



## CHAPTER I

“Will she last out the night<sup>1</sup>, I wonder?”

“Look at the clock, Mathew.”

“Ten minutes past twelve! She has lived, Robert, to see ten minutes of the new day.”

The speakers were in the kitchen of a large country-house situated on the west coast of Cornwall. They were the servants of Captain Treverton, an officer in the navy<sup>2</sup>, and the eldest male representative of an old Cornish family. Both the servants talked in whispers.

“It’s awful,” said Robert, the elder of the men, “we are alone here, at this dark time, and we are counting out the minutes of our mistress!”

“Robert,” said the other, “did you ever hear that our mistress was an actress when our master married her?”

A bell rang in the passage outside.

“That bell is for Sarah Leeson,” exclaimed Robert. “Go out into the passage and look.”

Mathew, the younger servant, took a candle and obeyed. When he opened the kitchen-door, a long row of bells met his eye on the wall opposite. Above each of them was painted the title of the servant whom it was specially intended to summon.

Mathew passed quickly along the passage, and knocked at an oak door at the end of it. No answer. He opened the door and looked into the room. It was dark and empty.

“Sarah is not in the housekeeper’s room<sup>3</sup>,” said Mathew to his fellow-servant in the kitchen.

“She is in her own room, then,” rejoined the other. “Go up and tell her that she is wanted<sup>4</sup> by her mistress.”

The bell rang again as Mathew went out.

“Quick! Quick!” cried Robert.

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<sup>1</sup> **Will she last out the night?** – Переживёт ли она эту ночь?

<sup>2</sup> **an officer in the navy** – флотский офицер

<sup>3</sup> **housekeeper’s room** – кастелянская

<sup>4</sup> **she is wanted** – её зовут

Mathew knocked at another oak door. A low, clear, sweet voice, inside the room answered him. In a few hasty words Mathew told his errand. The door was quietly and quickly opened, and Sarah Leeson confronted him, with a candle in her hand.

She was not tall, not handsome, shy and irresolute in manner. Her cheeks lost their roundness and their natural color. Her lips faded to an unhealthy paleness. But her hair was thick and soft, it grew as gracefully, as the hair of a young girl; but it was as gray as the hair of an old woman.

She stood for an instant speechless. Her hand was trembling while she held the candlestick. She shook her head, and thanked Mathew, then passed before him quickly.

The room in which Mrs. Treverton lay was on the floor beneath. Sarah knocked at the door. It was opened by Captain Treverton.

“Go in,” he said. “She does not wish the nurse; she only wishes for you. Call me if the doctor—” His voice faltered, and he hurried away.

Sarah Leeson looked after her master attentively — with an eager terror in her eyes. She listened for a moment outside the door of the room and whispered affrightedly to herself,

“Did she tell him?”

Then she opened the door, with a visible effort; and went in.

Mrs. Treverton’s chamber was a large, lofty room in the western front of the house.

“Mistress,” said Sarah Leeson, “my master has left the room, and has sent me here in his place.”

“Light! Give me more light.”

The feebleness of mortal sickness was in the voice; but the accent of the speaker sounded resolute. The strong nature of the mistress and the weak nature of the maid came out, even in that short interchange of words.

Sarah lit two candles and placed them hesitatingly on a table by the bedside. She waited for a moment and then undrew the curtains.

The disease of Mrs. Treverton was one of the most terrible of all the maladies that afflict humanity. The hand of Death was signing to her already from the Gates of the Grave.

Mrs. Treverton held up her hand.

“Bolt the door,” she said, with the accent of resolution. “Bolt the door. Let no one in.”

“No one?” repeated Sarah, faintly. “Not the doctor? Not even my master?”

“Not the doctor — not even your master,” said Mrs. Treverton, and pointed to the door.

The hand was weak; but it was the gesture of command.

Sarah bolted the door, returned irresolutely to the bedside, and said in a whisper:

“Have you told my master?”

“No,” was the answer. “I sent for him, to tell him. I love him so dearly! And I wanted to tell him, but he talked of the child. Sarah! He did nothing but talk of the child. That silenced me.”

Sarah clasped her hands over her face, and groaned to herself, “Oh, what will happen! What will happen now!”

Mrs. Treverton’s eyes softened and moistened when she spoke of her love for her husband. She lay silent for a few minutes. Then she turned her head uneasily toward the chair in which her attendant was sitting, and spoke again.

“Look for my medicine,” said she; “I want it.”

Sarah stood up.

“The doctor,” she said. “Let me call the doctor.”

“No! The medicine — look for the medicine.”

