The Gypsy Queen's Vow
VOL.I

By
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Freeditorial

THE GYPSY QUEEN'S VOW

CHAPTER I

NIGHT AND STORM

"The night grows wondrous dark; deep-swelling gusts
And sultry stillness take the rule by turn,
While o'er our heads the black and heavy clouds
Roll slowly on. This surely bodes a storm."
Baillie.

Overhead, the storm-clouds were scudding wildly across the sky, until all above was one dense pall of impenetrable gloom. A chill, penetrating rain was falling, and the wind came sweeping in long, fitful gustspiercingly cold; for it was a night in March.

It was the north road to London. A thick, yellow fog, that had been rising all day from the bosom of the Thames, wrapped the great city in a blackness that might almost be felt; and its innumerable lights were shrouded in the deep gloom. Yet the solitary figure, flitting through the pelting rain and bleak wind, strained her eyes as she fled along, as though, despite the more than Egyptian darkness, she would force, by her fierce, steady glare, the obscure lights of the city to show themselves.

The night lingered and lingered, the gloom deepened and deepened, the rain plashed dismally; the wind blew in moaning, lamentable gusts, penetrating through the thick mantle she held closely around her. And still the woman6 fled on, stopping neither for wind, nor rain, nor stormunheeding, unfeeling them allkeeping her fierce, devouring gaze fixed, with a look that might have pierced the very heavens, on the still far-distant city.

There was no one on the road but herself. The lateness of the hourfor it was almost midnightand the increasing storm, kept pedestrians within doors that cheerless March night. Now and then she would pass cottages in which lights were still glaring, but most of the houses were wrapped in silence and darkness.

And still on, through night, and storm, and gloom, fled the wanderer, with the pitiless rain beating in her facethe chill blasts fluttering her thin-worn garments and long, wild, black hair. Still on, pausing not, resting not, never removing her steadfast gaze from the distant citylike a lost soul hurrying to its doom.

Suddenly, above the wailing of the wind and plashing of the rain, arose the thunder of horses' hoofs and the crash of approaching carriage wheels. Rapidly they came on, and the woman paused for a moment and leaned again a cottage porch, as if waiting until it should pass.

A bright light was still burning in the window, and it fell on the lonely wayfarer as she stood, breathing hard and waiting, with burning, feverish impatience, for the carriage to pass. It displayed the form of a woman of forty, or thereabouts, with a tall, towering, commanding figure, gaunt and bony. Her complexion was dark; its naturally swarthy hue having been tanned by sun and wind to a dark-brown. The features were strong, stern, and prominent, yet you could see at a glance that the face had once been a handsome one. Now, howeverthin, haggard, and fleshless, with the high, prominent cheek-bones; the gloomy, overhanging brows; the stern, set, unyielding mouth; the rigid, corrugated brow; the fierce, devouring, maniac, black eyesit looked positively hideous. Such eyes!such burning, blazing orbs of fire, never was seen in human head before! They glowed like two live coals in a bleached skull. There was utter misery, there was despair unspeakable, mingled with fierce determination, in those lurid, flaming eyes. And that dark, stern terrific face was stamped with the unmistakable impress of a despised, degraded race. The woman7 was a gipsy. It needed not her peculiar dress, the costume of her tribe, to tell this, though that was significant enough. Her thick, coarse, jet-black hair, streaked with threads of gray, was pushed impatiently off her face; and her only head-covering was a handkerchief of crimson and black silk knotted under her chin. A cloak, of coarse, red woolen stuff, covered her shoulders, and a dress of the same material, but in color blue, reached hardly to her ankles. The brilliant head-dress, and unique, fiery costume, suited well the dark, fierce, passionate face of the wearer.

For an instant she paused, as if to let the carriage pass; then, as if even the delay of an instant was maddening, she started wildly up, and keeping her hungry, devouring gaze fixed on the vision of the still unseen city, she sped on more rapidly than before.

CHAPTER II

MR TOOSYPEGS

"He bears him like a portly gentleman;
And, to say truth, Vernon brags of him
To be a virtuous and well-governed youth."
Shakspeare.

The vehicle that the gipsy had heard approaching was a light wagon drawn by two swift horses. It had two seats capable of holding four persons, though the front seat alone was now occupied.

The first of these (for his age claims the precedence) was a short, stout, burly, thick-set, little man, buttoned up in a huge great-coat, suffering under a severe eruption of capes and pockets. An immense fur cap, that, by its antediluvian looks, might have been worn by Noah's grandfather, adorned his head, and was pulled so far down on his face that nothing was visible but a round, respectable-looking bottle-nose, and a pair of small, twinkling gray eyes. This individual, who was also the driver, rejoiced in the cognomen of Mr. Bill Harkins, and made it his business to take belated wayfarers to London (either by land or water), when arriving too late for8 the regular conveyances. On the present occasion his sole freight consisted of a young gentleman with a brilliant-hued carpet-bag, glowing with straw-colored roses and dark-blue lilies, rising from a back-ground resembling London smoke. The young gentleman was a very remarkable young gentleman indeed. He was exceedingly tall and thin, with legs like a couple of pipe-stems, and a neck so long and slender that it reminded you of a gander's, and made you tremble for the safety of the head balanced on such a frail support. His hair and complexion were both of that indefinite color known to the initiated as "whity brown"the latter being profusely sprinkled with large yellow freckles, and the former as straight and sleek as bear's grease could make it. For the rest, he was characterized by nothing in particular, but for being the possessor of a pair of large, pale-blue eyes, not remarkable for either brilliancy or expression, and for wearing the meekest possible expression, of countenance. He might have been eighteen years old, as far as years went; but his worldly wisdom was by no means equal to his years.

"By jingo! that 'ere was a blast!" said Mr. Harkins, bending his head as a gale swept shrieking by.

"Yes, it does blow, but I don't mind itI'm very much obliged to you," said the pale young man, with the white hair and freckles, holding his carpet-bag in his arms, as if it were a baby.

"Who said you did?" growled Bill Harkins. "You'll be safe in Lunnon in half an 'our, while I'll be a-drivin' back through this 'ere win' and rain, getting wetted right through. If you don't mind it, I does, Mr. Toosypegs."

“Mr. Harkins,” said Mr. Toosypegs, humbly, “I’m very sorry to put you to so much trouble, I’m sure, but if two extra crowns”
“Mr. Toosypegs,” interrupted Mr. Harkins, with a sudden burst of feeling, “give us yer hand; yer a trump. It’s easy to be perceived, them as is gentlemen from them as isn’t. You’re one o’ the right sort; oughter to be a lord, by jingo! Get up, hold lazybones,” said Mr. Harkins, touching the near-wheeler daintily with his whip.
“Mr. Harkins, it’s very good of you to say so, and I’m very much obliged to you, I’m sure,” said Mr. Toosypegs, gratefully; “but, at the same time, if you’ll please to recollect. I’m an American, and consequently couldn’t be a lord. There aren’t any lords over in America, Mr. Harkins; though if there was, I dare say I would be one. It’s real kind of you to wish it, though, and I’m much obliged to you,” added Mr. Toosypegs, with emotion.
“Hamerica must be a hodd sorter place,” said Mr. Harkins, reflectively. “I’ve heern tell that your king”
“He isn’t a king, Mr. Harkins; he’s only the President,” broke in Mr. Toosypegs, with energy.
“Well, President, then,” said Mr. Harkins, adopting the amendment with a look of disgust. “I’ve heern they call him ‘mister,’ jest like hany hother man.”
“So they do; and he glories in the triumphant titlea title which, as an American citizen’s, is a prouder one than that of king or kaiser!” said Mr. Toosypegs, enthusiastically, while he repeated the sentence he had read out of a late novel: “—It is a title for which emperors might lay down their sceptersfor which potentates might doff the royal purplefor which the great ones of the earth mightamight’”Mr. Toosypegs paused and knit his brows, having evidently lost his cue.
“Kick the bucket!” suggested Mr. Harkins, coming to his aid.
“Mr. Harkins, I’m very much obliged to you; but that wasn’t exactly the word,” said Mr. Toosypegs, politely, “—Might’oh, yes!‘might resign name and fame, and dwell under the shadow of the American eagle, whose glorious wings extend to the four quarters of the earth, and before whose soul-piercing eye the nations of the world must blush forevermore!’”
And Mr. Toosypegs, carried away by national enthusiasm, gave his arm such a flourish that it came in contact with the head of Mr. Harkins, and set more stars dancing before his eyes than there would have been had the night been ever so fine.
The outraged Mr. Harkins indignantly sprung round, and collared Mr. Toosypegs, whose complexion had turned from whity-brown to gray, with terror, and whose teeth chattered with mingled shame and fear.
“You himpertanent wagabond!” shouted Mr. Harkins, “to go for to strike a hunnoffending man like that! Blessed! if I hain’t a good mind to chuck yer ’ead fust hout the waggin.”

“Mr. HarHarHarkins,” stammered the half-strangled advocate of the American eagle, “I didn’t mean to do it, I’m very much obliged to you! I do assure you, Mr. Harkins, I hadn’t the faintest idea of hitting you; and if money”
“How much?” demanded Mr. Harkins, fiercely, looking bayonets at his trembling victim.
“Mr. Harkins, if five or even ten dollars”
“Which is how many pounds?” demanded the somewhat mollified Mr. Harkins.
“Two pounds sterling,” said Mr. Toosypegs, in a trembling falsetto; “and I do assure you, Mr. Harkins, I hadn’t the faintest idea of hitting you that time. If two pound”
“Done!” cried Mr. Harkins. “Never say it ag’in. I ain’t a man to bear spite at no onewhich is a Christian maxim, Mr. Toosypegs. A clip side the head’s neither here nor there. Same time, I’ll take them two-pound flimsies now, if’s all the same to you?”
“Certainlycertainly, Mr. Harkins,” said Mr. Toosypegs, drawing out a purse well-filled with gold, and opening it nervously. “Threefiveten dollars, and two for the drive’s twelve; and one to buy sugar-plums for your infant familyif you’ve got such a thing about youis thirteen. Here’s thirteen dollars, Mr. Harkins. I’m very much obliged to you.”
“Same to you, Mr. Toosypegs,” said Mr. Harkins, pocketing the money, with a broad grin. “‘May you ne’er want a frien,’ nor a bottle to give him,’ as the poic says.”
“Mr. Harkins, I’m obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs, grasping his hand, which Mr. Harkins resigned with a grunt. “You have a soul, Mr. Harkins. I know itI feel it. Everybody mightn’t find it out; but I canI perceived it from the first.”
Mr. Harkins heard this startling fact with the greatest indifference, merely saying, “Humph!”
“And now, how far do you suppose we are from the city, Mr. Harkins!” said Mr. Toosypegs, in his most insinuating tone.

“’Bout a mile or so.”
“Could you recommend any hotel to me, Mr. Harkins. I’m a stranger in the city, you know, and should feel grateful if you would,” said Mr. Toosypegs, humbly.
“Why, yes, I can,” said Mr. Harkins, brightening suddenly up. “There’s the ‘Blue Pig,’ one of the finest ’otels in Lunnon, with the best o’ ’commodations for man and beast. You’ve heern o’ the ‘Blue Pig’ over there in Hamerica, hain’t you?”
Mr. Toosypegs wasn’t sure. It was very likely he had; but, owing to his bad memory, he had forgotten.
“Well, anyhow, you won’t find many ’otels to beat that ’ere. Best o’ ’commodationbut I told you that hafore.”
“Where is it located?” asked Mr. Toosypegs.
“St. Giles. You know where that is, in coursehevery-body does. The nicest ’otel in Lunnonbest o’ ’commodations. But I told you that hafore. My hold frien’ Bruisin’ Bob keeps it. You’ll like it, I know.”

“Yes, Mr. Harkins, I dare say I will. I am very much obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs, in a somewhat dubious tone.
“That ’ere man’s the greatest cove a-goin’,” said Mr. Harkins, getting enthusiastic. “Been married ten times if he’s been married once. One wife died; one left his bread-board, and run hoff with a hofficer dragoon; one was lagged for stealin’ wipes, and he’s got three livin’ at this present writin’. Great fellar is Bob.”
“I haven’t the slightest doubt of it, Mr. Harkins,” said the proprietor of the freckles, politely; “and I anticipate a great deal of pleasure in making the acquaintance of your friends, Mr. and Mrs. Bob. But, good gracious! Mr. Harkins, just look thereif that ain’t a woman hurrying on there after,” said Mr. Toosypegs, pointing, in intense surprise, to the form of the gipsy, as she darted swiftly away from the cottage.
“Well, what o’ that? Some tramper a-goin’ to Lunnon,” said Mr. Harkins, gruffly.
“But, Mr. Harkins, a woman out in such a storm at this hour of the night! Why, it ain’t right,” said Mr. Toosypegs, getting excited.
Mr. Harkins picked up his hat, turned down the collar of12 his coat, faced abruptly round, and looked Mr. Toosypegs straight in the eyes.
“Do call to her to get in, Mr. Harkins. There’s plenty of room for her on the back seat,” said Mr. Toosypegs, unheeding Mr. Harkins’ astounded look at his philanthropy. “A woman traveling on foot in such a storm! Why, it ain’t right!” repeated Mr. Toosypegs, getting still more excited.
“Mr. Toosypegs, Hamericans don’t never be a little hout their mind, do they?” said Mr. Harkins, blandly.
“Not often, Mr. Harkins, I’m very much obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with his customary politeness.
“Because if they did, you know,” said Mr. Harkins, in the same bland tone, “I should say you wasn’t quite right yourself, you know!”
“Good gracious! Mr. Harkins, what do you mean?” exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, in a tone of mild remonstrance. “You don’t think I’m crazy, do you?”
“Mr. Toosypegs, I don’t like to be personal; so I’ll only say it’s my private opinion you’re a brick!” said Mr. Harkins, mildly. “Perhaps, though, its the hair of Hingland wot doesn’t agree with you. I thought you was wery sensible a little w’ile ago, when you gin me them two poun’.”
“I’m very much obliged to you for your good opinion, Mr. Harkins,” said Mr. Toosypegs, blushing. “And if you’ll only call to that woman to get into the wagon, I’ll be still more so.”
“And have your pockets picked?” said Mr. Harkins, sharply. “I shan’t do no sich thing.”
“Mr. Harkins!” said Mr. Toosypegs, warmly, “she’s a womanain’t she?”
“Well, wot if she be?” said Mr. Harkins, sullenly.
“Why, that no woman should be walking at this hour when men are riding; more particularly when there is a back seat with nobody in it. Why, it ain’t right!” said Mr. Toosypegs, who seemed unable to get beyond this point.

