

“All Soul’s Eve” by Ellen Price Wood

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A **LITERARY GOTHIC** etext.

I.

ONE of the pleasantest spots in that part of France is the little commune of St. Eloi, so named after its church. It lies in the north, not many miles from Calais. One summer's day, years ago, two strange ladies were set down by the morning diligence at its only inn, or auberge, over whose door was written, Ici on loge à pied et à cheval.

The landlady came forward, in a blue petticoat and white braces; sabots on her feet and a long broom in her hand. “What did mesdames please to require?”

“Nous êtes viens—tell her, Clara—pour avoir trouver some apartments,” began the elder lady, in a tumult of confusion.

“Mesdames sont Anglaises?” interrupted the woman.

“Oui,” hastily answered the elder lady; “that is, Irlandaises—it's all the same—and nous besoin des appartements. Vous comprends? Why don't you explain, Clara, standing there as silent as a post?”

“Dear mamma, if you will allow me a moment to speak.” And the young lady explained, in perfect French, that her mother, being in delicate health, required quiet, pure country air, and pure country milk; and that a friend had recommended St. Eloi. Could the landlady tell them of apartments?

“Never was asked for such a thing before,” responded the hostess. But at that moment a very handsome young man, tall and slender, rode up, sprang from his horse, tossed the bridle to the landlady, and spoke.

“I'll leave him here for five minutes, dame. Just put him in the stable as he is: while I go into Duterte's on an errand for my mother.”

“Master Francis,” cried the landlady, “these good English ladies want apartments. Do you believe there is such a thing to be had?”

The young man raised his hat to the ladies. “Could he have the honour of being of service to them?”

“Tell him, Clara—I can see he is a gentleman—he may be of more use to us than that ill-dressed landlady,” cried Mrs. Fitzgerald. And the young lady, blushing, proceeded to do so.

The young man considered. “Truly, I don't know,” he said. “I fear—— This spot is so very small and retired, you see, that visitors rarely come to it, consequently no accommodation has ever been provided. Let me see—Madame Coe has a commodious house: what do you think of la mère Coe, dame?” turning to the landlady.

“Well, you have a talent for getting out of difficulties, Master Francis! Mother Coe has done nothing but grumble at the loneliness of her big house, since her daughters married, and at the easy life Babette leads of it. She might like some one in it for company. Suppose you were to go and see, Master Francis?”

“What a civil, gentlemanly young man!” exclaimed the lady, looking after him as he moved away. “I always took young Frenchmen to be nothing but monkeys. Ask who he is, Clara?”

He was the young gentleman at the château, the landlady answered, François Latange, and owned a good bit of property in the commune—that is, his father did. Monsieur Latange was very old now, turned seventy, and sat in the chimney-corner all day, sucking tablettes. Madame Latange was not fifty yet; a scolding, never-quiet dame, who ruled despotically the house, and the village, and especially Master Francis. He was the only child, heir to all; but madame had a niece who lived with her, Mademoiselle Anastasie, a demoiselle of six-and-twenty with a vinegar face and a cherry-coloured coiffure, who looked after the kitchen sharper than madame did, and scolded the servants twice to her once. Master Francis was betrothed to Mademoiselle Anastasie, and they were to be married when he was twenty-one: that would be in another year. The landlady *hoped* it would be a prosperous ménage: madame had brought it all about: but some people had a notion that Master Francis was too fond of admiring pretty faces to put up exclusively with the plain one of Mademoiselle Anastasie.

She was interrupted by the return of Master Francis himself. He had seen Madame Coe (except in conversations of ceremony, like the present, that gentlewoman was familiarly styled la mère Coe), and thought matters might be arranged. Would the ladies allow him the honour of escorting them to her house?

Matters were arranged. Madame Coe was not less pleased to have her solitary rooms occupied, and to afford an increase of employment to her lazy maid Babette, than the ladies were to agree to her very reasonable terms. And in a few days they arrived finally with their luggage from Calais, and took up their abode in St. Eloi.