“Which bottle? The opiate —”

“No. Not the opiate. The other.”

Sarah took a bottle from the table. She looked attentively at the direction on the label, and said that it was not yet time to take that medicine again.

“Give me the bottle.”

“Oh, don’t ask me! The doctor said it was as bad as poison, if you took too much.”

Mrs. Treverton’s clear gray eyes began to flash. The rosy flush deepened on her cheeks. The commanding hand was raised again.

“Take the cork out of the bottle,” she said, “and give it to me. I want strength. No matter whether I die in an hour’s time or a week’s. Give me the bottle.”

“No, no — not the bottle!” said Sarah. “There are two doses left. Wait, wait till I get a glass.”

She turned again toward the table. At the same instant Mrs. Treverton raised the bottle to her lips, and drained it of its contents.

“She has killed herself!” cried Sarah.

She ran in terror to the door.

“Stop!” said the voice from the bed, more resolute than ever, already. “Stop! Come back and help me.”

Sarah came back; and added one more to the many pillows which supported the dying woman’s head and shoulders.

“Did you unbolt the door?” Mrs. Treverton asked.

“No.”

“I forbid you to go near it again. Get my writing-case, and the pen and ink, from the cabinet near the window.”

Sarah went to the cabinet and opened it. The writing-case, with a sheet of note-paper on it, was placed upon Mrs. Treverton’s knees. Mrs. Treverton paused, closed her eyes for a minute, and sighed heavily. Then she began to write: To my Husband.

“Oh, no! no! For God’s sake, don’t write it!” Sarah cried. “Don’t write it to him if you can’t tell it to him. Let the Secret die with you and die with me!”

“The Secret must be told,” answered Mrs. Treverton. “My husband must know it. I tried to tell him, and my courage failed me. I can not trust you to tell him. It must be written. Take the pen, and write what I tell you.”

Sarah wept bitterly.

“You have been with me ever since my marriage,” Mrs. Treverton went on. “You have been my friend more than my servant. Do you refuse my last request? Fool! Listen to me. Write, or I shall not rest in my grave. Write, or I will come to you from the other world!”

Sarah cried. At the same instant, the overdose of the medicine began to affect Mrs. Treverton’s brain. She rolled her head restlessly from side to side of the pillow.

“Write!” Mrs. Treverton cried, with an awful mimicry of her old stage voice. “Write!”

Sarah waited for the next command. Some minutes elapsed before Mrs. Treverton spoke again. She began to dictate in quiet, deliberate, determined tones. Sarah’s tears fell fast; her lips murmured fragments of sentences, expressions of penitence, and

exclamations of fear. She nearly filled the first two sides of the paper. Then Mrs. Treverton paused, and signed her name at the end of it

“Sign!” she cried. “Sign ‘Sarah Leeson, witness.’ No! Write ‘Accomplice.’ Sign, I insist on it! Sign as I tell you.”

Sarah obeyed. Mrs. Treverton took the paper from her and pointed to it solemnly.

“You will give this to your master,” she said, “when I am dead. You will answer any questions he puts to you. Promise me that you will give the paper to your master. Oh no! I won’t trust your promise. I’ll have your oath. Get the Bible. Get it, or I shall not rest in my grave. Get it, or I will come to you from the other world. Yes, yes — the Bible the clergyman used. The clergyman — a poor weak man. I frightened him, Sarah. He said, ‘Are you at peace with all the world?’ and I said, ‘All but one<sup>1</sup>.’ You know who.”

“The Captain’s brother? Oh, don’t die at enmity with anybody. Don’t die at enmity even with him,” pleaded Sarah.

“The clergyman said so too,” murmured Mrs. Treverton. “‘You must forgive him,’ the clergyman said. And I said, ‘No, I forgive all the world, but not my husband’s brother.’ The clergyman will pray for me and come back. Will he come back?”

“Yes, yes,” answered Sarah. “He is a good man — he will come back — and oh! tell him that you forgive the Captain’s brother! Those vile words he spoke of you when you were married will come home to him some day. Forgive him—forgive him before you die!”

Sarah attempted to remove the Bible softly out of her mistress’s sight. The action attracted Mrs. Treverton’s attention.

“Stop!” she cried.

She caught at Sarah’s hand with a great effort, placed it on the Bible, and held it there.

“Ah!” she said, “Sarah; you can’t deceive me even yet.”

She stopped again, smiled a little, whispered to herself rapidly,

“Wait, wait, wait!” then added aloud, with the old stage voice and the old stage gesture:

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<sup>1</sup> **All but one.** — Со всеми, кроме одного.

