

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WATCHER AT THE DOOR

This was what had happened. Just about the centre of the reef is a large flat-topped rock--it may be twenty feet in the square--known to the Bryngelly fishermen as Table Rock. In ordinary weather, even at high tide, the waters scarcely cover this rock, but when there is any sea they wash over it with great violence. On to this rock Geoffrey and Beatrice had been hurled by the breaker. Fortunately for them it was thickly overgrown with seaweed, which to some slight extent broke the violence of their fall. As it chanced, Geoffrey was knocked senseless by the shock; but Beatrice, whose hand he still held, fell on to him and, with the exception of a few bruises and a shake, escaped unhurt.

She struggled to her knees, gasping. The water had run off the rock, and her companion lay quiet at her side. She put down her face and called into his ear, but no answer came, and then she knew that he was either dead or senseless.

At this second Beatrice caught a glimpse of something white gleaming in the darkness. Instinctively she flung herself upon her face, gripping the long tough seaweed with one hand. The other she passed round the body of the helpless man beside her, straining him with all her strength against her side.

Then came a wild long rush of foam. The water lifted her from the rock, but the seaweed held, and when at length the sea had gone boiling by, Beatrice found herself and the senseless form of Geoffrey once more lying side by side. She was half choked. Desperately she struggled up and round, looking shoreward through the darkness. Heavens! there, not a hundred yards away, a light shone upon the waters. It was a boat's light, for it moved up and down. She filled her lungs with air and sent one long cry for help ringing across the sea. A moment passed and she thought that she heard an answer, but because of the wind and the roar of the breakers she could not be sure. Then she turned and glanced seaward. Again the foaming terror was rushing down upon them; again she flung herself upon the rock and grasping the slippery seaweed twined her left arm about the helpless Geoffrey.

It was on them.

Oh, horror! Even in the turmoil of the boiling waters Beatrice felt the seaweed give. Now they were being swept along with the rushing wave, and Death drew very near. But still she clung to Geoffrey. Once more the air touched her face. She had risen to the surface and was floating on the stormy water. The wave had passed. Loosing her hold of Geoffrey she slipped her hand upwards, and as he began to sink clutched him by the hair. Then treading water with her feet, for happily for them both she was as good a swimmer as could be found upon that coast, she managed to open her eyes. There, not sixty yards away, was the boat's light. Oh, if only she could reach it. She spat the salt water from her mouth and once

more cried aloud. The light seemed to move on.

Then another wave rolled forward and once more she was pushed down into the cruel depths, for with that dead weight hanging to her she could not keep above them. It flashed into her mind that if she let him go she might even now save herself, but even in that last terror this Beatrice would not do. If he went, she would go with him.

It would have been better if she had let him go.

Down she went--down, down! "I will hold him," Beatrice said in her heart; "I will hold him till I die." Then came waves of light and a sound as of wind whispering through the trees, and--all grew dark.

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"I tell yer it ain't no good, Eddard," shouted a man in the boat to an old sailor who was leaning forward in the bows peering into the darkness. "We shall be right on to the Table Rocks in a minute and all drown together. Put about, mate--put about."

"Damn yer," screamed the old man, turning so that the light from the lantern fell on his furrowed, fiercely anxious face and long white hair streaming in the wind. "Damn yer, ye cowards. I tells yer I heard her voice--I heard it twice screaming for help. If you put the boat about, by Goad when I get ashore I'll kill yer, ye lubbers--old man as I am

I'll kill yer, if I swing for it!"

This determined sentiment produced a marked effect upon the boat's crew; there were eight of them altogether. They did not put the boat about, they only lay upon their oars and kept her head to the seas.

The old man in the bow peered out into the gloom. He was shaking, not with cold but with agitation.

Presently he turned his head with a yell.

"Give way--give way! there's something on the wave."

The men obeyed with a will.

"Back," he roared again--"back water!"

They backed, and the boat answered, but nothing was to be seen.

"She's gone! Oh, Goad, she's gone!" groaned the old man. "You may put about now, lads, and the Lord's will be done."