“Well, I don’t care!” said Mr. Harkins, snappishly. “Do you s’pose, Mr. Toosypegs, I have nothing to do but buy waggins to kerry sich lumber as that ’ere? I won’t do it for no one. Likely as not she’s nothin’ but a gipsy, or something as bad. This ’ere waggin ain’t goin’ to be perluted with no sich trash.”
“Mr. Harkins,” said Mr. Toosypegs, briskly, thrusting his hand into his pocket, “what will you take and bring her to London?”
“Hey? ‘A fool and his money’hum! What’ll you give?”
“There’s a crown.”
“Done!” said Mr. Harkins, closing his digits on the coin, while his little eyes snapped. “Hullo! you, woman!” he shouted, rising his voice.
The gipsywho, though but a yard or so ahead, was indistinguishable in the darknesssped on without paying the slightest attention to his call.
“Hallo, there! Hallo!” again called Mr. Harkins, while Mr. Toosypegs followed him:
“Stop a moment, if you please, madam.”
But neither for the sharp, surly order of the driver, nor the bland, courteous request of Mr. Toosypegs, did the woman stop. Casting a brief, fleeting glance over her shoulder, she again flitted on.
“You confounded old witch! Stop and take a ride to townwill you?” yelled the polite and agreeable Mr. Harkins, holding up a dark lantern and reining in his horse by the woman’s side.
The dark, stern face, with its fierce, black eyes and wildly-streaming hair, was turned, and a hard, deep voice asked what he wanted.
“A gipsy! I knew it!” muttered Mr. Harkins, shrinking involuntarily from her lurid glances. “Ugh! What a face! Looks like the witch in the play?” Then aloud: “Get in, ma’am, and I’ll take ye to town.”
“Go play your jokes on some one else,” said the woman, curtly, turning away.
“I ain’t a-jokin’. Nice time o’ night this to stop and play jokesain’t it?” said Mr. Harkins, in a tone of intense irony. “This ’ere young man, which is a Hamerican from the New Knighted States, has paid yer fare to Lunnon outer his hown blessed pocket. So jump in, and don’t keep me waitin’ here in the wet.”
“Is what he says true?” said the dark woman, turning the sharp light of her stiletto-like eyes on the freckles and pale-blue eyes of good-natured Mr. Toosypegs.

“Yes, ma’am. I’m happy to say it is,” said Mr. Toosypegs. “Allow me to hand you in.”
And Mr. Toosypegs got up to fulfill his offer; but Dobbin at that moment gave the wagon a malicious jerk, and dumped our patriotic American back in his seat. Before he could recover his breath, the gipsy had declined his assistance, with a wave of her hand, and had entered the wagon unassisted, and taken her seat.
“I know that tramper,” said Mr. Harkins in a nervous whisper to Mr. Toosypegs. “It’s the gipsy queen, Ketura, from Yetholm; most wonderful woman that ever was, ’cept Deborah, the woman the Bible tells about, you know, wot druv the nail through the

fellar's head when she found him takin' a snooze. Heard a minister take her for his tex' once, and preach all about it. Our cow's name's Deborah, too," said Mr. Harkins, absently.
"And she's a gipsy queen? Lord bless us!" exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, turning round and looking in some alarm at the fixed, stern, dark face before himlike the face of a statue in bronze. "Does she tell fortunes?"
"Yes; but you'd better not hask her to-night," said Mr. Harkins, in the same cautious whisper. "Her son's in prison, and sentenced to transportation for life for robbin' the plate of the Hearl De Courcy. He's goin' off with a lot of hothers airly to-morrow mornin'. Now, don't go exclaiming that way;" said Mr. Harkins, in a tone expressive of disgust, as he gave his companion a dig in the side.
"Poor thing! poor thing!" said Mr. Toosypegs, in a tone of sympathy. "Why, it's too bad; it really is, Mr. Harkins."
"Sarved him right, it's my opinion," said Mr. Harkins, sententiously. "Wot business had he for to go for to rob Hearl de Courcy, I want ter know? His mother, the hold lady ahind here, went and sot him up for a gentleman, and see wot's come hof hit. She, a hold gipsy queen, goin' and sendin' her son to Heton with hall the young lordses, and baronetses, and dukeses, and makin' believe he was somethin' above the common. And now see what her fine gentleman's gone and done and come to. Wonder wot she'll think of herself, when she sees him takin' a sea voyage for the good of his 'ealth at the 'spense of the government, to-morrow?"
"Poor thing! poor thing!" said Mr. Toosypegs, looking deeply sorry.
"Poor hold thing hindeed!" said Mr. Harkins, turning up his nose contemptuously. "Sarved 'im right, I say ag'in. That 'ere son o' hern was the most stuck-hup chap I ever clapped my two blessed heyes on. Hafter he left Heton, I see'd 'im, one day, in the streets, hand guess who with? W'y, with nobody less than young Lord Williers, honly son o' the Hearl De Courcy, as he has gone and robbed. There's hingratitude for you! I didn't know 'im then; but I 'cognized him hafterward in the court-room hat 'is trial."

"How could he afford to go to Etonhe, a gipsy?" said Mr. Toosypegs, in surprise.
"Dunno! Hold woman sent 'im, I s'pose'owever she got the money. He was a fine-looking fellow, too, I must say, though rayther tawny, but 'andsome as Lord Williers himself. Hold Ketura was 'andsome once, too; see'd 'er w'en she was a reg'lar hout-and-hout beauty; though you mightn't think it now. Times changes folks, yer know," said Mr. Harkins, in a moralizing tone.
"What made him steal, if his mother was so rich?" said Mr. Toosypegs.
"His mother wasn't rich no more'n I be. S'pose she made enough tellin' fortunes, poachin', and stealin' to pay fur'im at school; hand then when he growed hup, and his cash gave out, he took hand stole the hearl's plate. He denied it hall hat 'is trial; but then they hall do that. By jingo! he looked fierce enough to knock the judge and jury, and all

the rest on 'em, hinto the middle hof next week, hif not further, that day. 'Twas no go, though; hand hover the water he goes to-morrow."
"Poor fellow! Mr. Harkins, I'm sorry for himI really am," said Mr. Toosypegs, in a tone of real sincerity.
Mr. Harkins burst into a gruff laugh.
"Well, hif this ain't good! Wot fools folks is! Sorry for a cove yer never saw! Wonder hif hall Hamericans is as green as you be?"
After this sentence, which came out in a series of little jerks, with strong notes of admiration appended to each, Mr. Harkins relapsed into silence and the collar of his great-coat, and began whistling "The Devil Among the Tailors," in a voice like a frog with the influenza.
They were now rapidly approaching the citythe loud crash and din of which had somewhat subsided, owing to the inclemency of the weather and the lateness of the hour. The gipsy, who had not heard a word of the foregoing conversationit having been carried on in a prudently-subdued tonehad wrapped her coarse cloak closer around her, while the gaze of her devouring eyes grew more intense, as the lights of the city began to appear. One by one, they came gleaming out through the dense fog with bug-like stars here and there; and in every direction.
The city was gained; and they were soon in the very midst of the great, throbbing heart of mighty London.
The wagon stopped, and Mr. Toosypegs sprung out to assist the woman to alight.
But waving him away with an impatient motion, she sprung out unassisted, and without one word or look of thanks, turned and flitted away in the chill night wind.
"There! I knowed that would be all the thanks ye'd get," said Mr. Harkins, with a hoarse chuckle. "Hoff she goes, and you'll never see her again."
"Well, that don't matter any. I didn't want thanks, I'm sure," said the kind-hearted Mr. Toosypegs. "Good-by, Mr. Harkins. Give my respects to Mrs. Harkins."
"Good-night, hold fellar," said Mr. Harkins, giving Mr. Toosypegs' hand a cordial shake. "You're a brick! How I'd like to come hacross one like you hev'ry night! Go right to Bob's, sign o' the 'Blue Pig,' St. Giles, best o' 'commodation for man and beast; but I told you that before. Tell Bob I sent you, and I'll call and see you in a few days."
"You're very good, Mr. Harkins. I'll certainly tell Mr. Bob so when I see him!" said Mr. Toosypegs, with a severe twinge of conscience at the deception he felt himself to be using; "and I'll be very glad to see you whenever you call. I'm very much obliged to you."

CHAPTER III

THE LOVERS

“Oh, thou shalt be all else to me,
That heart can feel, or tongue can feign;
I’ll praise, admire, and worship thee,
But must not, dare not, love again.”
Moore.

While the solitary wagon was driving, through wind and rain, along the lonely north road, bearing its three strangely-contrasted inmatesthe gruff, avaricious driver, the simple, kind-hearted youth, and the dark, fierce, stern womana far different scene was passing in another quarter of the city. At that same hour the town mansion of Hugh SeytonEarl De Courcywas all ablaze with lights, music and mirth. Gorgeous drawing-rooms, fretted with gold and carving, dazzling with numberless jets of light from the pendant chandeliers, odorous with the heavy perfume of costly exotics, the very air quivering with softest music, were thrown open, and were filled with the proud, the high-born, the beautiful, of London. Peers and peeresses, gallant nobles and ladies bright, moved through the glittering rooms, and with singing, talking, flirting, dancing, the night was waning apace.

Two young men stood together within the deep shadow of a bay-window, in the music-room, watching a group assembled round a young lady at the piano, and conversing in low tones.

One of these was decidedly the handsomest man present that night. In stature he was tall, somewhat above the common height, and faultless in form and figure, with a certain air of distingue about him that stamped him as one of noble birth. His clear, fair complexion, his curling chestnut hair, and large blue eyes, betrayed his Saxon blood. His face might have seemed slightly effeminate; but no one, in looking at the high, kingly brow, the dark, flashing eyes, and firm-set mouth, would have thought that long. A dark mustache shaded his upper lip, and a strange, nameless beauty lit up and softened his handsome face whenever he smiled. Adored by the ladies, envied by the men, Lord Ernest Villiers, only son of Earl De Courcy, seemed to have nothing on earth left to wish for.

And yet, at times, over that white, intellectual brow a dark shadow would flit; from the depths of those dark, handsome eyes the bright light of a happy heart would pass; the mouth would grow stern, and a look of troubled care would darken his young face.

His companion, a good-looking young man, with a certain air about him as if he were somebody and knew it, with a listless look, and most desirable curling whiskers, leaned against a marble Hebe, and listened languidly to the singing. He wore the undress

uniform of an officer, and being interpreted, was no other than Captain George Jernyngham, of the Guards.
“What a wonderful affair this is of Germaine’seh, Villiers?” said Captain Jernyngham, carressing his mustache. “Just like a thing in a play, or a story, where everybody turns out the most unexpected things. The Duke of B is going crazy about it. He had invited Germaine to his house, and the fellow was making the fiercest sort of love to his pretty daughter, when all of a sudden, it turns out that he is a robber, a gipsy, a burglar, and all sorts of horrors. How the deuce came it to pass that he entered Eton with us, and passed himself off as a gentleman?”
“I cannot tell; the whole affair is involved in mystery.”
“You and he were pretty intimatewere you not, my lord?”
“Yes, I took a fancy to Germaine from the first; and I don’t believe, yet, he is guilty of the crime they charge him with.”
“You don’t, eh? See what it is to have faith in human nature! How are you to get over the evidence.”
“It was only circumstantial.”
“Granted; but it was most conclusive. There is not another man in London has the slightest doubt of his guilt but yourself.”
“Poor Germaine!” said Lord Villiers, in a tone of deep feeling; “with all his brilliant talents, his high endowments, and refined nature, to come to such a sad end! To be obliged to mate with the lowest of the low, the vilest of the vilemen degraded by every species of crime, below the level of the brute! And this for life! Poor Germaine!”
The young guardsman shrugged his shoulders.
“If refined men will stealoh, I forgot! you don’t believe it,” he said, as Lord Villiers made an impatient motion, “Well, I confess, I thought better things of Germaine myself. There was always something of the dare-devil in him, and he was reckless and extravagant to a fault; but upon my honor, I never thought he could have come to this. Have you seen him since his trial?”
“No, I had not the heart to meet him. Death would be preferable to such a fate.”
“There was a devil in his eye, if there ever was in any man’s, when he heard his sentence,” observed the young captain. “No one that saw him is likely to forget, in a hurry, the way he folded his arms and smiled in the judge’s face, as he pronounced it. By Jove! I’m not given to nervousness, but I felt a sensation akin to an ague-shiver, as I watched him.”
“With his fierce, passionate nature, it will, turn him into a perfect demon,” said Lord Villiers; “and if ever he escapes, woe to those who have caused his disgrace! He is as implacable as death or doom in his hateas relentless as a Corsican in his vengeance.”
“Has he any friends or relatives among the gipsies?”
“I don’t know, I think I heard of a mother, or brother, or something. I intend paying him a last visit to-night, and will deliver any message he may send to his friends.”