It was quite an event to the village, and everyone fell in love with Clara, who really was a very lovable young lady, with her charming beauty and her modest manners. Mrs. Fitzgerald at times got laughed at, and that was when she insisted on plunging wholesale into French. At first, a few styled them "English heretics," but they proved to be staunch Roman Catholics, with not a taint of heresy about them. Madame Latange did not take quite kindly to them. She hated and despised the English. But she condescendingly invited them to spend an occasional day at the château, where Clara had to make friends with Mademoiselle Anastasie. Master Francis and Miss Clara got on very well together. But we are coming to that by-and-by.

II.

THE time arrived for the tirage-au-sort of that year for the department of the Pas-de-Calais. Every French male subject, on approaching his twenty-first year, has to draw lots whether he shall be a soldier or not. There is no exception: the prince's son and the beggar's must alike hazard their chance. But when once the drawing is over, the equality ends; for while the poor, if they fall, have no chance but to serve; the rich, should they have been unlucky, provide a substitute.

Heavily rose the morning, and heavily rose the hearts in St. Eloi, on the day fixed for the tirage. Many a mother, sick with anxious suspense, saw her boy depart for Calais, with a wailing prayer to the Virgin that a high number might fall to him. They were mostly peasants' sons who went from St. Eloi; and they started to walk, in their clean blue blouses and greased Sunday shoes; started with heavy steps and still more heavy hearts: but Master Francis Latange, for *his* time had now come, rode forth from his father's house, well mounted, followed by his servant. It may indeed be said that what was as death to them was sport to him. Suppose he did fall? Well, what of that? a substitute was ready. Twenty substitutes had he needed them.

As he came to la mere Coe's house, he looked up at certain of its windows. A young, anxious face was at one of them; and Master Francis leapt off his horse; which Paul, the groom, rode up and held.

"Just a word, Clare, my dearest," he said, as he entered, "to bid me God-speed."

“Now why did you come in, Francis?” she asked, in quite a cold sort of voice, though she was trembling with delight. “It is wrong.”

“Bah, Clare! I know now who it was that busied herself to tell you that rubbish about my mother. It came through that interesting cousin of mine, Mademoiselle Anastasie.”

“It is of no consequence who it was, Francis. If—if—it is really so” – Clara seemed to hesitate for words—“that Madame Latange forbids your visits here, we cannot continue to receive you.”

“We'll talk of that another time: my horse won't stand. Farewell, my love,” he whispered, snatching also another sort of farewell. “There, Clare, my own! that's what I came in for.”

He was outside almost as he spoke, vaulting on his horse, and the blushing face of Clara peeped again from the window. He detected it, hidden though it nearly was by the curtain, and he smiled and bowed gallantly, riding away bareheaded till he was beyond her view.

“I wouldn't give my old clay pipe for Mam'selle Anastasie's chance now,” cogitated old Paul, shrewdly, as he trotted after his young master. “But I'm not going to split upon him to madame.”

Ah! those anxious hearts, those anxious faces, standing, that afternoon, at their cottage doors! The day had turned out wretchedly cold, and pouring with rain. Francis Latange was back early.

“Oh, Master Francis,” cried a woman, from the first door he came to, “what about my poor boy? His number—”

“First-rate, Mother Gris,” interrupted the young man cheerily, riding on without stopping. “Ninety-six, I think.”

“Thank the good God!” murmured the mother, falling upon her knees on the threshold, and drawing out her beads.

“Master Francis—a moment, sir!” implored an aged man, staggering across the road. “Has my grandson fallen?”

“I cannot tell you, Joseph,” answered the young horseman, in a kindly tone; doubly kind, because he knew the news that was in store for the poor old man. “I did not get at all the numbers, you know.”

“I feel he is down,” moaned the old man, “though you won't tell it me, sir. Who is to work for me, in my years, when Jean shall be gone! His brother does nothing for me.”

“Don't meet sorrow half-way, my poor Joseph. You shan't want a crust and a roof, even if Jean can has to go.”

“The saints protect him for a kind heart!” muttered the aged man, gazing after the horseman. “But—oh, Mother of Mercy, help me and my poor boy! I know he has fallen.”

Mrs. Fitzgerald saw Master Francis coming, and threw her window up. “What speed?” she called out, as Clara glided to her side.

“Tombé.” replied the young man, partly checking his horse; “my number was seventeen. So I can go for a soldier, now, as soon as I please.” And Clara's very lips turned white as he cantered on.