The light from the lantern fell in a little ring upon the seething water. Suddenly something white appeared in the centre of this illuminated ring. Edward stared at it. It was floating upwards. It vanished--it appeared again. It was a woman's face. With a yell he

plunged his arms into the sea.

"I have her--lend an hand, lads."

Another man scrambled forward and together they clutched the object in the water.

"Look out, don't pull so hard, you fool. Blow me if there ain't another and she's got him by the hair. So, steady, steady!"

A long heave from strong arms and the senseless form of Beatrice was on the gunwale. Then they pulled up Geoffrey beside her, for they could not loose her desperate grip of his dark hair, and together rolled them into the boat.

"They're dead, I doubt," said the second man.

"Help turn 'em on their faces over the seat, so--let the water drain from their innards. It's the only chance. Now give me that sail to cover them--so. You'll live yet, Miss Beatrice, you ain't dead, I swear. Old Eddard has saved you, Old Eddard and the good Goad together!"

Meanwhile the boat had been got round, and the men were rowing for Bryngelly as warm-hearted sailors will when life is at stake. They all knew Beatrice and loved her, and they remembered it as they rowed. The gloom was little hindrance to them for they could almost have navigated

the coast blindfold. Besides here they were sheltered by the reef and shore.

In five minutes they were round a little headland, and the lights of Bryngelly were close before them. On the beach people were moving about with lanterns.

Presently they were there, hanging on their oars for a favourable wave to beach with. At last it came, and they gave way together, running the large boat half out of the surf. A dozen men plunged into the water and dragged her on. They were safe ashore.

"Have you got Miss Beatrice?" shouted a voice.

"Ay, we've got her and another too, but I doubt they're gone. Where's doctor?"

"Here, here!" answered a voice. "Bring the stretchers."

A stout thick-set man, who had been listening, wrapped up in a dark cloak, turned his face away and uttered a groan. Then he followed the others as they went to work, not offering to help, but merely following.

The stretchers were brought and the two bodies laid upon them, face downwards and covered over.

"Where to?" said the bearers as they seized the poles.

"The Vicarage," answered the doctor. "I told them to get things ready there in case they should find her. Run forward one of you and say that we are coming."

The men started at a trot and the crowd ran after them.

"Who is the other?" somebody asked.

"Mr. Bingham--the tall lawyer who came down from London the other day. Tell policeman--run to his wife. She's at Mrs. Jones's, and thinks he has lost his way in the fog coming home from Bell Rock."

The policeman departed on his melancholy errand and the procession moved swiftly across the sandy beach and up the stone-paved way by which boats were dragged down the cliff to the sea. The village of Bryngelly lay to the right. It had grown away from the church, which stood dangerously near the edge of the cliff. On the further side of the church, and a little behind it, partly sheltered from the sea gales by a group of stunted firs, was the Vicarage, a low single-storied stone-roofed building, tenanted for twenty-five years past and more by Beatrice's father, the Rev. Joseph Granger. The best approach to it from the Bryngelly side was by the churchyard, through which the men with the stretchers were now winding, followed by the crowd of sightseers.

"Might as well leave them here at once," said one of the bearers to the other in Welsh. "I doubt they are both dead enough."

The person addressed assented, and the thick-set man wrapped in a dark cloak, who was striding along by Beatrice's stretcher, groaned again. Clearly, he understood the Welsh tongue. A few seconds more and they were passing through the stunted firs up to the Vicarage door. In the doorway stood a group of people. The light from a lamp in the hall struck upon them, throwing them into strong relief. Foremost, holding a lantern in his hand, was a man of about sixty, with snow-white hair which fell in confusion over his rugged forehead. He was of middle height and carried himself with something of a stoop. The eyes were small and shifting, and the mouth hard. He wore short whiskers which, together with the eyebrows, were still tinged with yellow. The face was ruddy and healthy looking, indeed, had it not been for the dirty white tie and shabby black coat, one would have taken him to be what he was in heart, a farmer of the harder sort, somewhat weather-beaten and anxious about the times--a man who would take advantage of every drop in the rate of wages. In fact he was Beatrice's father, and a clergyman.