"No! I won't trust you on your promise. I'll have your oath. Kneel down. These are my last words in this world — disobey them if you dare!"

Sarah dropped on her knees by the bed.

"Swear!" said Mrs. Treverton. "Swear that you will not destroy this paper after I am dead."

Sarah answered faintly,

"I swear it."

"Swear that you will not take this paper away with you, if you leave the house, after I am dead."

Again Sarah said,

"I swear it."

"Swear!" Mrs. Treverton began for the third time.

Her voice failed.

"I haven't done — you must swear — close, close, come close — your master — swear to give it —"

The last words died away very softly. The lips closed. Sarah sprang to the door, opened it, and called for help. Then she ran back to the bedside, caught up the sheet of the paper, and hid it in her bosom.

The doctor entered the room. He spoke first to the servant who followed him.

"Go to your master," he said, "and beg him to wait in his own room until I can come and speak to him."

Then he said to Sarah,

"Let me recommend you to leave us for a little while."

He touched Sarah on the arm. She went out.

## CHAPTER II

Sarah Leeson turned the key of her bedroom door, and took the sheet of the paper from its place of concealment in her bosom. She placed it on her little dressing-table, and fixed her eyes eagerly on the lines. The characters were clear. There was the address: "To my Husband;" there the first line beneath, in her dead mistress's handwriting; there the lines that followed, with

the signature at the end — Mrs. Treverton's first, and then her own. Sarah Leeson read the few lines as a condemned prisoner.

The oath! Sarah pushed away the paper and rose to her feet. Then she began to talk to herself. She repeated incessantly the phrases:

“How can I give him the letter? Such a good master; so kind to us all. Why did she die, and leave it all to me? I can't bear it alone; it's too much for me!”

Then she read aloud the address again,

“To my Husband... Why give it to him at all? Why not let the secret die with her and die with me? Why must he know it? He won't know it!”

She opened the door and glided into the passage. She stopped there for a moment and hesitated a little, then whispered, “I must! I must!”

She descended very slowly. The door of Mrs. Treverton's bedroom was opened, when she knocked at it.

“I want to speak to my master.”

“Look for him somewhere else. He was here half an hour ago,” said the nurse.

“Do you know where he is?”

“No. I mind my own business<sup>1</sup>.”

With that discourteous answer, the nurse closed the door. Sarah looked toward the inner end of the passage. The door of the nursery was situated there. It was ajar. She went in immediately, and saw that the candle-light came from an inner room. It was usually occupied by the nursery-maid and by the only child of the house of Treverton — a little girl named Rosamond, aged, at that time, nearly five years.

“Can he be there? In that room!”

Sarah raised the letter to the bosom of her dress, and hid it for the second time. Then she came toward the inner room. The first object that attracted her attention in the child's bedroom was the figure of the nurse-maid. The nurse-maid was asleep, in an easy-chair by the window.

Then Sarah saw her master, by the side of the child's crib. Little Rosamond was awake, and was standing up in bed with

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<sup>1</sup> **I mind my own business.** — Я занимаюсь своими делами.



her arms round her father's neck. One of her hands held over his shoulder the doll, the other was twined gently in his hair.

The tears stood thick in Sarah's eyes. She lingered by the raised curtain. Then Captain Treverton said soothingly to the child:

"Hush, Rosie, dear! Hush, my love! Don't cry anymore for poor mamma. Think of poor papa, and try to comfort him."

Sarah Leeson turned and ran into the passage. She descended to the kitchen. There one of the servants, with a face of astonishment and alarm, asked:

"What is the matter?"

"I'm ill — I'm faint — I want air," she answered. "Open the garden door, and let me out<sup>1</sup>."

The man obeyed doubtfully.

"She is very strange," he said, when he rejoined his fellow-servant. "Now our mistress is dead, she will have to find another place, I suppose."

### CHAPTER III

The cool, sweet air in the garden calmed the violence of Sarah's agitation. She overlooked the church of the neighboring village. The old church was clear and bright. Sarah's eyes wandered from the building itself to the cemetery by its side.

"Oh, my heart! my heart!" she said.

She was pondering over the words which Captain Treverton said to the child. They seemed to connect themselves, as everything else now appeared to connect itself in her mind, with the letter. She drew it from her bosom once more, and crushed it up angrily in her fingers. She crossed the terrace, descended some wooden steps, and followed a shrubby path to the north side of the house.

This part of the building was uninhabited. The mansion was originally built in the form of a square. Of the many defenses of

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<sup>1</sup> let me out — выпустите меня

the place, a heavy tower remained (from which the house derived its name of Porthgenna Tower).