The next morning, as Clara was making the breakfast, Madame Coe came in. “I have news to tell you, Miss Clare,” she began, “and I'll tell it before madame your mamma comes down—I know I did not want my mother to ferret into my private affairs when I was a demoiselle. There was a great dispute up at the château last night.”

“A dispute!” repeated Clara.

“Between Master Francis and his mother. Mam'selle Adèle, who was up there yesterday doing some dress-making, told me. It seems they were talking about the substitute for Master Francis, and that brought up other matters. Madame began to speak of his marriage, and Master Francis stopped her, quite carelessly like, and said he did not intend to carry out the marriage, for he thought he and Mam'selle Anastasie would not suit each other.”

Clara changed colour. “And the joke of it was, that Mam'selle Anastasie had got her ear to the partition, along with mam'selle and heard it,” continued the Mother Coe, in perfect glee. “Then madame set-to, and wrangled with him; and Master Francis brought out that he liked somebody else better—and of course, my dear, *we* know who that is. Upon which madame's rage ran sky high, and she gave him a flat box on both his ears. He is to serve his seven years. Madame will not buy him a substitute. In her passion she swore it.”

“But his father?” Clara shivered, much shocked and bewildered.

“His father! My dear, you might as well speak of a block of wood. Whatever madame decrees, is law. She tamed the spirit out of her old husband years ago.”

“But the property is his—the estate, the money; it is not hers.”

“Just as much his as it is mine, for any manner of use,” persisted Dame Coe. “He dare not ask for a sou, that old man, and he never has one. He might as well ask madame for her head as for money to buy his son off, unless she chose to give it. No, Miss Clara. Femme Latange has not sworn to many things in her life, but she has to this. Poor Master Francis must serve.”

Mademoiselle Adele's report was substantially correct. Master Francis had declined to marry Mam'selle Anastasie, and when his mother defiantly urged the contract, he said the contract might go and be hanged—to speak politely. So then she boxed his ears. Upon which, Master Francis, his cheeks tingling with pain, and himself with anger, boldly avowed there was only one woman in the world should call him husband, and that was Clara Fitzgerald. Madame danced about the room with rage, and finally fell on her knees and *swore* that he should serve his seven years as a soldier; she would find him no substitute. At the end of that period he would come back glad enough to take to himself his deserving cousin Anastasie.

Oh, he would serve, Francis replied with bravado, and glad to do so; anything to get away from home tyranny. But he thought Mademoiselle Anastasie need not trouble herself to wait for him.

Everyone said that before the time came for the calling out of the new recruits, madame would grow cool and reasonable: she never would permit her fine son, of whom she was so proud, to serve as a soldier. It is probable that these were precisely madame's own intentions. But one early day, long before madame or St. Eloi expected it, an order descended on the village like a clap of thunder. The new recruits were to join forthwith: *for war had broken out with Russia.*

War! Francis Latange to go forth and be shot at: Madame came to her senses at once: and she ordered the horses to the lumbering, window-rattling old family coach, that she might jog off to Calais to see about the substitute.

“Spare yourself the trouble, mother,” said Francis. “I shall serve my time.”

“We are at war,” shrieked madame. “You'll get killed.”

“I dare say I shall. And not be sorry, either. Anything for a quiet life. You might have purchased a substitute *before* the war broke out, but none shall say that Francis Latange shirked his duty now.”

“The grief will kill me,” wailed madame.

“Oh no, it won't,” returned Francis. “You and Mam'selle Anastasie will just go on as much alive as ever, looking after the eggs, and blowing up the servants.”

Madame melted into tears. “Francis, you are ungrateful. Won't you reflect that you are very dear to me: the day-star of my life, the apple of my eye?”

“Well, mother, you have taken the wrong way to show it; treating me as a child, and magging the peace out of me.”

“I *will* get you a substitute, my son,” she passionately broke forth. “Or, if you must go to the war, you shall have your commission.”

“Listen, mother,” he answered. “You have suffered my name to stand enrolled, these many weeks, as one of the ranks, and as such I will serve. Do you fear I am a coward? Would I like the reproach of being one cast at me?”

The village all turned out to see the recruits depart; there was not a dry eye in it. Francis Latange went with the rest, and his mother flung herself down on her knees in the mud of the road, to pray the Virgin for his safe return. Mam'selle Anastasie was behind her, also on her knees, telling her beads. This was nothing extraordinary for that moment of painful emotion at St. Eloi.