“Will your rigorous father approve of such a visit, since it was he that prosecuted Germaine?”
“Certainly, Jernyngham. My father, believing in his guilt, thought it his duty to do so; but he bears no feeling of personal anger toward him,” said Lord Villiers, gravely.
“Well, I wish Germaine a safe passage across the ocean,” said Captain Jernyngham, as he listlessly admired his hand in its well-fitting glove. “He was a confoundedly good-looking fellow; cut me completely out with that pretty little prize widow of old Sir Rob Landers; but I’ll be magnanimous and forgive him now. Oh, by Jove! Villiers, there goes Lady Maude Percy!” cried the guardsman, starting suddenly up, all his listlessness disappearing as if by magic. “Ye gods! what a perfectly dazzling beauty! Ah! my lord, I thought you would find the subject more interesting than that of poor Germaine,” he added, with a mischievous smile at his companion’s look of intense admiration.
Lord Villiers laughed, and his clear face flushed.
“The handsomest girl in London, and the greatest heiress,” said the guardsman, resuming his half-drawl and languid caressing of his whiskers. “What an intensely enviable fellow you are, Villiers, if rumor is true.”
“And what says rumor?” said Lord Villiers, coldly.
“Why, that you are the accepted lover of the fair Lady Maude.”
Before the somewhat haughty reply of Lord Villiers was spoken, a young lady, suddenly entering the room, caught sight of them, and coming over, she addressed the guardsman with:
“George, you abominably lazy fellow, have you forgotten you are engaged for this set to Miss Ashton? Really, my lord, you and this idle brother of mine ought to be ashamed to make hermits of yourselves in this way, while so many bright eyes are watching for your coming. Lady Maude is here, and I will report you.”
And, raising her finger warningly, Miss Jernyngham tripped away.
“‘Fare thee welland if forever!’” said Captain Jernyngham, in a tragic tone, as he turned away.
“‘Why, forever fare thee well!’” said Lord Villiers laughing as he finished the quotation, and turned in an opposite direction.
The dancing was at its height as he passed from the music-room. Standing a little apart, his eyes went wandering over the fair forms tripping through the “mazy dance,” while they rested on one form fairer than all the rest, and his handsome face brightened, and his fine eyes lit up, as a man’s alone does, when he watches the woman he loves.
Standing at the head of one of the quadrilles was the object of his gazethe peerless, high-born Lady Maude Percy. Eighteen summers had scarce passed over her young head, yet a thoughtful, almost sad, expression ever fell like a shadow on her beautiful face. Her form was rounded, exquisite, perfect; her oval face perfectly colorless, save for the full, crimson lips, her eyes large, dark and lustrous as stars, and fringed by long, silken-blacken lashes; her shining hair fell in soft, glittering, spiral curls, like raveled silk, round her fair, moonlight face; and her pallor seemed deepened by its raven hue. Her

dress was of white brocade, fringed with seed-pearls; and her snowy arms and neck gleamed through misty clouds of point-lace. Pale, oriental pearls, wreathed her midnight hair, and ran in rivers of light around her neck. Queenly, peerless, dazzling, she moved through the brilliant train of beauties, eclipsing them all, as a meteor outshines lesser stars.

Drinking in the enchanting draught of her beauty to intoxication, Lord Ernest Villiers stood leaning against a marble pillar until the dance was concluded; and then moving toward her, as she stood for an instant alone, he bent over her, and whispered, in a voice that was low but full of passion:

"Maude! Maude! why have you tried to avoid me all the evening? I must see you! I must speak to you in private! I must hear my destiny from your lips tonight!"

At the first sound of his voice she had started quickly, and the "eloquent blood" had flooded cheek and bosom with its rosy light; but as he went on it faded away, and a sort of shiver passed through her frame as he ceased.

"Come with me into the music-roomit is deserted now," he said, drawing her arm through his. "There, apart from all those prying eyes, I can learn my fate."

Paler still grew the pale face of the lady; but, without a word, she suffered herself to be led to the shadowy and deserted room he had just left.

"And now, Maudemy own lovemay I claim an answer to the question I asked you last night?" he said, bending over her.

"I answered you then, my lord," she said, sadly.

"Yes; you told me to goto forget you; as if such a thing were possible. Maude, I cannot, I will take that for an answer. Tell me, do you love me?"

"Oh, Ernestoh, my dear lord! you know I do!" she cried, passionately.

"Then, Maudemy beautiful onewill you not be minemy wife?"

"Oh, I cannot! I cannot! Oh, Ernest, I cannot!" she said, with a convulsive shudder.

"Cannot! And why, in Heaven's name?"

"My lord, that is my secret. I can never, never be your wife. Choose some one worthier of you, and forget Maude Percy."

She tried to steady her voice, but a stifled sob finished the sentence.

For all answer he gathered her in his strong arms, and her head dropped on his shoulder.

"My poor little romantic Maude, what is this wonderful secret?" he said, smiling. "Tell me, and we will see if your mountain does not turn out a molehill after all. Now, why cannot you be my wife?"

"You think me weak and silly, my lord," she said, raising her head somewhat proudly, and withdrawing from his retaining arms; "but there is a reason, one sufficient to separate us foreverone that neither you nor any living mortal can ever know!"

"And you refuse to tell this reason? My father and yours are eager for this match; in worldly rank we are equals; I love you passionately, with all my heart and soul, and still you refuse. Maude, you never loved me," he said, bitterly.

Her pale sweet face was bent in her hands now, and large tears fell through her fingers.
“Maude, you will not be so cruel,” he said, with sudden hope. “Only say I may hope for this dear hand.”
“No, no. Hope for nothing but to forget one so miserable as I am. Oh, Lord Ernest! there are so many better and worthier than I am, who will love you. I will be your friendyour sister, if I may; but I can never be your wife.”
“Maude, is there guilt, is there crime connected with this secret of yours?” he demanded, stepping before her.
She rose to her feet impetuously, her cheeks crimsoning, her large eyes filling and darkening with indignation, her noble brow expanded, her haughty little head erect.
“And you think me capable of crime, Lord Villiers?of guilt that needs concealment?” she said, with proud scorn.
“You, Maude? No; sooner would I believe an angel from heaven guilty of crime, than you. But I thought there might be others involved. Oh, Lady Maude! must this secret, that involves the happiness of my whole life, remain hidden from me?”
The bright light had died out from the beautiful eyes of Lady Maude; and her tone was very sad, as she replied:
“Some day, my lord, I will tell you all; but not now. Let us part here, and let this subject never be renewed between us.”
“One word, Maudedo you love me?”
“I do! I do! Heaven forgive me!”
“Now, why, ‘Heaven forgive me?’ Maude! Maude! you will drive me mad! Is it such a crime to love me then?”
“In some it is,” she said, in her low, sad voice.
“And why, fairest saint?”
“Do not ask me, my lord. Oh, Ernest! let me go, I am tired and sick, and very, very unhappy. Dearest Ernest, leave me, and never speak of this again.”
“As you will, Lady Maude,” he said, with a bow, turning haughtily away.
But a light touch, that thrilled to his very heart, was laid on his arm, and the low, sweet voice of Lady Maude said:
“I have offended you, my lord; pray forgive me.”
“I am not offended, Lady Maude Percy; neither have I anything to forgive,” he said; but his fine face was clouded with mortification. “You have rejected me, and I presume the matter ends there.”
“But you are offended, I can hear it in your voice. Oh, Lord Villiers, if you knew how unhappy I am, you would forgive me the pain I have caused you.”
Her tone touched him, and taking her hand gently, he said:
“It is I who should ask forgiveness, Lady Maude. Yes, I will accept the friendship you offer, until such time as I can claim a better reward. Notwithstanding all you have said, I do not despair still.”
He pressed her hand to his lips and was gone.

“Excuse me, your lordship,” insinuated a most aristocratic footman in his ear, at that moment, “but there is an individual downstairs who persists on seeing the earl, and and won’t take no for an answer.”
“Who is it?” inquired Lord Villiers, impatiently.
“A gipsy, my lord, a desperate-looking old tramper, too.”
“What’s that about gipsies?” said the unceremonious little Miss Jernyngham, passing at that moment. “You must know, my lord, I fairly dote on gipsies, ever since I saw that charming young man they are going to transport.”
“How I wish I were a gipsy!” said Lord Villiers, gayly, “for such a reward.”
“Pray spare your pretty speeches for Lady Maude Percy, my lord,” lisped Miss Jernyngham, giving him a tap with her fan; “but about this gipsyis it a man or woman?”
“A woman, Miss, they call her the gipsy queen, Ketura.”
“A gipsy queen! oh, delightful!” cried the young lady, clapping her hands; “my lord, we must have her up, by all means. I insist on having my fortune told.”
“Your slave hears but to obey, Miss Jernyngham,” said Lord Villiers, with a bow. “Jonson, go and bring the old lady up.”
“Yes, me lud,” said Jonson, hurrying off.
“GeorgeGeorge! do come here!” exclaimed the young lady, as her brother passed; “I want you!”
“What’s all this about?” said the guardsman, lounging up. “My dear Clara, the way you do get the steam up at a moment’s notice is perfectly astonishing. What can I do for you?”
“Do you want to have your fortune told?”
“If any good sibyl would predict for me a rich wife, who would pay my debts, and keep me provided with kid gloves and cigars, I wouldn’t object; but in any other case”
His speech was cut short by the sudden appearance of the footman with the gipsy queen, of whom he seemed considerably afraid. And truly not without reason; for a lioness in her lair might have looked about as safe an animal as the dark, fierce-eyed gipsy queen. Even the two young men started; and Miss Clara Jernyngham stifled a little scream behind her fan.
“I wish to see Earl De Courcy,” was her abrupt demand.
“And we wish our fortune told, good mother,” said Lord Villiers; “my father will attend to you presently.”
“Your father!” said the woman, fixing her piercing eyes on his handsome face, “then you are Lord Villiers?”
“You have guessed it. What has the future in store for me?”
“Nothing good for your father’s son,” she hissed through her clenched teeth. “Give me your hand.”
He extended it, with a smile, and she took it in hers, and peered into it. What a contrast they were! his, white, small, and delicate; her hand, bronzed and rough.
“Well, mother, what has destiny in store for me?”

“Much good or more evil. This night decides thy destiny; either thou shalt be blessed for life, or if the scale turns against theethen woe to thee! Stand asidethe earl comes.”
A tall, distinguished-looking man, of middle-age, approached, and looked with grave surprise on the group before him.
“A word with you, lord-earl,” said the gipsy, confronting him.
“Speak out, then.”
“It must be in private.”
“Who are you?” said the earl, surprised and curious.
“I am called the gipsy queen, Ketura,” said the woman, drawing herself up.
“And what do you want of me, woman?”
“I tell you I must speak in private. Is your time so precious that you cannot grant ten minutes of it to me?” said the woman, with a fiercely-impatient flash of her black eyes.
“This way, then,” said the earl, impressed by the woman’s commanding look and tones, as he turned and led the way across a wide, lighted hall to a richly-furnished library.
Seating himself in a softly-cushioned lounging-chair, he waited for his singular visitor to begin.

CHAPTER IV

THE GIPSY'S VOW

"May the grass wither from thy feet! the woods
Deny thee shelter! earth, a home! the dust,
A grave! the sun, his light! and heaven, her God!"
Byron.

"Well, madam, I am waiting," said the earl, after a pause, during which the wild, black eyes of the woman were fixed immovably on his face, until he began to grow uneasy under the steady glare.

"Lord earl, behold at thy feet a mother who comes to plead for her son," said the strange woman, sinking on her knees at his feet, and holding up her clasped hands.

"Madam, I do not understand," said the earl, surprised, and feeling himself obliged, as it were, to use a respectful form of address, by the woman's commanding look.

"My son is in your power! my darling, my only son! my first-born! Oh, spare him!" said the woman, still holding up her clasped hands.

"Your son? Madam, I do not understand," said the earl, knitting his brows in perplexity.

"You have condemned him to transportation! And he is innocentas innocent of the crime for which he is to suffer as the angels in heaven," cried the woman, in passionate tones.

"Madam, I assure you, I do not understand. Who is your son?" said the earl, more and more perplexed.

"You know him as Germaine, but he is my son, Reginaldmy only son! Oh, my lord! spare him! spare him!" wildly pleaded the gipsy queen.