The windows were broken in some places, and covered thickly with dirt and dust in others. Here, the shutters were closed — there, they were only half opened. The ivy, the vegetation, the spiders' webs, the rubbish of wood, bricks, plaster, broken glass, rags, and strips of soiled cloth lay beneath the windows.

Sarah Leeson strayed into the deserted northern garden. She stopped on an open patch of ground.

“What binds me to give the letter to my master at all?” she thought to herself. “My mistress died without my oath. Can she visit me from the other world? I can keep the promises<sup>1</sup> I swore to observe, and do no more.”

She paused. Her superstitious fears were influencing her. She paused, and began to recall the terms of the solemn engagement.

What did she actually bind herself to do? Not to destroy the letter, and not to take it away with her if she left the house. Beyond that, Mrs. Treverton's desire was to give the letter to her husband. But did Sarah take an oath? No.

As she arrived at that conclusion, she looked up. A faint flush of color flew into her cheeks, and she hastily advanced closer to the wall of the house.

The panes of the large window were yellow with dust and dirt. Below it was a heap of rubbish. Sarah glanced at the letter in her hand, and said to herself abruptly—

“I'll risk it!”

As the words fell from her lips, she hastened back to the inhabited part of the house. She followed the passage on the kitchen-floor which led to the housekeeper's room. She entered it, and took a bunch of keys. She read “Keys of the North Rooms.”

She placed the keys on a writing-table near her, took up a pen, and rapidly added these lines on the blank side of the letter —

“If somebody finds this paper, I wish to say that I decided to hide it, because I dare not show this to my master, to whom it is addressed. Though I am acting against my mistress's last wishes, I am not breaking the solemn engagement which she obliged me to make before her on her death-bed. That engagement forbids

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<sup>1</sup> keep the promises — сдержать обещания

me to destroy this letter, or to take it away with me if I leave the house. I shall do neither — my purpose is to conceal it. Any hardship or misfortune will fall on myself. Others, I believe, will be happy not to know the dreadful Secret which this letter contains.”

She signed those lines with her name, took the note in her hand, and then left the room. She ascended a back staircase, and unlocked a door at the top of it. Then she came upon a row of doors, all leading into rooms on the first floor of the north side of the house.

She knelt down opposite the key-hole of the fourth door, peered in distrustfully for an instant, then began to try the different keys till she found one that fitted the lock. Her hands trembled. At length she opened the door. Then she entered the room.

She did not remain in it more than two or three minutes. When she came out again her face was white with fear. Her hand held nothing now but a small rusty key.

She examined the large bunch of keys. The particular key which she used had a label “The Myrtle Room.”

She took the scissors and cut the label from the key. Was it enough? She cut off the other labels, too. Then she retraced her steps to the housekeeper’s room, entered it, and hung up the bunch of keys again on the nail in the wall.

After that Sarah hastened back to her bedroom. The candle was still burning feebly in the fresh daylight. She opened the window.

Whether for good or for evil, the fatal Secret was hidden now. She will think more composedly, after that, of herself, and of the uncertain future that lay before her.

The connection between herself and her mistress was severed by death. She knew that Mrs. Treverton, in the last days of her illness, earnestly recommended her maid to Captain Treverton’s kindness and protection. But will she accept protection and kindness at the hand of the master whom she was deceiving? The bare idea of such baseness was so revolting, that she decided to leave the house immediately.

And how to leave it? Can she face her master again? His first inquiries will refer to her mistress. Sarah listened at her door in sudden suspicion and fear. Did she hear footsteps? Was it her master?

No; all was silent outside. A few tears rolled over her cheeks as she put on her bonnet. She must leave Porthgenna Tower, and leave it secretly.

Secretly — as a thief? Without a word to her master? Without a letter to thank him for his kindness and to ask his pardon? “Shall I write?” she asked herself, “and leave the letter here?”

Yes. She wrote a few lines addressed to Captain Treverton, in which she wrote that she was hiding a secret from his knowledge. She honestly believes no harm will come to him, or to anyone in whom he is interested. She is asking his pardon for leaving the house secretly. Then she sealed this short note, and left it on her table. She listened again at the door; and began to descend the stairs at Porthgenna Tower for the last time.

At the entrance of the nursery she stopped. The tears began to flow again. She ran to the stairs, reached the kitchen-floor in safety, and left the house.