Francis had stolen a meeting with Clara Fitzgerald the evening before. He had not seen much of her lately; for Clara had refused to meet him in opposition to his mother. But now that he was going away, perhaps for ever, she was as anxious as he for a parting interview. She had learnt to love him deeply, passionately; and when the last moment of farewell came, her anguish rose in convulsive sobs.

“Do not grieve so, Clara,” he whispered, fondly laying her head upon his shoulder. “I may be back sooner than you think. If the war should abruptly end, as many prophesy it will, they may then send a

substitute for me, and I will come home. But rest assured of one thing, Clara: that when I do come, be it sooner or later, it shall be to win you for my wife. God protect you, my love, for ever and for ever.”

But the war did not come to an end, and the months dragged themselves slowly on. A letter now and then found its way from Francis to his father, and to Clara Fitzgerald. These letters gave the leading incidents in the progress of the allied armies, the landing in the Crimea, the battle of the Alma, and the long and terrible siege of Sebastopol. The summer of 1855 came round, and the troops were still *before* Sebastopol, not in it.

It would really seem, at least it did to the village, that Mrs. Fitzgerald was going to be a fixture at St. Eloi. But Mrs. Fitzgerald was not rich, and she was unwilling to quit a locality where she saved no inconsiderable portion of her income. With the exception of a week or two's absence occasionally, she had now been two years at St. Eloi.

July came in; and with it the news of the disastrous battle of the 17th and 18th of June before Sebastopol, when the allied armies were repulsed in their attempt to take the Malakhof and the Redan. It was rumoured that the loss of the French was frightful, and St. Eloi trembled for the safety of its children. But they had to wait many days yet for the details and the names of the fallen.

The official returns came at last, and Monsieur le Commissaire de Police, who in his own august person did duty for the maire, préfet, and the rest of the authorities in a larger town, stood in his bureau, ready to read over the list of the slain. The poor villagers were crowding in: those who had relatives at the war in dread fear, those who had not, from sympathy and curiosity. The Commissaire was opening his mouth to begin, when a movement amongst his audience took place; they were pushing each other back, treading on toes, and humbly squeezing themselves into nothing, to make way for a feeble old gentleman who was entering. It was Monsieur Latange. He had actually come out of his chimney-corner, and walked down from his château. Monsieur le Commissaire stepped forth, bowing, from behind his desk, and installed his guest in his own office-chair.

“Attention!” shouted the Commissaire. And he proceeded to read out the list in his most official voice.

“For the commune of St. Eloi. Return of those killed in the engagement of the 18th of June, before Sebastopol:

“Jean-Marie Dubuis.

“Robert Eloi Hans.

“Paul Vanderwelde.

“François Latange.’

“C’est tout, mes amis, grâce à Dieu!” concluded the Commissaire, taking off his spectacles.

There was a moment of dead silence, and then a burst of sobs and smothered cries arose from the listeners, in the midst of which the poor old Proprietor fell heavily from his chair. They picked him up, and M. le Commissaire went to the pump, in the yard behind his bureau, and fetched some water. It restored him: but the hope of his old age was gone. Père Latange had truly loved his son.

Madame Latange was a changed woman from that day. It was not only her happiness, but the *pride* of her existence, that had left her with her son's life. She never knew until now how entirely her hopes had been concentrated in that son's future. Madame spent a little fortune in masses for his soul—for which the priests prayed their best. And she ordered a handsome tombstone to be placed in the cemetery to his memory. Mademoiselle Anastasie consoled herself by accepting the addresses of a neighbouring farmer: who, having become possessed of the notion that she would now be the inheritor, had hastened to offer them.

But the grief of Clara Fitzgerald! None saw its outward signs, save in her now invariably languid manner and pallid cheek. Babette set that down to her mother's illness. For Mrs. Fitzgerald had been seized with rheumatic-fever; and lay a martyr to suffering and fractiousness. And the weeks flew on again.

III.

BOOM! boom! boom! The heavy bell of St. Eloi's Church, never heard but on state occasions, or when a fire happened in the commune, suddenly tolled out at evening twilight. Boom! boom! boom!