"Madam, rise."

"Not until you have pardoned my son."

"That I will never do! Your son has been found guilty of wilful robbery, and has been very justly condemned. I27 can do nothing for him," said the earl, while his brow grew dark, and his mouth hard and stern.

"My lord, he is innocent!" almost shrieked the wretched woman at his feet.

"I do not believe it! He has been proven guilty," said the earl, coldly.

"It is false! as false as the black hearts of the perjurers who swore against him!" fiercely exclaimed the gipsy; "he is innocent of this crime, as innocent of it as thou art, lord earl. Oh, Earl De Courcy, as you hope for pardon from God, pardon him."

"Madam, I command you to rise."

"Never, never! while my son is in chains! Oh, my lord, you do not know, you never can dream, how I have loved that boy! I had no one else in the wide world to love; not a drop of kindred blood ran in any human heart but his; and I loved, I adored, I worshiped him! Oh, Earl De Courcy, I have suffered cold, and hunger, and thirst, and hardship, that he might never want; I have toiled for him night and day, that he might never feel

pain; I have stooped to actions I loathed, that he might be happy and free from guilt. And, when he grew older, I gave him up, though it was like rending soul and body apart. I sent him away; I I sent him to school with the money that years and years of unceasing toil had enabled me to save. I sent him to be educated with gentlemen. I never came near him, lest any one should suspect his mother was a gipsy. Yes; I gave him up, though it was like tearing my very heart-strings apart, content in knowing he was happy, and in seeing him at a distance at long intervals. For twenty-three years, my life has been one long dream of him; sleeping or waking, in suffering and trial, the thought that he was near me gave me joy and strength. And now he is condemned for lifecondemned to a far-off land, among convicts and felons, where I will never see him again! Oh, Lord De Courcy! mercy, mercy for my son!"

With the wild cry of a mother's agony, she shrieked out that frenzied appeal for mercy, and groveled prone to the floor at his feet.

A spasm of pain passed over the face of the earl, but he answered, sternly:

"Woman, your son is guilty. I cannot pardon him!"

"He is not guilty! Perish the soul so base as to believe such a falsehood of my high-hearted boy!" cried the gipsy, dashing fiercely back her wildly-streaming black hair. "He my proud, glorious, kindly-hearted Reginald, stoop to such a crime! Oh, sooner could the angels themselves be guilty of it than he!"

"Woman, you rave! Once again I tell you, rise!

"Pardon, pardon for my son!"

"Madam, I cannot. I pity you. Heaven knows I do! but he is guilty, and must suffer."

"Oh, my God! how shall I convince him?" cried the wretched woman, wringing her hands in wildest despair. "Oh, Earl De Courcy! you, too, have a son, handsome, gallant and noble, the pride of your old age, the last scion of your proud race! For his sake, for the sake of your son, pardon mine!"

"Once more I tell you, I cannot. Your son is condemned; to-morrow his sentence will be executed, and I have no power to avert it. And, madam, though I pity you deeply, I must again say he deserves it. Nayhear me out. I know you do not believe it; you think him innocent, and, being his mother, it is natural you should think so; but, believe me, he is none the less guilty. Your son deserves his fate, all the more so for his ingratitude to you, after all you have done for him. I deeply pity you, as Heaven hears me, I do!"

"Oh, then, for my sake, if there is one spark of pity for me in your heart, do not kill me! For, Lord De Courcy, it will be a double murder, his death and mine, if this sentence is executed."

"The law must take its course; I cannot prevent it. And once more, madam, I beseech you to rise. You should kneel to God alone."

"God would forgive him, had I pleaded to Him thus; but you, tiger-heart, you will not!" shrieked the woman, throwing up her arms in the impotence of her despair. "Oh, lord

earl, I have never knelt to God or man before; and to have my petition spurned now! You hold my life in the hollow of your hand, and you will not grant it!"
"I tell you I cannot."

"You canyou can! It is in your power? You are great, and rich, and powerful, and can have his sentence annulled. By your soul's salvation, by your hopes of heaven, by your mother's grave, by Him whom you worship, I conjure you to save my son!"
The haggard face was convulsed; the brow was dark, and corrugated with agony; the lips white and quivering; the eyes wild, lurid, blazing with anguish and despair; her clenched hands upraised in passionate prayer for pardon. A fearful sight was that despair-maddened woman, as she knelt at the stern earl's feet, her very voice sharp with inward agony.
He shaded his eyes with his hands to keep out the pitiful sight; but his stern determined look passed not away. His face seemed hardened with iron, despite the deep pity of his heart.
"You are yielding! He will yet be saved! Oh, I knew the iron-heart would soften!" she cried out, with maniac exultation, taking hope from his silence.
"My poor woman, you deceive yourself. I can do nothing for your son," said the earl, sadly.
"What! Do you still refuse? Oh, it cannot be! I am going mad, I think! Tell metell me that my son will live!"
"Woman, I have no power over your son's life."
"Oh, you haveyou have! Do you think he could live one single day among those with whom you would send him? As you hope for pardon on that last dread day, pardon my son!"
"It is all in vain. Rise, madam."
"You refuse?"
"I do. Rise!"
With the fearful bound of a wild beast, she sprung to her feet, and, awful in her rage, like a tigress robbed of her young, she stood before him. Even the stern earl drew back in dismay.
"Then, heart of steel, hear ME!" she cried, raising one long arm toward heaven, and speaking in a voice terrific in its very depth of despair. "Tiger-heart, listen to me! From this moment I vow, before God and all his angels, to devote my whole life to revenge on you! Living, may ruin, misery, and despair, equal to mine, be your portion; dead, may you never rest in the earth you sprung from! And, when standing before the judgment-seat of God, you sue for pardon, may He hurl your miserable soul back to perdition for an answer! May my curse descend to your children and children's children forever! May misery here and hereafter be their portion! May every earthly and eternal evil follow a wronged mother's curse!"

Appalled, horrified, the iron earl shrunk back from that awful, ghastly look, and that convulsive, terrific facethat face of a fiend, and not of mortal woman. A moment after, when he raised his head, he was alone, and the gipsy, Ketura, was gone. Whither?

CHAPTER V

MOTHER AND SON

“Oh, my son, Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! Would to God, I might die for thee! Oh! Absalom! my son, my son!”

That same night; that night of storm and tempest without, and still fiercer storm and tempest within; that same nightthree hours later; in a narrow, dark, noisome cell, with grated window and iron-barred door, with a rude pallet of straw comprising the furniture, and one flickering, uncertain lamp lighting its tomb-like darkness, sat two young men.

One of these was a youth of three-and-twenty; tall and slender in form, with a dark, clear complexion; a strikingly-handsome face; a fierce, flashing eye of fire; thick, clustering curls of jet; a daring, reckless air, and an expression of mingled scorn, hatred, defiance and fierceness in his face. There were fetters on his slender wrists and ankles, and he wore the degrading dress of a condemned felon.

By his side sat Lord Ernest Villiershis handsome face looking deeply sad and grave.

“And this is all, Germaine?” he said, sorrowfully. “Can I do nothing at all for you?”

“Nothing. What do you think I want? Is not the31 government, in its fatherly care, going to clothe, feed, and provide for me during the remainder of my mortal life? Why, man, do you think me unreasonable?”

He laughed a bitter, mocking laugh, terrible to hear.

“Germaine, Heaven knows, if I could do anything for you, I would!” said Lord Villiers, excitedly. “My father, like all the rest of the world, believes you guilty, and I can do nothing. But if it will be any consolation, remember that you leave one in England who still believes you innocent.”

“Thank you, Villiers. There is another, too, who, I think, will hardly believe I have taken to petty pilfering, your father and the rest of the magnates of the land to the contrary, notwithstanding.”

“Who is that, Germaine?”

“My mother.”

“Where is she? Can I bring her to you?” said Lord Villiers, starting up.

“You are very kind; but it is not in your power to do so,” said the prisoner, quietly. “My mother is probably in Yetholm with her tribe. You don’t need to be told now I am a gipsy; my interesting family history was pretty generally made known at my trial.”

Again he laughed that short, sarcastic laugh so sad to hear.

“My dear fellow, I think none the worse of you for that. Gipsy or Saxon, I cannot forget you once saved my life, and that you have for years been my best friend.”

“Well, it is pleasant to know that there is one in the world who cares for me; and if I do die like a dog among my fellow-convicts, my last hour will be cheered by the thought,” said the young man, drawing a deep breath. “If ever you see my mother, which is not

likely, tell her I was grateful for all she did for me; you need not tell her I was innocent, for she will know that. There is another, too"
He paused, and his dark face flushed, and then grew paler than before.
"My dear Germaine, if there is any message I can carry for you, you have only to command me," said the young lord, warmly.
"No; it is as well she should not know itbetter, perhaps," muttered the prisoner, half to himself. "I thank you for your friendly kindness, Villiers; but it will not be necessary."
"And your mother, Germaine, how am I to know her?"
"Oh, I forgot! Well, she's called the gipsy Ketura, and is queen of her tribe. It is something to be a queen's son is it not?" he said, with another hard, short laugh.
"Ketura, did you say?" repeated Lord Villiers, in surprise.
"Yes. What has surprised you now?"
"Why, the simple fact that I saw her three hours ago."
"Saw her! Where?"
"At my father's house. She came to see him."
Germaine sprung up, and while his eyes fiercely flashed, he exclaimed:
"Came to see Lord De Courcy? My mother came to see him? Villiers, you do not mean to say that my mother came to beg for my life?"
"My dear fellow, I really do not know. The interview was a private one. All I do know is, that half an hour after my father returned among his guests, looking very much as if he had just seen a ghost. In fact, I never saw him with so startled a look in all my life before. Whether your mother had anything to do with it or not, I really cannot say."
"If I thought she could stoop to sue for me," exclaimed the youth, through his clenched teeth; "but no, my mother was too proud to do it. My poor, poor mother! How was she looking, Villiers?"
"Very haggard, very thin, very worn and wild; very wretched, in a wordthough that was to be expected."
"Poor mother!" murmured the youth, with quivering lips, as he bowed his face in his manacled hands, and his manly chest rose and fell with strong emotion.
"My dear fellow," said Lord Villiers, with tears in his own eyes, "your mother shall never want while I live."
The prisoner wrung his hand in silence.
"If you like, I will try to discover her, and send her to you before you"
His voice choked, and he stopped.

"My dear Villiers, you have indeed proven yourself my friend," said the convict, gratefully. "If you could see her, and send her to me before I leave England to-morrow, you would be conferring the greatest possible favor on me. There are several things of which I wish to speak to her, and which I cannot reveal to any one elsenot even to you."
"Then I will instantly go in search of her," said Lord Villiers, rising and taking his hat. "My dear Germaine, good by."

“Farewell, Ernest. God bless you!”
The hand of the peer and the gipsy met in a strong clasp, but neither could speak.
And so they parted. The prison door closed between the convicted felon and his high-born friend. Did either dream how strangely they were destined to meet again? With his face shaded by his hand, the prisoner sat; that small white hand, delicate as a lady’s, doomed now to the unceasing labor of the convict, when a noise as of persons in altercation in the passage without met his ears. He raised his head to listen, and recognized the gruff, hoarse voice of his jailer; then the sharp, passionate voice of a woman; and, lastly, the calm, clear tones of Lord Ernest Villiers. His words seemed to decide the matter; for the huge key turned in the rusty lock, the heavy door swung back on its hinges, and the tall form of gipsy Ketura passed into the cell.
“Mother!”
The prisoner started to his feet, and with a passionate cry: “Oh, my son! my son!” he was clasped in the arms of his motherclasped and held there in a fierce embrace, as though she defied Heaven itself to tear them apart.
“Thank Heaven, mother, that I see you again!”
“Heaven!” she broke out, with passionate fierceness; “never mention it again! What is heaven, and God, and mercy, and happiness? All a mockery, and worse than a mockery!”
“My poor mother!”
“What have I done, that I should lose you!” she cried, with a still-increasing fierceness. “What crime have I committed, that I should be doomed to a hell upon earth? He was conceived in sin and born in iniquity, even as I was; yet the God you call upon permits him to live happy, rich, honored, and prosperous, while Ioh! it maddens me to think of it! But I will have revenge!”she added, while her fierce eyes blazed, and her long, bony hand clenched“yes, fearful revenge! If I am doomed to perdition, I shall drag him down along with me!”
“Mother! mother! Do not talk so! Be calm!”
“Calm! With these flames, like eternal fires, raging in my heart and brain? Oh, for the hour when his life-blood shall cool their blazing!”
“Mother, you are going mad!” said the young man, almost sternly. “Unless you are calm, we must part.”
“Oh, yes! We will part to-morrow. You will go over the boundless sea with all the thieves, and murderers, and scum of London, and II will live for revenge. By-and-by you will kill yourself, and I will be hung for his murder.”
She laughed a dreary, cheerless laugh, while her eyes grew unnaturally bright with the fires of incipient insanity.
“Poor mother!” said the youth, sadly. “This is the hardest blow of all! Try and bear up, for my sake, mother. Did you see Lord De Courcy to-night?”
“I did. May Heaven’s heaviest curses light on him!” exclaimed the woman, passionately. “Oh! to think that he, that any man, should hold my son’s life in the hollow of his hand,

