, the doctor ordered certain measures to be taken.

"The fever is going, you see, but his strength is not coming, nor won't for a while. It's a very nice thing, I can tell you, to bring him to land with such fine tackle. I've brought a salmon ten pound weight into

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my net with a bit of a trout rod as light as a rush almost. But this is nicer play—not, mind you, that I'd have you in the dumps, ma'am, but it will be necessary to watch him as a cat would a mouse. Now, you'll have on the table by his bed three bottles—decanted all, and ready for use instantaneously. Beside that claret you'll have a bottle of port, and you must also have a bottle of brandy. He'll be always at his tricks, going to faint, and you mustn't let him. Because, ma'am, it might not be easy to get him out of such a faint, and a faint is death, ma'am, if it lasts long enough. Now, you're not to be frightened."

"Oh, no, Doctor Willett."

"No, *that* would not do neither; but I want you clearly to see the importance of it. Let him have the claret to his lips constantly—in a tumbler, mind—you can't give him too much; and whenever you see him look faint, you must reinforce that with port; and no mincing of matters—none of your half

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measures. I'd rather you made him drunk three times a day than run the least risk once of the other thing; and if the port doesn't get him up quick enough, you must fire away with the brandy; and don't spare it—don't be afraid—we'll get him round, in time, with jellies and other good things; but life must be maintained in the meanwhile any way—every way—whatever way we can. So mind, *three*—claret, port, brandy."

He held up three fingers as he named them, touching them in succession.

"That's a fire it's better should burn a bit too fiercely for an hour than sink too low for a second; once out, out for ever."

"Thanks, Doctor Willett, I understand quite; and you'll be here to-morrow, won't you, at the usual hour?"

"Certainly, ma'am, and it's high time you should begin to take a little care of yourself; you must, indeed, or you'll rue it; you're too much on your feet, and you have had no rest night or day, and it's quite necessary you

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should, unless you mean to put yourself out of the world, which would not do at all. We can't spare you, ma'am, we can't indeed—a deal too valuable."

For some time Charles Fairfield continued in very much the same state. At the end of three or four days he signed faintly to Alice, who was in the room, with her large soft eyes gazing on the invalid, whenever she could look unperceived. She got up gently and came close to him.

"Yes, darling," and she lowered her head that he might speak more easily.

Charles whispered—

"Quite well?"

"You feel quite well? Thank God," she answered, her large eyes filling with tears.

"Not I—you," he whispered, with querulous impatience; "ain't you?"

"Quite, darling."

His fine blue Fairfield eyes were raised to her face.

With a short sigh, he whispered,—

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"I'm glad."

She stooped gently and kissed his thin cheek.

"I've been dreaming so much," he whispered. "Will you tell me exactly what happened—just before my illness—something happened here?"

In a low murmur she told him.

When she stopped he waited as if expecting more, and then he whispered—

"I thought so—yes."

And he sighed heavily.

"You're tired, darling," she said; "you must take a little wine."

"I hate it," he whispered—"tired of it."

"But, darling, the doctor says you must—and—for my sake won't you?"

The faintest possible smile lighted his pale face.

"Kind," he whispered.

And when she placed the glass of claret to his lips he sipped a little and turned away his head languidly.

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"Enough. Bring me my dressing-case," he whispered.

She did so.

"The key was in my purse, I think. Open it, Ally."

She found the key and unlocked that inlaid box.

"Underneath there are two or three letters in a big envelope. Keep them for me; don't part with them," he whispered.

"She lifted a long envelope containing some papers, and the faintest nod indicated that they were what he sought.

"Keep it safe. Put the case away."

When she came back, looking at her, he raised his eyebrows ever so little, and moved his head. She understood his sign and stooped again to listen.

"She mustn't be prosecuted, she's mad—Ally, mind."

"Darling, whatever you wish."

"Good, Ally; that's enough."

There was a little pause.

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"You did not take enough claret, darling Ry. Won't you take a little more for your poor little Ally?" whispered she anxiously.

"I'm very well, darling; by-and-by sleep; is better."

So he laid his cheek closer to the pillow and closed his eyes, and Alice Fairfield stole on tiptoe to her chair, and with another look at him and a deep sigh, she sat down and took her work.

Silent was the room, except for the low breathing of the invalid. Half an hour passed, and Alice stole softly to the bedside. He was awake, and said faintly,—

"Was it your mother?"

"Who, darling?"

"Talking."

"No one was talking, darling."

"I saw her; I thought I heard—*not* her —someone talking."

"No, darling Ry, nothing."

"Dreams; yes," he murmured, and was quiet again.

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Sad and ominous seemed those little wanderings. But such things are common in sickness. It was simply weakness.

In a little time she came over softly, and sat down by his pillow.