Clara started in nervousness from the chair she occupied in Babette's kitchen. Anxiety on her mother's account, combined with her own secret sorrow, was beginning to tell on her nerves and health.

"Babette! hark! It must be a fire."

"Sit yourself down again, Miss Clare, and look to your saucepan," responded Babette. "You are forgetting the fête of to-morrow: All Saints' Day. The bell's thundering out for that."

Clara resumed her place on the wooden chair by the stove, and went on stirring the arrowroot in the saucepan. Mrs. Fitzgerald, more peevish than ever, now she was recovering, fancied none of these messes, unless they were prepared by her daughter. So Clara made frequent visits to Babette's kitchen, to the complete satisfaction of that valuable domestic, who invariably treated her to a dish of gossip.

"My faith! isn't la patronne going to be smart tomorrow!" she began, in a half-whisper, jerking her head in the direction of Madame Coe's salle-à-manger, where that lady was snugly ensconced, her feet and her petticoats over an open charcoal chauffrette. "She has been having her purple velvet bonnet done up with green ribbons and grapes, and she has a new cloth mantle; one of those round grey things just come up. What are you going to wear new tomorrow, Miss Clare?"

"I?" answered Clara, languidly. "Nothing."

"Nothing!" retorted Babette. "But you are going to church?"

"Of course," answered the young lady.

"And as if folks went there in old clothes tomorrow! I wouldn't show my face at church on All Saints' Day in a cap I had worn before, if I knew I should get a sweetheart by it. You have not been here on the First of November, Miss Clare?"

"No, we have been in England both years. Mamma receives her rents then. I have never been in France on the day of All Saints."

"Then it's kept in this village, I can tell you, mademoiselle! The grand bell, that's stunning us now, begins at five in the morning, and never leaves off all day. And the church is kept open till ten at night. You should see the candles that are burnt in it after dark. Hundreds of them."

"Why, yes!" interrupted Clara, in sudden recollection; "to-morrow night is the Eve of All Souls! The night when we pray for the dead!"

"And wherever were your wits, mademoiselle, that you have only just thought of that?" asked Babette, with that familiarity of manner characteristic of French servants: who, however, with all their freedom of speech, do not lose sight of respect.

"Is it the custom here to kneel in the cemetery and pray on the Day of the Dead?" questioned Clara.

"I should think it is the custom everywhere," answered Babette, indignation in her tone at the superfluous question. "Dry or wet, we all go, if we have any dead to pray for; and those who've not go for company. That arrowroot's thickening, Miss Clare."

"Do you go, Babette?"

"What should hinder me?" asked Babette. "And la patronne," with another jerk of the head towards the salle-à-manger, "gives me two hours to-morrow afternoon for church. But there's one thing I would not do, mademoiselle; and that is, go out to pray to-morrow night."

"Why not?" asked Clara.

"Catch me stirring abroad after dark on All Souls' Eve! Why, you know, Miss Clare, that the spirits come out of purgatory then, and appear to you."

"Superstitious people say so, Babette. But it is not true."

"Oh, well—if you know better than those who have seen them. *I have seen them*," concluded Babette, resolutely.

"You may have fancied so."

"I saw my sister's husband. She, hard-hearted creature! had got married again, so, of course, it was no use its appearing to *her*. I was scuttering along in the dark to the church—it's six years ago this same blessed November—and there I beheld something without form, a fluttering of wings like, just before me, high in the air. I knew it was my poor brother- in-law's soul, released for that night out of purgatory, and I fell flat down on my face in a pool of water, and never dared to get up again till some passers-by led me home. You may well fancy, mademoiselle, that I have not put myself outside the door since on All Souls' Eve. But oh, my heart, Miss Clare! have you heard what Madame Latange is going to do?"

"No," answered Clara, rousing up at the name.

"Master Francis's tombstone is completed, and in the cemetery. The most superb slab, they say: a white urn, a willow on black marble that you may see your face in, and gold letters for the inscription. It must have cost money, though, that tablet."

The spoon had dropped into the arrowroot, and lay there. Babette's voice fell to a still lower key.

"She is going to church to-morrow night at seven, and when the candles are burnt out—she's to have some dozens, they say, all alight together—she goes off straight to the cemetery, to pray over this new stone. She *is*, Miss Clare."