while I am here, obliged to look on, powerless to avert the blow! May God's worst vengeance light on him, here and hereafter!"
Her face was black with the terrific storm of inward passion; her eyes glaring, blazing, like those of a wild beast; her long, talon like fingers clenched until the nails sunk deep in the quivering flesh.
"Mother, did you stoop to sue for pardon for me tonight?" said the young man, while his brow contracted with a dark frown.
"Oh, I did! I did! I groveled at his feet. I cried, I shrieked, I adjured him to pardon youI, who never knelt to God or man beforeand he refused! I kissed the dust at his feet, and he replied by a cold refusal. But woe to thee, Earl De Courcy!" she cried, bounding to her feet, and dashing back her wild black hair. "Woe to thee, and all thy house! for it were safer to tamper with the lightning's chain than with the aroused tigress Ketura."
"Mother, nothing is gained by working yourself up to such a pitch of passion; you only beat the air with your breath. I am calm."
"Yes, calm as a volcano on the verge of eruption," she said, looking in his gleaming eyes and icy smile.
"And I am submissive, forbearing, and forgiving."
"Yes, submissive as a crouching lionforgiving as a tiger robbed of its youngforbearing as a serpent preparing to spring."
He had awed hereven her, that raving maniacinto calm, by the cold, steely glitter of his dark eyes; by the quiet, chilling smile on his lip. In that fixed, iron, relentless look, she read a strong, determined purpose, relentless as death, or doom, or the grave; terrific in its very quiet, implacable in its very depth of calm, overtopping and surmounting her own.
"We understand each other, I think," he said, quietly. "You perceive, mother, how utterly idle these mad threats and curses of yours are. They will effect nothing but to have you imprisoned as a dangerous lunatic; and it is necessary you should be free to fulfill my last bequest."
Another mood had come over the dark, fierce woman while he spoke. The demoniac look of passion that had hitherto convulsed her face, gave way to one of despairing sorrow, and stretching out her arms, she passionately cried:
"Oh, my son! my only one! the darling of my old age! my sole earthly pride and hope! Oh, Reginald! would to God we had both died ere we had lived to see this day!"
It was the very agony of griefthe last passionate, despairing cry of a mother's utmost woe, wrung fiercely from her tortured heart.
"My poor mothermy dear mother!" said the youth, with tears in his dark eyes, "do not give way to this wild grief. Who knows what the future may bring forth?"
She made no reply; but sat with both arms clasped round her kneesher dry, burning, tearless eyes glaring before her on vacancy.
"Do not despair, mother; we may yet meet again. Who knows?" he said, musingly, after a pause.

She turned her red, inflamed eyeballs on him in voiceless inquiry.
“There are such things as breaking chains and escaping, mother.”
Still that lurid, straining gaze, but no reply.
“And I, if it be in the power of man, I shall escapeI shall return, and then”
He paused, but his eyes finished the sentence. Lucifer, taking his last look of heaven, might have worn just such a lookso full of relentless hate, burning revenge, and undying defiance.
“You may come, but I will never live to see you,” said the gipsy, in a voice so deep, hollow and unnatural, that it seemed issuing from a tomb.
“You willyou must, mother. I have a sacred trust to leave you, for which you must live,” he said impetuously.
“A trust, my son?”
“Yes. One that will demand all your care for many years. You shall hear my story, mother. I would not trust any living being but you; but I can confide fearlessly in you.”
“You have only to name your wishes, Reginald. Though I should have to wade through blood to fulfill them, fear not.”
“Nothing so desperate will be required, mother. The less blood you have on your hands the better. My advice to you is, when I am gone, to return to Yetholm, and wait with patience for my returnfor return I will, in spite of everything.”
Her bloodshot eyes kindled fiercely with invincible determination as he spoke, but she said nothing.
“My story is a somewhat long one,” he said, after a pause, during which a sad shadow had fallen on his handsome face; “but I suppose it is necessary I should tell you all. I thought never to reveal it to any human being; but I did not dream then of ever being a convicted felon, as I am now.”
He had been sitting hitherto with his head resting on his hand; now he arose and began pacing to and fro his narrow cell, while the dark, stern woman, crouching in a distant corner like a dusky shadow, watched him with her eyes of fire, and prepared to listen.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHILD-WIFE

"Oh, had we never, never met,
Or could this heart e'en now forget,
How linked, how blessed we might have been,
Had fate not frowned so dark between!"
Moore.

"Eight years ago, mother," began the prisoner, "I first entered Eton. Through your kindness, I was provided with money enough to enable me to mix on terms of equality in all things with the highest of its high-born students. No one dreamed I was a gipsy; they would as soon have thought of considering themselves one as me. I adopted the name of Reginald Germaine, and represented myself as the son of an exiled French count, and being by Nature gifted with a tolerable share of good looks, and any amount of cool assurance, I soon worked my way up above most of my titled compeers, and became ringleader and prime favorite with students and professors. They talk of good blood showing itself equally in men as in horses, mother. I don't know how that may be, but certain it is the gipsy's son equaled all, and was surpassed by none in college. In fencing, shooting, riding, boxing, rowing, I was as much at home as reading Virgil or translating Greek. If it is any consolation to you, mother, to know what an exceedingly talented son you have," he said, with a bitter smile, "all this will be very consoling to youmore especially as Latin, and Greek, and all the rest of my manifold accomplishments will be extremely necessary to me among my fellow-convicts in Van Dieman's Land. It is very probable I will establish an infant school for young thieves and pickpockets when the day's labor is over. I wonder if our kind, fatherly, far-seeing British government dreams what an incalculable treasure they possess in the person of Germaine, the convicted burglar!"

His bitter, jeering tone was terrible to hear; but the dark, burning glare of his fierce eyes was more terrible still. Oh, it was a dreadful fate to look forward toa chained, manacled convict for lifeand so unjustly condemned! With his fierce, gipsy blood, is it any wonder that every noble and generous feeling in his breast should turn to gall?

The dusky form crouching in the corner moved not, spoke not; but the inflamed eyes glared in the darkness like two red-hot coals.

"Well, mother, I was boasting of my cleverness when I interrupted myselfwas I not?" he said, after a pause, during which he had been pacing, like a caged lion, up and down. "It is an exciting subject, you perceive; and if I get a little incoherent at times, you must only pass it over, and wait until I come to the point. That brief exposé of my standing in the school was necessary, after all, as it will help to show the sort of estimation I was held in. When the vacations came, numberless were the invitations I received to accompany my fellow-students home. Having no home of my own to go to, I need hardly

say those invitations were invariably accepted. How the good people who so lavishly bestowed their hospitality upon me feel now, is a question not very hard to answer. I fancy I can see the looks of horror, amazement and outraged dignity that will fill some of those aristocratic mansions, when they learn that the dashing son and heir of the exiled Count Germaine, on whom they have condescended to smile so benignly, is no other than the convicted gipsy thief. It will be a regular farce to witness, mother."

He laughed, but the grim, shadowy face in the corner was as immovable as a figure in stone.

"Among the friends I made at Eton," he went on, "there was onea fine, princely-hearted fellow about my own agecalled Lord Everly. He was my 'fag' for a time, and, owing to a similarity of tastes and dispositions, we were soon inseparable friends, Wherever one was, there the other was sure to be, until we were nicknamed 'Damon and Pythias' by the rest. Of course, the first vacation after his coming, I received a pressing invitation to accompany him home; and, without requiring much coaxing, I went."

The young man paused, and a dark, earnest shadow39 passed over his fine face. When he again resumed, his voice was low and less bitter.

"I met my fate there, motherthe star of my destiny, that rose, for a few brief, fleeting moments, and then set forever for me. I was a hot-blooded, hot-headed, hotter-hearted boy of nineteen then, who followed the impulse of his own headstrong passions wherever they chose to lead, without ever stopping to think. At Everly Hall I met the cousin of my friendone of the most perfectly beautiful creatures it has ever been my lot to see. Only fourteen years of age, she was so well-grown, and so superbly-proportioned, as to be, in looks, already a woman; and a woman's heart she already possessed. Her name, mother, it is not necessary to tell now. Suffice it to say, that name was one of the proudest of England's proud sons, and her family one of the highest and noblest in the land. She was at Everly Hall, spending her vacation, too, and daily we were thrown together. I had never loved beforenever felt even those first moonlight-on-water affairs that most young men rave about. My nature is not one of those that love lightly; but it was as resistless, as impetuous, as fierce and consuming as a volcano's fire, when it came. Mother, I did not love that beautiful child-woman. Love! Pshaw! that is a cold word to express what I feltevery moonstruck youth prates about his love. No; I adored, I worshipped, I idolized her; the remembrance of who I was, of who she wasall were as walls of smoke before the impetuosity of that first consuming passion. The Everlys never dreamednever, in the remotest degree, fanciedI, the son of an exiled count, could dare to lift my eyes to one whom a prince of the blood-royal might almost have wed without stooping. They had confidence in her, the proud daughter of a proud race, to think she would spurn me from her in contempt, did I dare to breathe my wild passion. But how little, in their cool, clear-headed calculations, did they dream that social position and worldly considerations were as a cobweb barrier before the impetuosity of first love!

"And so, secure in the difference between us in rank, the Everlys permitted their beautiful niece to ride, walk, dance and drive with the gay, agreeable son of the exiled

Count Germaine. Oh! those long, breezy morning rides, over the40 sloping hills and wide lawns that environed the home of the Everlys! I can see her now, as side by side we rode homewardI drinking in, until every sense was intoxicated, the bewildering draught of her beauty, as she sat on her coal-black pony, her dark riding-habit fluttering in the morning breeze; her cheek flushed with health and happiness; her brilliant eyes, more glorious to me than all the stars in heaven; her bright, black hair flashing back the radiant sunlight! Oh! those long, moonlight strolls, arm-in-arm, through the wilderness of roses, not half so beautiful as the queen-rose beside me, that bloomed in wild luxuriance in the gardens! Oh! those enchanting evenings, when, encircled by my arm, we kept time together to the delicious music of the voluptuous waltz. Then it was, there it was, that the gipsy youth wooed and won the high-born daughter of a princely race.

"For, mother, even as I loved her she loved me. No, not as I loved herit was not in her nature to do that, but with all the passionate ardor of a first, strong passion. I had long known I was not indifferent to her; but when, one night, as I stood bending over her as she sat at the piano, and heard her stately lady-aunt whisper to a friend that, in a few more years, her 'lovely and accomplished niece' would become the bride of Lord Ernest Villiers, only son of Earl De Courcy, all that had hitherto restrained me from telling that love was forgotten. I saw her start, and turn pale as she, too, heard and caught the quick, anxious glances she cast at me. All I felt at that moment must have been revealed in my face, for her eyes fell beneath mine, and the hot blood mounted to her very brow.

"'And you are engaged to another?' I said, in a tone of passionate reproach. 'Oh, why did I not know this?'

"'It is no engagement of my making,' she said, in a low, trembling voice. 'I never saw Lord Villiers, nor he me. Our fathers wish we should marry, that is all.'

"'And will you obey?' I said, in a thrilling whisper.

"'No,' she said, impulsively; 'never.'

"The look that accompanied the words made me forget all I had hitherto striven to remember. In an instant I was at her feet, pouring out my wild tale of passion; in another, she was in my arms, whispering the words that made me the41 happiest man on earth. It was well for us both the room was nearly deserted, and the corner where we were in deepest shadow, or the ecstasies into which, like all lovers, we went, would have led to somewhat unpleasant consequences. But our destinies had decreed we should, for the time, have things all our own way; and that night, wandering in the pale, solemn moonlight, I urged, with all the eloquence of a first, resistless passion, a secret marriage. I spoke of her father's compelling us to part; of his insisting on her marriage with one whom she could not love; I drew a touching description of myself, devoted to a life of solitude and misery, and probably ending by committing suicidewhich melancholy picture so worked upon her fears, that I verily believe she would have fled with me to New South Wales, had I asked it. And so I pleaded, with all the ardor of a passion that was as strong and uncontrollable as it was selfish and exacting, until she promised, the

following night, to steal secretly out and fly with me to where I was to have a clergyman in waiting, and then and there become my wife."

Once more he paused, and his fine eyes were full of bitter self-reproach now.

"Mother, that was the turning-point in my destiny. Looking back to that time now, I can wish I had been struck dead sooner than have hurried, as I did, that impulsive, warm-hearted girl into that fatal marriage. Then, in all the burning ardor of youth, I thought of nothing but the intoxicating happiness within my grasp; and had an angel from heaven pleaded for the postponement of my designs, I would have hurled a refusal back in his face. I thought only of the presentof the joy, too intense, almost, to be borneand I steadily shut my eyes to the future. I knew she would loathe, hate, and despise me, if she ever discoveredas discover she must some dayhow I had deceived her; for, with all her love for me, she inherited the pride and haughtiness of her noble house uncontaminated. Had she known who I really was, I know she would have considered me unworthy to touch even the hem of her garment.

"All that day she remained in her room; while I rode off to a neighboring town to engage a clergyman to unite us at the appointed hour. Midnight found me waiting, at the trysting-place; and true to the hour, my beautiful bride, brave in the strength of her love and woman's faith in my honor, met me there, alone; for I would have no attendants to share our confidence.