By his side, and leaning over him, was Elizabeth, her elder sister. There was five years between them. She was a poor copy of Beatrice, or, to be more accurate, Beatrice was a grand development of Elizabeth. They both had brown hair, but Elizabeth's was straighter and faint-coloured, not rich and ruddying into gold. Elizabeth's eyes were also grey, but



it was a cold washed-out grey like that of a February sky. And so with feature after feature, and with the expression also. Beatrice's was noble and open, if at times defiant. Looking at her you knew that she might be a mistaken woman, or a headstrong woman, or both, but she could never be a mean woman. Whichever of the ten commandments she might

choose to break, it would not be that which forbids us to bear false witness against our neighbour. Anybody might read it in her eyes. But in her sister's, he might discern her father's shifty hardness watered by woman's weaker will into something like cunning. For the rest Elizabeth had a very fair figure, but lacked her sister's rounded loveliness, though the two were so curiously alike that at a distance you might well mistake the one for the other. One might almost fancy that nature had experimented upon Elizabeth before she made up her mind to produce Beatrice, just to get the lines and distances. The elder sister was to the other what the pale unfinished model of clay is to the polished statue in ivory and gold.

"Oh, my God! my God!" groaned the old man; "look, they have got them on the stretchers. They are both dead. Oh, Beatrice! Beatrice! and only this morning I spoke harshly to her."

"Don't be so foolish, father," said Elizabeth sharply. "They may only be insensible."

"Ah, ah," he answered; "it does not matter to you, you don't care

about your sister. You are jealous of her. But I love her, though we do not understand each other. Here they come. Don't stand staring there. Go and see that the blankets and things are hot. Stop, doctor, tell me, is she dead?"

"How can I tell till I have seen her?" the doctor answered, roughly shaking him off, and passing through the door.

Bryngelly Vicarage was a very simply constructed house. On entering the visitor found himself in a passage with doors to the right and left.

That to the right led to the sitting-room, that to the left to the dining-room, both of them long, low and narrow chambers. Following the passage down for some seven paces, it terminated in another which ran at right angles to it for the entire length of the house. On the further side of this passage were several bedroom doors and a room at each end. That at the end to the right was occupied by Beatrice and her sister, the next was empty, the third was Mr. Granger's, and the fourth the spare room. This, with the exception of the kitchens and servants' sleeping place, which were beyond the dining-room, made up the house.

Fires had been lit in both of the principal rooms. Geoffrey was taken into the dining-room and attended by the doctor's assistant, and Beatrice into the sitting-room, and attended by the doctor himself. In a few seconds the place had been cleared of all except the helpers, and the work began. The doctor looked at Beatrice's cold shrunken form, and at the foam upon her lips. He lifted the eyelid, and held a light before

the contracted pupil. Then he shook his head and set to work with a will. We need not follow him through the course of his dreadful labours, with which most people will have some acquaintance. Hopeless as they seemed, he continued them for hour after hour.

Meanwhile the assistant and some helpers were doing the same service for Geoffrey Bingham, the doctor himself, a thin clever-looking man, occasionally stepping across the passage to direct them and see how things were getting on. Now, although Geoffrey had been in the water the longer, his was by far the better case, for when he was immersed he was already insensible, and a person in this condition is very hard to drown. It is your struggling, fighting, breathing creature who is soonest made an end of in deep waters. Therefore it came to pass that when the scrubbing with hot cloths and the artificial respiration had gone on for somewhere about twenty minutes, Geoffrey suddenly crooked a finger. The doctor's assistant, a buoyant youth fresh from the hospitals, gave a yell of exultation, and scrubbed and pushed away with ever-increasing energy. Presently the subject coughed, and a minute later, as the agony of returning life made itself felt, he swore most heartily.

"He's all right now!" called the assistant to his employer. "He's swearing beautifully."

Dr. Chambers, pursuing his melancholy and unpromising task in the other room, smiled sadly, and called to the assistant to continue the

treatment, which he did with much vigour.

Presently Geoffrey came partially to life, still suffering torments. The first thing he grew aware of was that a tall elegant woman was standing over him, looking at him with a half puzzled and half horrified air.

Vaguely he wondered who it might be. The tall form and cold handsome face were so familiar to him, and yet he could not recall the name.

