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**The Dead Alive**

**By**

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## **CHAPTER I. THE SICK MAN.**

"HEART all right," said the doctor. "Lungs all right. No organic disease that I can discover. Philip Lefrank, don't alarm yourself. You are not going to die yet. The disease you are suffering from is--overwork. The remedy in your case is--rest."

So the doctor spoke, in my chambers in the Temple (London); having been sent for to see me about half an hour after I had alarmed my clerk by fainting at my desk. I have no wish to intrude myself needlessly on the reader's attention; but it may be necessary to add, in the way of explanation, that I am a "junior" barrister in good practice. I come from the channel Island of Jersey. The French spelling of my name (Lefranc) was Anglicized generations since--in the days when the letter "k" was still used in England at the end of words which now terminate in "c." We hold our heads high, nevertheless, as a Jersey family. It is to this day a trial to my father to hear his son described as a member of the English bar.

"Rest!" I repeated, when my medical adviser had done. "My good friend, are you aware that it is term-time? The courts are sitting. Look at the briefs waiting for me on that table! Rest means ruin in my case."

"And work," added the doctor, quietly, "means death."

I started. He was not trying to frighten me: he was plainly in earnest.

"It is merely a question of time," he went on. "You have a fine constitution; you are a young man; but you cannot deliberately overwork your brain, and derange your nervous system, much longer. Go away at once. If you are a good sailor, take a sea-voyage. The ocean air is the best of all air to build you up again. No: I don't want to write a prescription. I decline to physic you. I have no more to say."

With these words my medical friend left the room. I was obstinate: I went into court the same day.

The senior counsel in the case on which I was engaged applied to me for some information which it was my duty to give him. To my horror and amazement, I was perfectly unable to collect my ideas; facts and dates all mingled together confusedly in my mind. I was led out of court thoroughly terrified about myself. The next day my briefs went back to the attorneys;

and I followed my doctor's advice by taking my passage for America in the first steamer that sailed for New York.

I had chosen the voyage to America in preference to any other trip by sea, with a special object in view. A relative of my mother's had emigrated to the United States many years since, and had thriven there as a farmer. He had given me a general invitation to visit him if I ever crossed the Atlantic. The long period of inaction, under the name of rest, to which the doctor's decision had condemned me, could hardly be more pleasantly occupied, as I thought, than by paying a visit to my relation, and seeing what I could of America in that way. After a brief sojourn at New York, I started by railway for the residence of my host--Mr. Isaac Meadowcroft, of Morwick Farm.

There are some of the grandest natural prospects on the face of creation in America. There is also to be found in certain States of the Union, by way of wholesome contrast, scenery as flat, as monotonous, and as uninteresting to the traveler, as any that the earth can show. The part of the country in which M. Meadowcroft's farm was situated fell within this latter category. I looked round me when I stepped out of the railway-carriage on the platform at Morwick Station; and I said to myself, "If to be cured means, in my case, to be dull, I have accurately picked out the very place for the purpose."

I look back at those words by the light of later events; and I pronounce them, as you will soon pronounce them, to be the words of an essentially rash man, whose hasty judgment never stopped to consider what surprises time and chance together might have in store for him.

Mr. Meadowcroft's eldest son, Ambrose, was waiting at the station to drive me to the farm.

There was no forewarning, in the appearance of Ambrose Meadowcroft, of the strange and terrible events that were to follow my arrival at Morwick. A healthy, handsome young fellow, one of thousands of other healthy, handsome young fellows, said, "How d'ye do, Mr. Lefrank? Glad to see you, sir. Jump into the buggy; the man will look after your portmanteau." With equally conventional politeness I answered, "Thank you. How are you all at home?" So we started on the way to the farm.

Our conversation on the drive began with the subjects of agriculture and breeding. I displayed my total ignorance of crops and cattle before we had traveled ten yards on our journey. Ambrose Meadowcroft cast about for another topic, and failed to find it. Upon this I cast about on my side, and asked, at a venture, if I had chosen a convenient time for my visit. The young

farmer's stolid brown face instantly brightened. I had evidently hit, hap-hazard, on an interesting subject.

"You couldn't have chosen a better time," he said. "Our house has never been so cheerful as it is now."

"Have you any visitors staying with you?"

"It's not exactly a visitor. It's a new member of the family who has come to live with us."

"A new member of the family! May I ask who it is?"

Ambrose Meadowcroft considered before he replied; touched his horse with the whip; looked at me with a certain sheepish hesitation; and suddenly burst out with the truth, in the plainest possible words:

"It's just the nicest girl, sir, you ever saw in your life."

"Ay, ay! A friend of your sister's, I suppose?"

"A friend? Bless your heart! it's our little American cousin, Naomi Colebrook."

I vaguely remembered that a younger sister of Mr. Meadowcroft's had married an American merchant in the remote past, and had died many years since, leaving an only child. I was now further informed that the father also was dead. In his last moments he had committed his helpless daughter to the compassionate care of his wife's relations at Morwick.

"He was always a speculating man," Ambrose went on. "Tried one thing after another, and failed in all. Died, sir, leaving barely enough to bury him. My father was a little doubtful, before she came here, how his American niece would turn out. We are English, you know; and, though we do live in the United States, we stick fast to our English ways and habits. We don't much like American women in general, I can tell you; but when Naomi made her appearance she conquered us all. Such a girl! Took her place as one of the family directly. Learned to make herself useful in the dairy in a week's time. I tell you this--she hasn't been with us quite two months yet, and we wonder already how we ever got on without her!"

Once started on the subject of Naomi Colebrook, Ambrose held to that one topic and talked on it without intermission. It required no great gift of

penetration to discover the impression which the American cousin had produced in this case. The young fellow's enthusiasm communicated itself, in a certain tepid degree, to me. I really felt a mild flutter of anticipation at the prospect of seeing Naomi, when we drew up, toward the close of evening, at the gates of Morwick Farm.