"Two horses stood waiting. I lifted her into the saddle, sprung upon my own horse; and away we dashed, at a break-neck pace, to consummate our own future misery. There was no time for words; but I strove to whisper of the happy days in store for us, as we rode along. She did not utter a word; but her face was whiter than that of the dead when I lifted her from the saddle and drew her with me into the church.

"The great aisles were dimly lighted by one solitary lamp, and by its light we beheld the clergyman, standing, in full canonicals, to sanction our mad marriage. Robed in a dark, flowing dress, with her white face looking out from her damp, flowing, midnight hair I can see her before me, as she stood there, shivering at intervals with a strange presaging of future evil.

"It was an ominous bridal, mother; for, as the last words died away, and we were pronounced man and wife, the harsh, dreadful croak of a raven resounded through the vast, dim church, and the ghostly bird of omen fluttered for a moment over our heads, and fell dead at our feet. Excited by the consciousness that she was doing wrong; the solemn, unlighted old church; the dread, mystic hourall proved too much for my little child-wife, and with a piercing shriek, she fell fainting in my arms. Mother, the unutterable reproach of that wild agonizing cry will haunt me to my dying day."

No words can describe the bitterness of his tone, the undying self-reproach that filled his dark eyes, as he spoke.

"We bore her to the vestry; but it was long before she revived, and longer still before, with all the seductive eloquence of passionate love, I could soothe her into quiet.

"'Oh, Reginald, I have done wrong!' was her sorrowful, remorseful cry to all I could say.

“We paid the clergyman, and rode homethe gipsy youth and the high born lady, united for life now by the mysterious tie of marriage. Now that the last, desperate step was taken, even I grew for a moment appalled at what I had done. But I did not repent. No; had it been again to do, I would have done it over a thousand times. I would have lost heaven sooner than her!

“Three weeks longer we continued inmates of Everly Hall; and no one ever suspected that we met other than as casual acquaintances. Looking back now on my past life, those are the only days of unalloyed sunshine I can remember in the whole course of my life; and sheshe, too, closed her eyes to the future, and was for the time being perfectly happy.

“But the time came when we were forced to part. She went back to school, while I returned to London, I met her frequently, at first; but her father, after a time, began to think, perhaps, that, for the son of an exiled count, I was making too rapid progress in his daughter’s affections, and peremptorily ordered her to discontinue the acquaintance. But she loved me well enough to disobey him; and though I saw she looked forward with undisguised terror to the time when the revelation of our marriage would be made we still continued to meet at long intervals.

“So a year passed. One day, wishing to consult her about somethingI forget whatwe met at an appointed trysting place. She entered the light chaise I had brought with me, and we drove off. The horses were half tamed things at best, and in the outskirts of a little village, several miles from the academy, they took fright at something, and started off like the wind. I strove in vain to check them. On they flew, like lightning, until suddenly coming in contact with a garden-fence, the chaise was overthrown, and we were both flung violently out.

“I heard a faint cry from my companion, and, unheeding: a broken arm, which was my share of the accident I managed to raise her from the ground, where she lay senseless, and bear her into the cottage. Fortunately, the cottage was owned by an old widow, to whom I had once rendered some slight service which secured her everlasting gratitude; and more fortunately still, my companion had received no injury from her fall, beyond a slight wound in the head.

“Leaving her in the care of the old woman, I went to the nearest surgeon, had my wounds dressed, and my horses disposed of until such times as we could resume our journey. Then I returned to the cottage; but found to my great44 alarm, that my wife, during my absence, had become seriously ill, and was raving in the wild delirium of a burning fever.

“There was no doctor in the village whose skill I could trust where her life was concerned; and, half-mad with terror and alarm, I sprung on horseback, and rode off to London for medical aid. But with all my haste, nearly twelve hours elapsed before I could return accompanied by a skillful though obscure physician, chosen by me because he was obscure, and never likely to meet her again.

“As I entered, the feeble wail of an infant struck on my ear; and the first object on which my eyes rested as I went in, was the old woman sitting with a babe in her arms, while the child-mother lay still unconscious, as I had left her.
“Mother, what I felt at that moment words can never disclose. Discovery now seemed inevitable. She must wake to the knowledge that he for whom she had given up everything was a gipsy; that her child bore in its veins the tainted gipsy blood. Disowned and despised by all her high-born friends, she would hate me for the irretrievable wrong I had done her; and to lose her was worse than death to me.
“The intense anguish and remorse I endured at that moment, might have atoned for a darker crime than mine. I had never felt so fully, before, the wrong I had done her; and with the knowledge of its full enormity, came the resolution of making all the atonement in my power.
“The doctor had pronounced her illness severe, but not dangerous; and said that with careful nursing she would soon be restored to health. When he was gone, I turned to the old woman, and inquired if she was willing to undertake the care of the child. The promise of being well paid made her readily answer in the affirmative; and then we concluded a bargain that she was to take care of the infant, and keep its existence a secret from every one, and, above all, from its mother. For I knew that she would never consent to give it up, and I was resolved that it should not be the means of dragging her down to poverty and disgrace. The woman was to keep it out of her sight while she remained, and tell her it had died, should she make any inquiries.
“During the next week, I scarcely ever left the cottage; and when she was sufficiently recovered to use a pen, she wrote a few lines to the principal of the academy, saying she had gone to visit a friend, and would not return for a fortnight, at least. As she had ever been a petted child, accustomed to go and come unquestioned, her absence excited no surprise or suspicion; and secreted in the cottage, she remained for the next two weeks. How the old woman managed to conceal the child I know not; but certain it is, she did it.
“The time I had dreaded came at last. My better nature had awoke since the birth of my child; and I resolved to tell her all, cost what it might, and set her free. Mother, you can conceive the bitter humiliation such a confession must have been to meyet I made it. I told her all; how basely I had deceived her; how deeply I had wronged her. In that moment, every spark of love she had ever felt for me was quenched forever in her majestic indignation, her scorn, and utter contempt. Silently she arose and confronted me, white as the dead, superb in her withering scorn, as far above me as the heavens from the earth. All the pride of her proud race swelled in her breast, in a loathing too deep and intense for words. But those steady, darkening eyes, that seemed scintillating sparks of fire, I will never forget.
“‘Here we must part, then, Reginald Germaine; and on this earth we must never meet again!’ she said, in a voice steady from its very depth of scorn. ‘Of the matchless wrong you have done me, I will not speak; it is too late for that now. If one spark of the honor you once professed still lingers in your breast, be silent as regards the past. I ask no

more. You have forever blighted my life; but the world need never know what we once were to each other. If money is any object'and her beautiful lip curled with a contempt too intense for words'you shall have half my wealththe whole of it, if you willif it only buys your silence. I will return to school, and try to forget the unutterable degradation into which I have sunk. You go your own way, and we are strangers from henceforth!'

"Mother! mother! such was our parting; in scorn and hatred on one side; in utter despair and undying remorse on the other. That day she returned to school; I fled, to46 drown thought in the maddening whirl and tumult of London; and we have never met since. She is unmarried still, and the reigning belle of every gilded salon in London; but I know she never will, never can, forget the abyss of humiliation into which I dragged her down. For her sake, to injure her happiness, I would willingly end this wretched existence, but that I must live for what is so dear to the gipsy heartrevenge! With all her lofty pride, what she will feel in knowing she is the wife of a convicted felon, God and her own heart alone will ever know."

He threw himself into a seat, and shading his face with his hands, sat silent; but the convulsive heaving of his strong chest, his short, hard breathing, told, more than words could ever do, what he felt at that moment. And still the dusky shadow in the duskier corner sat silently glaring upon him with those red, lurid eyes of flame.

"To tell you this story, to commit my child to your charge, I wished to see you to-night, mother," he said, at last, without looking up. "She does not dream of its existence; she was told it died the hour of its birth, and was buried while she was still unconscious. In this pocketbook you will find the address of the woman who keeps it; tell her the countfor as such she knows mesent you for it. Take it with you to Yetholm, mother; try to think it is your son, Reginald, and forget the miserable convict whom you may never see more."

Still no reply, but oh, the fixed, burning gaze of those spectral eyes of fire!

"Mother, you must leave me now," he said, lifting his head, and looking sorrowfully in her rigid, haggard face; "for the few hours that are left me, I would like to be alone. It is better for us both that we part now."

"I will not go!" said a voice so hollow, so unnatural, that it seemed to issue from the jaws of death. "I will not go. I defy heaven and earth, and God himself, to tear me from you now."

"Mother, it is my wish," he said, calmly.

"Yours, Reginald?" she cried, in a voice of unutterable reproach. "You wish that I should leave you? For fifteen years I have given you up, and in one short hour you tire of me now. Oh, Reginald, my son! my son!"

No words can describe the piercing anguish, the utter woe, that rived that wild cry up from her tortured heart.

He came over, and laid his small, delicate hand on hers, hard, coarse, and black with sun, wind and toil.

“Listen to me, my mother!” And his low, calm, soothing tones were in strong contrast to her impassioned voice. “I am not tired of youyou wrong me by thinking so; but I have letters to write, and many matters to arrange before to-morrow’s sun rises. I am tired, too, and want to rest; for it is a long time since sleep has visited my eyes, mother.”
“Sleep,” she bitterly echoed; “and when do you think I have slept. Look at these sunken eyes, this ghastly face, this haggard form, and ask when I have slept. Think of the mighty wrong I have suffered, and ask when I shall sleep again.”
“My poor, unhappy mother!”
“He can sleep,” she broke out, with a low, wild laugh. “Oh, yes! in his bed of down, with his princely son under the same roof, with menials to come at his beck, he can sleep. Yes, he sleeps now! but the hour comes when that sleep shall last forever! Then my eyes may close, but never before!”
“You are delirious, mother; this blow has turned your brain.”
She rose to her feet, her tall, gaunt form looming up in the shadowy darkness; her wild black hair streaming disheveled down her back; her fierce eyes blazing with demoniacal light, one long, bony arm raised and pointing to heaven. Dark, fierce and stern, she looked like some dread priestess of doom, invoking the wrath of Heaven on the world.
“Delirious, am I?” she said, in her deep, bell-like tones, that echoed strangely in the silent cell. “If undying hate, if unresting vengeance, if revenge that will never be satiated but by his misery, be delirium, then I am mad. I leave you now, Reginald, such is your command; and remember, when far away, you leave one behind you who will wreak fearful vengeance for all we have both suffered.”
“Mother, Lord De Courcy is not so much to blame after all, since he believes me guilty. I am not alarmed by your48 wild threats; for I know, in the course of time, this mad hate will grow less.”
“Nevernever!” she fiercely hissed through her clenched teeth. “May God forget me if I ever forget my vow! Reginald, if I thought that man could go to heaven, and I by some impossibility could be saved, too, I would take a dagger and send my soul to perdition, sooner than go there with him.”
Upturned in the red light of the lamp, her face, as she spoke, was the face of a demon.
“Strong hate, stronger than death!” he said, half to himself, as he gazed on that fiendish face. “Farewell, then, mother. Will you fulfill my last request?”
“About your child?yes.”
“Thank you, dearest mother. If so lost a wretch as I am dare invoke Heaven, I would ask its blessings on you.”
“Ask no blessing for me!” she fiercely broke in. “I would hurl it back in the face of the angels, did they offer it.”
Folding her mantle around her, she knotted the handkerchief, that had fallen off, under her chin, and stood ready to depart. The young man went to the door, and knocked loudly. A moment after, the tramp of heavy feet was heard in the corridor approaching the door.

“It is the jailer to let you out. Once more, good-by, mother.”
She was hard, and stern, and rigid now; and there were no tears in her dry, stony, burning eyes, as she turned to take a last farewell of the son she idolizedthe son she might never see again. His eyes were dim, but her tears were turned to sparks of fire.
Without a word she pressed one hot, burning kiss on his handsome brow; and then the door opened, and she flitted out in the darkness like an evil shadow. The heavy door again swung to; the key turned in the lock; the son was alone in his condemned cell; and the maniac mother, out once more in the beating rain and chill night wind, was lost in the great wilderness of mighty London.

CHAPTER VII

THE MOTHER'S DESPAIR

"Go, when the hunter's hand hath wrung
From forest-cave her shrieking young,
And calm the lonely lioness
But soothe not, mock not, my distress."
Byron.

Away through the driving stormthrough the deepening darkness of coming mornthrough the long, bleak, gusty streetsthrough alleys, and courts, and lanes; whirled on like a leaf in the blast that knows not, cares not, whither it goes, sped the gipsy queen Ketura. There were not many abroad at that hour; but those she passed paused in terror, and gazed after the towering form, with the wild face and wilder eyes, that flew past like a lost soul returning to Hades. She stood on London bridge, and, leaning over, looked down on the black, sluggish waters beneath. Many lights were twinkling here and there upon the numerous barges rising and falling heavily on the long, lazy swell, but the river elsewhere lay wrapped in the blackness of Tartarus. One plunge, she thought, as she looked over, and all this gnawing misery that seems eating her very vitals might be ended forever. One hand was laid on the railthe next moment she might have been in eternity; but with the rebound of a roused tigress she sprung back. Was it the thought of standing before the judgment-seat of God with all her crime on her soulof the long eternity of misery that must followthat appalled her? No, she would have laughed in scorn at these, but the remembrance of her vow, of her oath of vengeance, restrained her.