"I was looking down, Ally," he whispered.

"I'll get it, darling. Something on the floor, is it?" she asked, looking down.

"No, down to my feet; it's very long — stretched."

"Are your feet warm, darling?"

"Quite," and he sighed and closed his eyes.

She continued sitting by his pillow.

"When Willie died, my brother, I was just fifteen."

Then came a pause.

"Willie was the handsomest," he murmured on.

"Willie was elder — nineteen, very tall. Handsome Willie, he liked me the best. I cried a deal that day. I used to cry alone,

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every day in the orchard, or by the river. He's in the churchyard at Wyvern. I wonder shall I see it any more. There was rain the day of the funeral, they say it is lucky. It was a long coffin, the Fairfields you know——"

"Darling Ry, you are talking too much, it will tire you; take ever so little claret, to please your poor little Ally."

This time he did quite quietly, and then closed his eyes, and dozed.

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CHAPTER II.

HARRY DRINKS A GLASS AND SPILLS A GLASS.

ABOUT an hour after, old Dulcibella came to the door and knocked. Charles Fairfield had slept a little, and was again awake. Into that still darkened room she came to whisper her message.

"Mr. Harry's come, and he's downstairs, and he'd like to see you, and he wanted to know whether he could see the master."

"I'll go down and see him; say I'll see him with pleasure," said Alice. "Harry is here, darling," she said gently, drawing near to the patient, "but you can't see him, of course."

"I must," whispered the invalid peremptorily.

"Darling, are you well enough? I'm sure

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you ought not. If the doctor were here he would not allow it. Don't think of it, darling Ry, and he'll come again in a few days, when you are stronger."

"It will do me good," whispered Charles. "Bring him—you tire me; *wait, she* can tell him. I'll see him alone; go, go, Ally, go."

She would have remonstrated, but she saw that in his flushed and irritated looks, which warned her against opposing him further.

"You are to go down, Dulcibella, and bring Mr. Harry to the room to see your master; and, Dulcibella, like a dear good creature, won't you tell him how weak Master Charles is?" she urged, following her to the lobby, "and beg of him not to stay long."

In a minute or two more the clank of Harry Fairfield's boot was heard on the stair. He pushed open the door, and stepped in.

"Hullo! Charlie—dark enough to blind a horse here—all right, now. I hear you'll be

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on your legs again—I can't see you, upon my soul, not a stim a'most — before you see three Sundays—you mustn't be tiring yourself. I'm not talking too loud, eh? Would you mind an inch or two more of the shutter open?"

"No," said Charles, faintly. "A little."

"There, that isn't much. I'm beginning to see a bit now. You've had a stiff bout this time, Charlie, 'twasn't typhus, nothing infectious, chiefly the upper story; but you had a squeak for it, my lad. I'd 'a came over to look after you but my hands was too full."

"No good, Harry; could not have spoken, or seen you. Better now."

"A bit shaky still," said Harry, lowering his voice. "You'll get o'er that, though, fast enough. Keeping your spirits up, I see," and Harry winked at the decanters. "Summat better than that rot-gut claret, too. This is the stuff to put life in you. Port, yes." He filled his brother's glass, smelled to it,

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and drank it off. "So it is, and right goo port. I'll drink your health, Charlie," he added, playfully filling his glass again.

"I'm glad you came, Harry, I feel better," said the invalid, and he extended his thin hand upon the bed to his brother.

"Hoot! of course you do," said Harry, looking hard at him, for he was growing accustomed to the imperfect light. "You'll do very well, and Alice, I hear, is quite well also. And so you've had a visit from the old soldier, and a bit of a row, eh?"

"Very bad, Harry. Oh! God help me," moaned Charles.

"She ain't pretty, and she ain't pleasant — bad without and worse within, like a collier's sack," said Harry, with a disgusted grimace, lifting his eyebrows and shaking his head.

"She's headlong and headstrong, and so there has been bad work. I don't know what's to be done."

"The best thing to be done's to let her

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alone," said Harry. "They've put her up at Hatherton, I hear."

"That's one thing," murmured Charles, with a great sigh. "I'm a heart-broken man, Harry."

"That's easy mended. Don't prosecute, that's all. Get out o' the country when you're well enough, and they must let her go, and maybe the lesson won't do her no great harm."

"I'm glad I have you to talk to," murmured Charles, with another great sigh. "I can't get it out of my head. You'll help me, Harry?"

"All I can—'taint much."

"And, Harry, there's a thing that troubles me." He paused, it seemed, exhausted.

"Don't mind it now, you're tirin' yourself. Drink a glass o' this."

And he filled the glass from which he had been drinking his port.

"No, I hate wine," he answered. "No, no, by-and-by, perhaps."

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