"But it is not the custom to pray in the cemetery to-morrow night," debated the young lady, forgetting the spoon and the arrowroot.

"Never was yet," responded Babette. "But madame lays his death at her own door, and she thinks to expiate some of his time in purgatory, poor young gentleman, by praying-in the Day of the Dead. She'll kneel in the cemetery until the clocks have told midnight."

"All alone?" shivered Clara.

"Not she. Plenty of commères will go with her for the novelty of the thing. I wouldn't be one: and risk seeing his spirit—which is certain to appear. Do you notice how thin she's grown?"

Clara replied by a faint moan. Her face was hidden in her hands.

"She's like a shadow, compared with what she was when Master Francis was at home; and as to her dead-alive old husband—— There's your arrow-root all gone, Miss Clare!" screamed out Babette, by way of conclusion. "And *now* you must begin some more! I'll put on a handful of braises and get up the fire."

All Saints' Day is the greatest religious fête, excepting Easter, in the Catholic calendar. The church decorations, the music, the rich robes of the priests, and the brilliancy of the ladies' toilets, are perfect on the fête of Toussaint. A strange contrast does the following day present, All Souls'; or, as the French emphatically express it, the Jour des Morts. There are no gaudy colours in dress then; no decorations. The world attires itself in sombre black; the glittering tints in the priests' robes are replaced by black and white; the church is hung with black, and nothing meets the eye, within it, but deaths' heads, and cross-bones, and skulls elevated on poles; whilst in the bowed, craped heads of the hushed congregation you behold real mourners. People in the large towns do not go to the cemetery, to kneel on the damp earth and pray, quite so universally as they once did; but in the small rural communes, such as St. Eloi, none omit it. The superstition, that the souls of the deceased come out of purgatory after dark on All Souls' Eve and hover in the air, waiting to appear to any of their relatives who may venture abroad, is most religiously believed by the lower orders; and by a good many of their betters also. The supposed object of their appearing is to remind these their relatives to pray for them on the Jour des Morts: and with the first glimmer of that sombre day's dawn, the poor spirits wing their flight back to purgatory.

IV.

ALL SAINTS' DAY at last! and a very fine one. It was to be an eventful day, take it for all in all. Breakfast over, Clara left her mother to the care of the French nurse and prepared to go out.

"Have you seen her, Miss Clare?" whispered Babette, as she traversed the passage to open the house-door for the young lady.

"Seen whom?"

“La patronne,” answered Babette, with one of her favourite side-nods towards the staircase. “She’ll be down by-and-by, as fine as an empress, in her brown satin gown; and she’s putting white net sleeves over her old wrists, and there’s a pair of straw-coloured gloves lying on the commode by her bonnet and new cloak. Won’t some cats have tails!”

“Open the door, Babette. I shall be late at mass.”

“Not so late as she’ll be. When she comes out en grande tenue, she’s always an hour at her toilet. But for the love of all the saints, mademoiselle,” continued the unceremonious Babette, running her eyes over Clara, “why did you keep on your old mourning today? And all the commune so elegant!—and you with those lovely dresses in your garde-robe! I’m sure that uncle of madame your mamma’s has had the mourning worn for him these six months. It’s getting to look quite rusty.”

“Oh, what matters it—black or white?” uttered Clara, the grieved feeling in her heart finding vent, as the woman spoke about *mourning*. “Don’t keep me here, Babette. I want to go.”

Babette moved her back from against the door; and Clara, passing out, found herself face to face with Madame Latange, with whom she had held no intercourse since the departure of Francis. She would willingly have shrunk away now, but Babette had shut the door.

“Don’t look so scared, young lady,” said the latter, in a kindly tone, to Clara’s very great astonishment. “I am not going to reproach you. *He* is gone; and to indulge ill-feeling will not bring him back again. Perhaps I might have liked you better, but you see I had set my mind on his marrying Anastasie. She was just the wife for him, for she would have kept the château together, and things in the kitchen from going to rack and ruin, and checked Francis in his generous fits.”

Madame paused, but Clara did not answer

“She has been ungrateful, has Anastasie. Actually gone and promised to marry a man who is at mortal enmity with me—Farmer Brun. He won a lawsuit from me last year. Since then, my dear, it has crossed my mind that you might have made him as good a wife as she; so let us be friends. We’ll go to mass together.”