"No; I will live till I have wrung from his heart a tithe of the misery mine has felt," she thought; and then a dark, lowering glance on the black, troubled waters below filled up the hiatus.

Dusky forms, like shadows from the grave, were flitting to and fro, brushing past her as they went. Restlessly they50 flew on, as if under the friendly mantle of darkness alone they dared leave their dens. She knew who they werethe scum, the offcasts, the street-walkers of London; and she wondered vaguely, as she caught fitful glimpses of wild, pale faces, that gleamed for an instant in the light of the lamp, and then were gone, if any of them had ever felt anguish like to hers. While she stood clutching the parapet, a female form, in light, flowing garments, was borne on, as if by the night wind, and stood gazing down into the gloomy waters beside her. One fleeting glimpse she caught of a pale young face, beautiful still, despite its look of unutterable woe; and then, with a light rustle, something went down, far down, into the waves beneath. There was a sullen plunge, and the gipsy queen leaned over to see. By the light of one of the barge lamps she saw a darker shadow rise through the darkness to the surface. For an instant that white, wild

face glared above the black bosom of the Thames, and then disappeared forever; and with a hard, bitter smile, terrible to see, the dark, dread woman turned away.

Away, again, through the labyrinth of the city, leaving that "Bridge of Sighs" far behindaway from the dark dens and filthy purlieus to the wider and more fashionable part of the town, sped the gipsy queen. There could be no rest for her this last sorrowful night; as if pursued by a haunting demon she fled on, as if she would escape from the insufferable misery that was gnawing at her heart; seeking for rest, and finding it not. Clutching her breast fiercely at intervals with her dark, horny fingers, as if she would tear thence the anguish that was driving her mad, she still flew on, until once again she found herself before the brilliantly lighted mansion of Earl De Courcy. Swelling on the night air, came borne to her ear strains of softest music, as if to mock her misery. Gay forms went flitting past the windows, and, at intervals, soft musical peals of laughter mingled with the louder sounds of gayety. Folding her arms over her breast, the gipsy leaned against a lamp-post, and looked, with a steady smile, up at the illuminated "marble hall" before her. Her commanding form, made more commanding by her free, fiery costume, stood out in bold relief, in the light of the street-lamp. Her dark face was set with a look fairly terrific in its intensity of hate. And that smile curling51 her thin, colorless lipsSatan himself might have envied her that demoniacal smile of unquenchable malignity!

Moving through his gorgeous rooms, Earl De Courcy dreamed not of the dark, vengeful glance that would, if it could, have pierced those solid walls of stone to seek him. And yet ever before him, to mar his festivity, would arise the haunting memory of that convulsed face, those distended eye-balls, those blanched lips, those upraised hands, pleading vainly for the mercy he could not grant. Amid all the glitter and gayety of the brilliant scene around him, he could not forget the pleadings of that strong heart in its strong agony. He thought little of her threatsof her maledictions; yet, when some hours later he missed his son from the gay scene, dark thoughts of assassinationof the unfailing subtle poisons gipsies were so skilful in, arose before him; and he shuddered with a vague presentiment of dread. But his son had returned safe; and now the stately old nobleman stood gayly chatting with a bevy of fair ladies, who clustered round him like so many gay, glittering, tropical butterflies.

"Oh! she was positively the most delightful old thing I ever saw!" exclaimed the gay voice of gay little Miss Clara Jernyngham. "Just like 'Hecate' in 'Macbeth,' for all the worldthe very beau ideal of a delightful Satanic old sorceress! I would have given anythingmy diamond ring, my French poodle, every single one of my lovers, or even a 'perfect love of a bonnet'to have had her tell my fortune. I fairly dote on all those delightfully-mysterious, enchanting, ugly old gipsies who come poking round, stealing and telling fortunes. What in the world did she want of you, my lord?"

A shadow fell darkly over the brow of the earl for a moment, as he recollected that dark, impassioned woman pleading for her only son; but it passed away as quickly as it came, and he answered, with a smile:

“To tell my fortune, of course, little bright-eyes. Am I not an enviable man?”
“And did she really tell it? Oh, how delightful! What did she say, my lord?”
“That I was to propose to Miss Clara Jernyngham, who was to say, ‘With pleasure, my lord!’that I was to indulge52 her with ‘loves of bonnets’ and French poodles to an unlimited extentthat”
“Now, I don’t believe a word of it,” said Miss Clara, pouting, while a peal of silvery laughter arose from the rest. “I wouldn’t be a mere countess at any price. I’ll have a ducal coronet, if I die for it! You know the old Duke of B, my lord!” she added, in a mysterious whisper. “Well, he is not quite right in his mind, poor man! and I am going to propose to him the very first chance! The family diamonds are superb, and I will become them beautifully, you know! This is strictly entre nous, though; and if you don’t tell, my lord, you shall have an invitation to the wedding, and drink my health in his grace’s old wine!”
And, with her pretty little face all dimpled with smiles, Miss Clara danced away to a window near, and, lifting the heavy curtains, peeped out.
The earl had bowed, and, with his hand on his heart, had promised, with befitting gravity, to preserve the young lady’s secret inviolate, and was now turning away, when a sudden ejaculation from Miss Clara’s rosy lips brought him again to her side.
“Oh, my lord! only look!” she cried, in a breathless whisper, pointing out. “There is that dark, dreadful gipsy we were talking of, herself. Only look at that awful face; it is positively enough to make one’s blood run cold. Could she have heard us, do you think, my lord?”
At any other time, the gay little lady’s undisguised terror would have amused the earl; but now, with that dark, stern, terrible face gleaming like a vision from the dead, in the fitful light of the street-lamp, he felt his very blood curdle. It rose before him so unexpectedly, as if she had risen from the earth to confront him, that even his strong heart grew for a moment appalled. Her tall form looming up unnaturally large in the uncertain light; her unsheltered head, on which the rain mercilessly beat; her steady, burning, unswerving gaze fixed on the very window where they stoodall combined, sent a thrill of terror, such as in all his life he had never felt before, to the very heart of the earl.
She saw them as they stood there; for by the brilliant jets of light, his imposing form was plainly revealed in the large window. Slowly, like an inspired sibyl of darkest53 doom, she raised one skinny hand, and, while her long, flickering finger pointed upward, her ominous gaze never for a single instant wandered from his face. So wild, so threatening was her look, that the shriek she had opened her mouth to utter, froze on little Miss Jernyngham’s lips; and the earl, with a shudder, shaded his eyes with his hands to shut out the weird sight. One moment later, when he looked again, the dark, portentous vision was gone, and nothing met his eye but the slanting rain falling on the wet, glittering pavement.

Slowly and reluctantly, as though unwilling to go, the clouds of night rolled sullenly back, and morning, with dark, shrouded face and dismal fog, broke over London.

The crash, the din, the surging roar of busy life had commenced. The vast heart of the mighty Babel was throbbing with the unceasing stream of life. Men, looking like specters, in the thick, yellow fog, buttoned up in overcoats, and scowling at the weather, passed up and down the thronged thoroughfares. On the river, barges, yachts and boats ran against each other in the gloom, and curses, loud and deep, from hoarse throats, mingled with peals of gruff laughter, from crowds of rowdy urchins on the wharves, who, secure in their own safety, seemed hugely to enjoy the discomfiture of their fellow-heathens. The dark bosom of the sluggish Thames rose and fell calmly enough, telling no tales of all the misery, woe and shame hidden forever under its gloomy waves.

A large, black, dismal-looking ship lay moored to one of the docks, and a vast concourse of people were assembled to witness the crowd of convicts who were to be borne far away from "Merrie England" in her, that morning. Two-by-two they came, chained together hand and foot, like oxen; and the long, gloomy procession wound its tortuous way to the vessel's side, amid the laughter, scoffs and jeers of the crowd. Yet there were sad faces in that crowd, toofaces hard, rough and guilt-stainedthat grew sorrowful as better men's might have grown, as some friend, son, husband or brother went by, straining their eyes to take a last look at the land they were leaving forever. Now and then, some fair young face scarcely past boyhood would pass in the felon gangfaces hard to associate with the idea of guilt; but most were dark, savage, morose men, with scowling eyes and guilt-hardened looksmen inured to crime from their very infancy, and paying crime's just penalty now.

At last came one who was greeted with an insulting cheer that rung to the very heavens. And "Hurrah! for the gentleman gipsy!" "Hurrah! hurrah! for the thief from Eton!" rung out again and again, until the welkin rung.

Proudly erect, with his fine head thrown back; his full, falcon eyes flashing with a scorn that made more than one scoffing gaze fall, walked the son of the gipsy queen.

Shout after shout of derision greeted him as he went on; for the rabble ever hate those who, belonging to their own class, raise themselves above them. But when a womana wild, haggard, despairing womanrushed through the crowd, and greeted him with the passionate cry: "My son! oh, my son!my son!" a silence like that of death fell over the vast throng. Unheeding all around her, the gipsy Ketura would have forced her way to his side; but she was held back by those who had charge of the convicts. And the dreary procession passed on its way.

All were on board at last; and the vessel, with a fair wind, was moving away from the wharf. The crowd was dispersing; and the officer, at last, who was guarding Ketura, moved away with the rest, casting a compassionate glance on the face white with woman's utmost woe.

Standing there, with straining eyeballs and clenched hands, the wretched woman watched the ship that bore away the son she so madly loved. A sort of desperate hope

was in her heart; still, while it remained in sight, something might intervene to restore him yet. With parted lips and heaving breast, she stood there, as any other mother might stand, and watched the sods piled over her child's grave; and still she would not believe he had gone forever. At last the vessel disappeared; the last trace of her white sails were gone; and then, with a terrific shriek that those who heard might never forget, she threw up both arms, and fell, in strong convulsions, to the ground.

CHAPTER VIII

MR TOOSYPEGS "TURNS UP" AGAIN

"His looks do argue him replete with modesty."
Shakspeare.

"Why, Mr. Harkins, it ain't possible, now!" exclaimed a struggling, incredulous voice. "Just to think we should meet again after such a long time! I'm sure it's real surprising."

The speaker, a pale young man, with a profusion of light hair and freckles, and a gaudy hand carpet-bag, was taking a stroll on the classic banks of the Serpentine, when suddenly espying a short, plethoric, gruff-looking, masculine individual coming toward him, he made a sudden plunge at him, and grasped his hand with an energy that was quite startling.

The short individual addressed, with a wholesome distrust of London pickpockets before his eyes, raised a stout stick he carried, with the evident intention of trying the thickness of the pale young man's skull; but before it could come down, the proprietor of the freckles began, in a tone of mild expostulation:

"Why, Mr. Harkins, you haven't forgotten mehave you? Don't you recollect the young man you brought to London in your wagon one rainy night? Why, Mr. Harkins, I'm O. C. Toosypegs!" said the pale young man, in a slightly aggrieved tone.

"Why, so hit be!" exclaimed Mr. Harkins, brightening up, and lowering his formidable weapon. "Blessed! if you 'adn't gone clean hout my 'ead! Why, Mr. Toosypegs, this is the most surprisingest thing as ever was! I hain't seen you I don't care when!"

"I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Harkins," said Mr. Toosypegs, gratefully. "I knew you'd be very glad to see me, and it's real kind of you to say so. I hope Mrs. Harkins and your infant family are all quite well, I thank you."

"Yes, they're hall among the middlin's" said Mr. Har56kins, indifferently. "Mrs. Harkins 'as been and gone and 'ad thewhat's this now?" said Mr. Harkins, pausing, with knit brows, and scratching his head in perplexity. "Blessed! if I hain't clean forgot the name, it was 'tongs,' Noyesit was 'tongs,' hand something else."

"And poker," suggested Mr. Toosypegs, thoughtfully.

"Mr. Toosypegs," said Mr. Harkins, facing round fiercely, "I 'ope you don't mean for to hinsult a cove, do you?"

"Why, Mr. Harkins!" remonstrated the astonished and aggrieved Mr. Toosypegs. "I'm sure I never meant any such thing; I wouldn't insult you for all the world forfor" Mr. Toosypegs paused for a figure of speech strong enough. "For any amount of money, Mr. Harkins," added Mr. Toosypegs, warmly.

"Well, it don't make no matter hif you did," said Mr. Harkins, cooling suddenly down. "But what has this Mrs. 'Arkins 'adtongstongs? Oh, yes! tongs-will-eat-us! that's the name, Mr. Toosypegs. Mrs. 'Arkins 'ad that," said Mr. Harkins, triumphantly.

"Tonsilitus, perhaps," insinuated Mr. Toosypegs, meekly.

