

DAILY JOURNAL.

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THE DAILY JOURNAL.

WILMINGTON, N. C.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 1867.

"LOVE STRONGER THAN DEATH."

BY R. J. AYLAIR.

"Christmas comes but once a year."

And once a year the old hall is filled from

basement to garret. Once a year old scores

are wiped out, old wounds healed, brothers

become boys again, and the battle of life,

with all its inevitable shortcomings, is for-

gotten. The heart roused which we clas-

sed as a mother's, is at once in an altar upon

which every worldly mistake is sacrificed; and

if we miss some dear face from the

gathering, we feel that, even on earth, we

have had a foretaste of the eternal home to

which we are hastening. So it is that,

year by year, the old house stretches its

sides; and the church roof, which our

forefathers sleep, for she was natively made

for the third and fourth generation. But,

though we miss a face sometimes, we also

often welcome a new one. And at the

Christmas time of which I am going to

write, a brother, after twenty years of exile,

had come back to us, bringing with him

his only child. Ina was a fair Spaniard,

and the prettiest girl I ever saw; her

common beauty, for she was natively unlike

any of our girls, and her quaint ways, took

our hearts by storm at once, and complete-

ly subdued that of Mark Ambery. Now,

though Mark was not, strictly speaking, a

relation, he was a sister's step-son, and

admitted, first for her sake, was speedily

loved for his own. A soldier, and the son

of a soldier, Mark had won honors which,

in our out-of-the-world county, established

him a hero at once, and it was verily be-

lieved that the dear lad was half as much of

the dear lady as of the worship with

which we favored it.

Mark was always at Ina's side; so we all

saw how it would be, and the love-making

gave a new charm to the gathering.

Christmas-eve came; the church had been

decorated, the guests feasted, the

Christmas tree dismantled, and tired of

dancing "Sir Bogan," we were all grouped

about in the dining-room, waiting for mid-

night, when, according to an old custom,

the "devil's knell" was tolled at the church,

and the square dispensed cakes and mulled

ale to all those who came to wish him

and his merry Christmas. My brother

stood upon the bench, watching even to

presently the time-keeper was thrust into

his pocket, and he crossed the room.

There was a general hush. Laughing faces

grew grave. Lips quivered and eyes filled,

for in the silence momentary woke up, and

struck with an alteration; what I could

hardly tell. She had grown handsomer.

Every one saw and said that, and yet no

one hinted at other changes. Yet from the

moment she came up to me, and looked at

me with her great grey wistful eyes, my

heart chilled, and I felt I could not define

what came over me. Nor was my anxiety lessened

when, as we were talking of Mark, Ina

began to cry passionately, and rushed out

of the room. There was something wrong,

and missing her that evening from the

drawing-room, I went to look for her.

Opening the morning-room door, I saw

Ina. She was sitting at the window, but

not alone; a man was beside her. There

was no light save that of the moon, so I did

not recognize him, nor did I try to make

the attempt; to tell the truth, I was indig-

nant with her; and closing the door with a

bang, I marched off to the drawing-room.

People were seated here, there, and every-

where, but I could not make out who it was

with Ina, though I tried hard that night

and the next day to discover who had

made my pet so miserable. We were all

busy that day, Ina as hard at work as any

of us; but when midnight came, with its

bell-ringing and carol singing, I missed

her, and with a feeling I could neither

explain nor explain, I went to the little

room.

There she was, sitting at the window,

and this time the window was open and the

man, for he was there too, was standing by

her, his arm around her. I heard her mur-

mur something in a sobbing voice, and saw

her lift her hands above her head and wring

them. Then, traitor as she was, I could

play the eavesdropper no longer, but hur-

ried away, and when I got to my bedroom

a little later I sat down and cried; of course

it was foolish; what had I, an old maid-

en aunt, to do with the perjured faith of

a heartless girl, or the broken heart of a

too easily duped lover? As I sat there be-

fore the dying fire, with the tears still wet

upon my face, I became conscious of a

sound resembling waves breaking; I list-

ened, the waves' beat grew louder. I could

hear them distinctly, and so too could I

hear the wind and storm howling louder

and louder; it broke against the windows

of my room, nay, in the very room itself.

I shuddered as the blast passed over me; I

felt the cold spray dashing in my face and

grasped the chair as I tried to shriek, to

cover my ears and hide my eyes in the pil-

low, but in vain. I had no choice but to

look upon the stormy sea, where a ship lay

tossing helplessly. I saw the spars washed

overboard. I saw men struggling in the

pitiless waves; the faces and streaming hair

of women and once the white face of a lit-

tle child. Then the darkness became so

intense that only when the lightning

flashed could I distinguish the wreck, al-

though the thunder of the tempest was

curdling my blood. Suddenly the winds

and waters ceased their war, and there

came a calm so deep that I heard every

throb of my heart; and as I sat wondering

what was coming, a gentle wind rushed

past me, a hand touched my face and Mark

Ambery's voice cried, "Comfort Ina."

I had been that I assumed to mean for

recovered consciousness the fire and can-

dles were out, and the dull grey morning

was shining into the room. Gradually I

began to collect my thoughts, and as I un-

deressed myself and crept into bed, a feel-

ing of horror settled down upon me. I had

never been a believer in the supernatural,

and now I tried hard to convince myself that

I had been dreaming. I was determined

to treat it as a dream, and, laughing at my

folly, persistently kept down my fears,

leaving next day, without saying a word to

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