Clara went. Walking into church side by side with madame, to the wondering astonishment of all the gazers in it.

“Mother,” said Clara, as she sat by her mother’s bedside that evening, when the shades of night were gathering, “you have no objection to my accompanying Madame Latange to pray to-night?”

“Madame Latange!”

“I told you, dear mother, I met her this morning, and how pleasant she was. She is coming to see you, when to-morrow is over.”

“What good’s Madame Latange to do me?” querulously interrupted Mrs. Fitzgerald. “I don’t like her. Breaking off her acquaintance with us, as she did, without reason!”

“She goes to-night to pray for her son; in the church and at his tombstone. May I make one of those who join her?”

“What, in the cemetery? Nonsense. You’ll catch your death.”

“Oh no, I shall be well wrapped up. We knew poor Francis” – Clara’s voice trembled. “Let me make one to pray for the repose of his soul.”

“I don’t see why its repose need trouble you,” returned Mrs. Fitzgerald. “Quite the contrary. I had used to think he was inclined to flirt with you, and that you encouraged him. There’s nothing so unladylike for a young girl as flirting, Clara.”

“Well, mamma, you will not have that to complain of again,” sighed Clara. “I may go with madame?”

“Now, I don’t want to be teased. My arms are in excruciating pain, and it’s nothing to me whether you go or not. But if you catch rheumatic-fever in the cemetery, there’ll be nobody to nurse you, recollect.”

A goodly company of commères, as Babette had expressed it, went forth that night with Madame Latange. The great bell boomed out incessantly: the church was crowded with devout groups, bowed in silence before their many candles, the grease from which guttered down on the stone floor; and the priests,

for the last time that long day, sang over their monotonous chants. A little before nine, the last candle offered up by Madame Latange had expired.

The cemetery lay beyond the village. It was a dreary walk to it at all times, between the two straight rows of poplars. The stout hearts of some of the commères failed; and they turned home on leaving the church. Mademoiselle Anastasie, who was a very coward, had been brought by her aunt against her will.

“For the love of Heaven, don't go, my aunt,” she implored, with chattering teeth; “wait till daylight. The shades will have returned to purgatory then, and we can all join you, and pray in peace. Should *he* appear to us, I should just die of fright.”

Madame Latange's only answer was the taking of Mam'selle Anastasie by the arm, and marching her off towards the cemetery. Her serving man, Paul, walked first with a blazing torch, and the group of courageous commères huddled close behind, holding on to one another.

“But is madame herself not afraid to behold the spirit of poor Master Francis?” ventured Paul, who by no means admired the position assigned him in the march.

“My eyes have ached to see him so long that they would rejoice in the sight,” replied his mistress, with valiance.

“Igh!—igh!—igh!” burst out Mam'selle Anastasie, in a succession of shrill screams. “What's that looking over the hedge?”

Considerable confusion ensued. Cries of horror. Everyone laying hold of everyone else's clothes.

“I tell you what it is, ladies,” said the unfortunate torchbearer, standing stock still, “if you are to frighten one like this, I can't go on in advance. Madame must forgive me when I say I'd rather lose my place first.”

“Courage,” commanded Madame Latange. “If you all walk linked, and bend your eyes on the ground, there'll be no danger of seeing anything. As for Mademoiselle Anastasie, should she frighten us again, I shall leave her in the hedge by herself till we come back.”

The threat imposed silence on Mademoiselle Anastasie, and the procession resumed its march. It came to the gate of the cemetery, and bore on through its cold grass to the corner, where stood the tablet to the memory of Francis Latange.

It was a handsome erection of black marble: a white urn and drooping willow carved on it.

Francois Latange,

Fils unique de Pierre Latange et de Francoise de Brie.

Tué devant Sébastopol le 18 de Juin, 1855, âgé de 22 ans.

Priez pour lui.

They sank on their knees around the stone, and the sobs of the *mother* broke forth aloud. Clara Fitzgerald's head was pressed on the cold marble, her grief was silent; but many wept in concert with madame. And so they knelt, and sobbed, and prayed, their faces hidden: a strange group to look on, in that dark night, in that lonely graveyard!