It was not till she spoke that his numbed brain realized that he was looking on his own wife.

"Well, dear," she said, "I am so glad that you are better. You frightened me out of my wits. I thought you were drowned."

"Thank you, Honoria," he said faintly, and then groaned as a fresh attack of tingling pain shook him through and through.

"I hope nobody said anything to Effie," Geoffrey said presently.

"Yes, the child would not go to bed because you were not back, and when the policeman came she heard him tell Mrs. Jones that you were drowned, and she has been almost in a fit ever since. They had to hold her to prevent her from running here."

Geoffrey's white face assumed an air of the deepest distress. "How could you frighten the child so?" he murmured. "Please go and tell her that I am all right."

"It was not my fault," said Lady Honoria with a shrug of her shapely shoulders. "Besides, I can do nothing with Effie. She goes on like a wild thing about you."

"Please go and tell her, Honoria," said her husband.

"Oh, yes, I'll go," she answered. "Really I shall not be sorry to get out of this; I begin to feel as though I had been drowned myself;" and she looked at the steaming cloths and shuddered. "Good-bye, Geoffrey. It is an immense relief to find you all right. The policeman made me feel quite queer. I can't get down to give you a kiss or I would. Well, good-bye for the present, my dear."

"Good-bye, Honoria," said her husband with a faint smile.

The medical assistant looked a little surprised. He had never, it is true, happened to be present at a meeting between husband and wife, when one of the pair had just been rescued by a hair's-breadth from a violent and sudden death, and therefore wanted experience to go on. But it struck him that there was something missing. The lady did not seem to him quite to fill the part of the Heaven-thanking spouse. It puzzled him very much. Perhaps he showed this in his face. At any rate, Lady Honoria, who was quick enough, read something there.

"He is safe now, is he not?" she asked. "It will not matter if I go

away."

"No, my lady," answered the assistant, "he is out of danger, I think; it will not matter at all."

Lady Honoria hesitated a little; she was standing in the passage. Then she glanced through the door into the opposite room, and caught a glimpse of Beatrice's rigid form and of the doctor bending over it. Her head was thrown back and the beautiful brown hair, which was now almost dry again, streamed in masses to the ground, while on her face was stamped the terrifying seal of Death.

Lady Honoria shuddered. She could not bear such sights. "Will it be necessary for me to come back to-night?" she said.

"I do not think so," he answered, "unless you care to hear whether Miss Granger recovers?"

"I shall hear that in the morning," she said. "Poor thing, I cannot help her."

"No, Lady Honoria, you cannot help her. She saved your husband's life, they say."

"She must be a brave girl. Will she recover?"

The assistant shook his head. "She may, possibly. It is not likely now."

"Poor thing, and so young and beautiful! What a lovely face, and what an arm! It is very awful for her," and Lady Honoria shuddered again and went.

Outside the door a small knot of sympathisers was still gathered, notwithstanding the late hour and the badness of the weather.

"That's his wife," said one, and they opened to let her pass.

"Then why don't she stop with him?" asked a woman audibly. "If it had been my husband I'd have sat and hugged him for an hour."

"Ay, you'd have killed him with your hugging, you would," somebody answered.

Lady Honoria passed on. Suddenly a thick-set man emerged from the shadow of the pines. She could not see his face, but he was wrapped in a large cloak.

"Forgive me," he said in the hoarse voice of one struggling with emotions which he was unable to conceal, "but you can tell me. Does she still live?"

"Do you mean Miss Granger?" she asked.

"Yes, of course. Beatrice--Miss Granger?"

"They do not know, but they think----"

"Yes, yes--they think----"

"That she is dead."

The man said never a word. He dropped his head upon his breast and, turning, vanished again into the shadow of the pines.

"How very odd," thought Lady Honoria as she walked rapidly along the cliff towards her lodging. "I suppose that man must be in love with her. Well, I do not wonder at it. I never saw such a face and arm. What a picture that scene in the room would make! She saved Geoffrey and now she's dead. If he had saved her I should not have wondered. It is like a scene in a novel."

From all of which it will be seen that Lady Honoria was not wanting in certain romantic and artistical perceptions.