She diverged to the church; but stopped before she came to it, at the public well. She dropped into the well the little rusty key, the key from the Myrtle Room. Then she hurried on, and entered the church-yard. She came to one of the graves, situated a little apart from the rest. On the head-stone were inscribed these words:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF HUGH POLWHEAL,  
AGED 26 YEARS. HE MET WITH HIS DEATH THROUGH  
THE FALL OF A ROCK IN PORTHGENNA MINE, DE-  
CEMBER 17TH, 1823.

Sarah gathered a few leaves of grass from the grave. Then she said,

“God help and forgive me — it is all done and over now!”<sup>1</sup>”

With those words she turned her back on the old house, and followed the moorland path.

Four hours afterward Captain Treverton desired one of the servants at Porthgenna Tower to inform Sarah Leeson that he wished to hear everything about the dying moments of her mistress. The messenger returned with the letter in his hand.

Captain Treverton read the letter, and ordered an immediate search after the missing woman. She was so easy to describe and

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<sup>1</sup> it is all done and over now! — теперь всему конец!

to recognize, by the premature grayness of her hair, by the odd, scared look in her eyes, that she was traced as far as Truro. In that large town the track of her was lost, and never recovered again.

Nothing explained the nature of the secret at which she hinted in her letter. Her master never saw her again, never heard of her again, after the morning of the twenty-third of August, eighteen hundred and twenty-nine.

## CHAPTER IV

The church of Long Beckley is not very remarkable. The large open space around the church can be approached in three different directions. There is a road from the village, there is a broad gravel walk, which begins at the vicarage gates, and there is a footpath over the fields.

One day three conspirators were advancing along the footpath. The leader of this party was an elderly gentleman, with a weather-beaten<sup>1</sup> face and a bluff, hearty manner. His two followers were a young gentleman and a young lady. They were talking together in whispers. They were dressed in the morning costume. The faces of both were rather pale.

The young man was blind. Soon the blind man and the young lady were standing together before the altar rails. They were ready to marry.

Soon the ceremony was concluded. Doctor Chennery went to the vicarage breakfast-table. The persons assembled at the breakfast were, first, Mr. Phippen, a guest; secondly, Miss Sturch, a governess; thirdly, fourthly, and fifthly, Miss Louisa Chennery (aged eleven years), Miss Amelia Chennery (aged nine years), and Master Robert Chennery (aged eight years). There was no mother; Doctor Chennery was a widower.

The guest was an old college acquaintance of the vicar's. He was staying at Long Beckley for the benefit of his health. He was not a handsome man. His eyes were watery, large, and light gray. They were always rolling from side to side in a state of

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<sup>1</sup> **weather-beaten** — обветренный

moist admiration of something or somebody. His nose was long and drooping. His lips had a lachrymose twist; his stature was small; his head large, bald, and loosely set on his shoulders. Such was Mr. Phippen, the Martyr to Dyspepsia, and the guest of the vicar of Long Beckley.

Miss Sturch, the governess, was a young lady. She was a little, plump, quiet, white-skinned, smiling, neatly dressed girl. Miss Sturch never laughed, and never cried, but she was smiling perpetually.

Miss Sturch's pupils were not remarkable at all. Miss Louisa's habitual weakness was an inveterate tendency to catch cold<sup>1</sup>. Miss Amelia's principal defect was a disposition to eat supplementary dinners and breakfasts. Master Robert was famous for his obtuseness in learning the Multiplication Table. The virtues of all three were of much the same nature — they were genuine children, and they loved Miss Sturch.

Let us describe the vicar himself. Doctor Chennery was the best bowler in the Long Beckley cricket-club. He was a strictly orthodox man in the matter of wine and mutton. He never started disagreeable theories about people's future destinies in the pulpit. He never quarreled with anybody out of the pulpit. In short, he was the most unclerical of clergymen.

As soon as the vicar entered the parlor, the children assailed him with a chorus of shouts.

"I'm sorry. I'm late, Miss Sturch," said the vicar; "but I have a good excuse."

"Pray don't mention it, Sir," said Miss Sturch. "A beautiful morning. I fear we shall have another warm day. Robert, my love, your elbow is on the table. A beautiful morning, indeed!"

"Guess why I am late this morning," said the vicar.

"You were lying in bed, papa," cried the three children.

"What do you say, Miss Sturch?" asked Doctor Chennery.

Miss Sturch smiled as usual, rubbed her hands as usual, cleared her throat softly as usual, and excused.

"Phippen," said the vicar. "Come, guess!"

"My dear friend," said Mr. Phippen, "don't ask me to guess — I know! I saw what you were eating at dinner yesterday.

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<sup>1</sup> to catch cold — простужаться