Paul's torch was coming to an end. Rising, he proceeded to light another. This little diversion caused la mère Coe to look up. Being middle-aged and stout, she was getting tired of her kneeling position. The cramp was coming into her legs.

A hideous shriek! an unearthly howl! and Madame Coe, from whom they proceeded, flung her arms round the legs of the startled Paul, and buried her face against them, and howled interminably. Whatever had taken la mère Coe?

“There he is! his own spectre!” she burst forth, her voice shrill with terror. “I knew it would appear.”

Paul raised his torch; the unhappy devotees looked as high in the air as its light would allow. Standing close by his own tombstone, his head bending forward as if to read its inscription, was the spectre of Francis Latange. Thin, worn, his cheeks pale, his eyes sunk, there it was, with only one arm, and in a faded old suit of regimentals. No doubt the clothes he had died in.

What had been the screams of the Mother Coe to those which now ensued? Not a saint in the calendar but was invoked with every variety of terrified aspiration; and the wretched group started to their feet and rushed away, pell-mell, out of the haunted cemetery. Paul, dropping his torch, and ungallantly shaking off the ladies, flew off in front; the ghost went after them; some choking, some praying, and the rest yelling. The noise penetrated nearly all the way to St. Eloi.

Clara Fitzgerald did not fly with the rest. In rising, her foot caught in a tuft of grass, and she was thrown heavily down again. Her companions were then at a distance, and she remained, clasping the marble stone, overcome with faintness and extremity of terror. The ghost came striding back again, in very unghostly fashion. It took up the flickering torch, and held it to her face.

“Clare,” it gently said—and, with the words, Clara began to suspect it was no ghost, but real flesh and blood—“do I frighten *you*?”

But she was too terrified still to answer: and her teeth chattered, and her frame shook.

“I have still one arm left,” he said, digging the torch in the earth, so that it still gave its light, and passing his arm round Clara. “Those terrified women must have taken me for my own spectre, for I see you have my death recorded here. Some mistake in the returns.”

“But is it really you?” she said, bursting into tears. “We thought you were dead.”

“So I was nearly, Clare. They took me up for dead last June, in the storming of the Malakhof. I have come home to recruit my strength, come home for good: a one-armed man is useless as a soldier. Perhaps you too will reject me now.”

Her tears flowed on. Delicious tears!

“Oh, Clare,” he whispered, as he held her to him, “though I have only one arm left, it shall be found powerful to protect you through life—my cherished wife. I said I would come home to you, my darling. None knew the fervent prayer I offered up for it, save God. He heard and blessed it.”

“But did you drop from the clouds?” demanded Madame Latange, in the midst of her tears, when Francis got home.

“No, mother, I dropped from the diligence. We were invalided home, *via* Marseilles, and I reached Calais to-day. There I got a banquette place in the six-o'clock diligence. The first face I saw here was Père Duterte's; when he recovered from his wonder, he volunteered the information that a company had just started to pray for me in the cemetery. So I thought I'd go after it, and send Duterte up here first to break the news to my father. How you all screamed!”

“But you are so piteously thin and ill, Francis! And your one arm! It is dreadful!”

“Never mind, mother. I shall get strong again. And for my lost arm—it might have been worse.”

“François, mon cher,” uttered the old man, with imploring eyes, “you will not go away again?”

“Never, father. I have sown my wild oats, and have come home to settle. If my mother will allow me.”

“Yes, I will, my son,” she replied, with a pointed meaning in her tone. “Mademoiselle Anastasie's going to settle herself also, Francis. With Farmer Brun.”

“It is not fixed; there's nothing decided; I'm not obliged to have him, now my cousin is come home,” eagerly interrupted Mademoiselle Anastasie. “And I think Farmer Brun an old bear.”

“You should have discovered that before,” said Madame Latange.

“*She* will make you a dutiful daughter, mother dear,” whispered Francis, “though she is an English girl. Will you not try her?”

“I suppose I shall have to do so, my son. You may go to-morrow, with my love, and fetch her to dinner.”

“A nice wife she'll make!” called out Mam'selle Anastasie, red with spite. “She'll never look after the eggs. They'll be half lost—you'll see! And I know she could not make an omelette if she tried.”

“I'll teach her,” said madame.

“Grâce à Dieu!” cried old Pere Latange.

THE END.

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