“Well, hain’t that wot I said?” exclaimed Mr. Harkins, rousing up again. “Hand my John Halbert, he’s been and ’ad a Sarah Bell affection”
“Cerebral,” again ventured Mr. Toosypegs, humbly.
“Well, hain’t that wot I said?” shouted Mr. Harkins, glaring savagely at the republican, who wilted suddenly down. “Blessed! if I hain’t a good mind to bring you a clip ’long side the ’ead, for your imperence in conterdicting me like this ’ere hev’ry time? Why, you’d perwoke a saint, so you would!” exclaimed the outraged Mr. Harkins.
“Mr. Harkins, I’m sure I never meant to offend you, and I’m real sorry for your trouble,” apologized Mr. Toosypegs, in a remorse-stricken tone.
“Well, it wasn’t no trouble,” said Mr. Harkins, testily. “’Cos he got took to the ’orsepittle for fear hany the rest hof the family would take it. Mary-Hann, she got her feet wet, and took the inn-flue-end-ways; whot yer got to say ag’in’ that?” fiercely demanded Mr. Harkins.
Mr. Toosypegs, who had been muttering “influenza” to himself, and chuckling inwardly, as he thought how he could correct Mr. Harkins, in his own mind, in spite of57 him, was so completely overpowered by this bristling question, that the blood of conscious guilt rushed to his face, and Mr. O. C. Toosypegs stood blushing like a red cabbage.
“Because if you’ve got hanything to say ag’in hit,” went on Mr. Harkins, pointing one stubby forefinger at society in general, “you ’ad better let hit hout for a little hexercise, that’s all. Come now!”
“Mr. Harkins, it’s very kind of you to give me permission, and I am very much obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs, looking severely at a small boy who had a hold of his coat-tails behind. “But I hadn’t the remotest idea of saying anything, whatever, against it. I’m sure it’s perfectly right and proper Mary Ann should have the influenza, if she wants to.”
“Ah! I didn’t know but what you might think she ’adn’t,” said Mr. Harkins blandly. “There wasn’t hany tellin’, you know, but what you might say a Hinglishman’s ’ouse wasn’t his castle, and he couldn’t ’ave whatever he likes there. Well, the baby, he got the crook, which ’ad the meloncholic heffec’ hof turning ’im perfectly black in the face.”
Mr. Toosypegs, though inwardly surmising Mr. Harkins meant the croup, thought it a very likely effect to be brought about by either.
“Then Sary Jane took the brown skeeters, hand I ’ad the lum-beggar hin my hown back, but on the whole we were all pretty well, thanky!”
“I am real glad to hear it,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with friendly warmth. “I’ve been pretty well myself since, too. I’m very much obliged to you.”
“Let’s see, it’s near a month, hain’t it, since the night I took you to London?” said Mr. Harkins.
“Three weeks and five days exactly,” said Mr. Toosypegs, briskly.
“I suppose you don’t disremember the hold gipsy has we took him that nightdo you? ‘I was a stranger hand you took me him.’ That’s in the Bible, Mr. Toosypegs,” said Mr. Harkins, drawing down the corners of his mouth, and looking pious, and giving Mr. Toosypegs a dig in the ribs, to mark the beauty of the quotation.

“Yes, Mr. Harkins, but not so hard, if you pleaseit hurts,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with tears in his eyes, as he rubbed the place.
“What does? that there piece hout the Bible?” said Mr. Harkins, with one of his sudden bursts of fierceness.
“Oh, Lor’, no!” said the deeply-scandalized Mr. Toosypegs, surprised into profanity by the enormity of the charge. “It’s your elbow, Mr. Harkins, it hurts,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with a subdued sniffle.
“Humph!” grunted Mr. Harkins; “well hit’s hof no squenceyance, but you don’t disremember the hold gipsy-woman we took in, do you?”
“The one with the black eyes and short frock? Oh, I remember her!” said Mr. Toosypegs. “I’ve never seen her since.”
“No, I shouldn’t s’pose you ’ad,” said Mr. Harkins, gruffly, “seein’ she’s as mad as a March ’are, down there with her tribe. Mysterious are the ways of Providence. You blamed little rascal! hif you do that again, I’ll chuck you inter the Serpentine! blessed hif I don’t.”
His last sentence, which began with a pious upturning of the whites, or rather the yellows, of Mr. Harkins’ eyes, was abruptly cut short by a depraved youth, who, turning a course of summersaults for the benefit of his constitution, rolled suddenly against Mr. Harkins’ shins, and the next instant found himself whimpering and rubbing a portion of his person, where Mr. Harkins had planted a well-applied kick.
“The way the principuls of perliteness is neglected to be hinstilled hinto the minds of youths now-a-days, is distressin’ to behold,” said Mr. Harkins, with a grimace of pain; “but has I was sayin’ habout the hold gipsy queen, she’s gone crazy, hand”(here Mr. Harkins lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper)“she’s went hand got a baby.”
“Do tell!” ejaculated Mr. Toosypegs, who saw it was expected of him to be surprised, and who consequently was, though he could not see any earthly reason for it.
“A baby,” went on Mr. Harkins, who would have emphasized his words by another dig in the ribs, but that Mr. Toosypegs dodged back in alarm; “a real baby, alive and kickin’!”
“Pshaw! it ain’t possible!” said Mr Toosypegs, in a voice betraying not the slightest particle of emotion.
“It ishincredulous as it may sound, it’s true,” said Mr. Harkins, solemnly. “The way I found hit hout was this: I was comin’ halong ’ome, one night hafter bringing hoff a cove w’at got waylaid to Lunnon, a-singin’ to myself that there song, the ‘Roast Beef hof Hold Hingland,’ hand a-thinkin’ no more ’arm, Mr. Toosypegs, nor a lot hof young pigses goin’ to market,” said Mr. Harkins, giving his stick a grand flourish to mark this bold figure of speech. “It wasn’t a dark night, Mr. Toosypegs, nor yet a light one; the starses was a-shinin’ like heverything, when, hall hof a suddint, a ’and was laid hon the reins, hand a voice, so deep and orful-like hit made me fairly jump, said:
“‘Will you let me ride hin your vagging has far has you’re going?’
“I looked round, Mr. Toosypegs,” continued Mr. Harkins, in a husky whisper, “and there I see’d that there gipsy queen, lookin’ so dark, hand fierce, and wild-like, I nearly

jumped clean hout the wagging. Blessed! if I wasn't skeert! Just then I heerd a cry from a bundle she'd got in her arms, hand what do you think I saw, Mr. Toosypegs?"
The startling energy with which Mr. Harkins, carried away by the excitement of his story, asked this question, so discomposed the mild young man with the freckles, that he gave a sudden jump back, and glanced in terror at the narrator's elbow.
"Really, Mr. Harkins, I don't know, I'm sure," said Mr. Toosypegs, grasping his carpet-bag, nervously.
"A baby!" said Mr. Harkins, in the same mysterious, husky whisper; "a baby, Mr. Toosypegs! Now, the question his, where did that there baby come from?"
Mr. Harkins gave his hat a slap on the crown, for emphasis, and, resting both hands on the top of his stick, came to a sudden halt, and looked Mr. Toosypegs severely in the face.
"Areally, Mr. HarkinsIaI hadn't the remotest idea," said Mr. Toosypegs, blushing to the very roots of his hair, "I hope you don't suspect me"
"Bah!" interrupted Mr. Harkins, with a look of disgust; "nobody never said nothin' about you! Well, Mr. Toosy60pegs, I took her hin, has she hasked, and brought her along has far has my 'ouse, where Missus 'Arkins gave her something to eat for the little 'un, which was has fine a little fellow has you'd wish to see. Then she went hoff, and the next week we heard she'd gone and went crazy."
"Poor thing. Why, I'm real sorry, Mr. Harkins. I dare say she was a real nice old lady, if she'd been let alone," said Mr. Toosypegs, in a tone of commiseration.
"Why, who tetched her?" said Mr. Harkins, testily.
"Well, they went and transported her son, and I'm sure it wasn't right at all, when he did not want to go. She looked real put out about it that night, herself, too."
"S'pose you heerd her son was drown-ded?"
"Yes; I saw it in the papers, and I was real sorryI really was. Mr. Harkins, I dare say you was, too?"
Mr. Harkins grunted.
"All hands was lost, wasn't they?" said Mr. Harkins, after a short pause.
"Yes; all hands and feet," said Mr. Toosypegs, venturing on a weak joke; but, catching the stern look of Mr. Harkins, at this improper levity, he instantly grew serious again; "the ship struck against something"
"A mermaid," suggested Mr. Harkins.
"Mr. Harkins, I'm very much obliged to you, but it wasn't a mermaid, it was a coral reefthat's the nameand went to the bottom with all hands and the cook."
"Which is a melancholic picture hof the treacherousness hof the hocean," said Mr. Harkins, in a moralizing tone, "hand should be a severe warning to hall, when they steal, not to let themselves get tooken hup, lest they be tooken down a peg or two, hafter."
"But you know, Mr. Harkins, it's been found out since he wasn't the one who stole the plate, at all. That man they arrested for murder, and are going to hang, confessed he did it. I'm sure you might have seen it in the papers, Mr. Harkins."

“I don’t put no faith hin the papers myself,” said Mr. Harkins, in a severe tone; “they hain’t to be believed, none of ’em. Hif they says one thing, you may be sure hit’s just hexactly the tother. That there’s my opinion.”
“But, Mr. Harkins, look here,” said Mr. Toosypegs, deeply impressed with this profound view of the newspaper press, in general, “I dare say that’s true enough, and it’s real sensible of you to say so; but in this case it must be true. Why, they’re going to hang the man, Mr. Harkins, and he confessed he did that, along with ever so many other unlawful things. I wonder if hanging hurts much, Mr. Harkins?” said Mr. Toosypegs, involuntarily loosening his neck-cloth, as he thought of it.
“Well, I don’t know,” returned Mr. Harkins, thoughtfully, “I never was ’anged myself, but I had a cousin who married a vidder.” Here, Mr. Harkins, taking advantage of a moment’s unguarded proximity, gave Mr. Toosypegs a facetious dig in the ribs, which caused that ill-used young gentleman to spring back with something like a howl.
“You don’t know how sharp your elbow is, Mr. Harkins; and my ribs are real thin. I ain’t used to such treatment, and it hurts,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with whom this seemed to be the climax of wrong, and beyond which there was no proceeding further.
“I have heerd it was honly their shins as was tender hin Hamerica,” said Mr. Harkins. “When are you goin’ back to Hamerica, Mr. Toosypegs?”
“Not before a yearperhaps two,” said Mr. Toosypegs, brightening suddenly up. “And I tell you what, Mr. Harkins, America is a real nice place, and I’ll be ever so glad to get back to it. There was the nicest people round where we lived that ever was,” went on Mr. Toosypegs, getting enthusiastic. “There was Judge Lawless, up at Heath Hill; and old Admiral Havenful, at the White Squall, and lots of other folks. Where I lived was called Dismal Hollow, owing to its being encircled by huge black rocks on all sides, and a dark pine forest on the other.”
“Pleasant place it must ’ave been,” said Mr. Harkins, with a strong sneer.
“Well, it wasn’t so pleasant as you might think,” seriously replied Mr. Toosypegs, on whom his companion’s sarcasm was completely thrown away; “the sun never shone there; and as Dismal Creek, that run right before the house, got swelled up every time it rained, the house always made a point of getting flooded, and so we lived most of the time in the attic in the spring. There were runaway niggers in the62 woods, too, who used to steal and do a good many other nasty things, so it wasn’t safe to go out at night, but, on the whole, it was pretty pleasant.”
“Wot ever made you leave sich a nice place?” said Mr. Harkins, with a little suppressed chuckle.
“Why, Mr. Harkins, I may tell you as a friend, for I know you won’t mention it again,” said Mr. Toosypegs, lowering his voice to a deeply-confidential and strictly private cadence. “My pa died when I was a little shaver about so-year-old, and ma and I were pretty poor, to be candid about it. Well, then, three years ago my ma died, too, which was a serious affliction to me, Mr. Harkins, and I was left plunged in deepest sorrow and poverty. The niggers worked the farm, and I was employing my time in cultivating a pair

of whiskers to alleviate my grief when I received a letter from an uncle here in England, telling me to come right on, and, if he liked me, he'd make me his heir when he died, which was real kind of him. That's what brought me here, Mr. Harkins; and I'm stopping with my uncle and his sister, who is an unmarried woman of forty-five, or so."
"Hand the hold chap's 'live yet?" inquired Mr. Harkins.
"Mr. Harkins, my uncle, I am happy to say, still exists," answered Mr. Toosypegs, gravely.
"Humph! 'As he got much pewter, Mr. Toosypegs?"
"Much what?" said the mild owner of the freckles, completely at a loss. "You'll excuse me, I hope, Mr. Harkins, but I really don't understand."
"Green," muttered Mr. Harkins, contemptuously to himself. Then aloud: "'Ow much do you think he'll leave you?"
"Well, about two thousand pounds or so," said Mr. Toosypegs, complacently.
"Twothousandpoun'!" slowly articulated the astounded Mr. Harkins. "Oh, my heye!w'y you'll be rich, Mr. Toosypegs! What will you do with all that there money?"
"Why, my aunt, Miss Priscilla Dorothea Toosypegs, and I are going home to Maryland (that's where I used to live, Mr. Harkins), and we're going to fit up the old place and63 live there. Aunt Priscilla never was in America, and wants to see it real bad."
"Twothousandpoun'," still more slowly repeated Mr. Harkins. "Well, things is 'stonishing. Jest think hof me now, the honest and 'ard-working father of ten children, hand you won't catch nobody going hand dying hand leaving me one single blessed brass farden, while here's a cove more'n 'alf a hass. I say, Mr. Toosypegs, you wouldn't lend me a guinea or two, would you?" insinuated Mr. Harkins in his most incredulous voice.
"Why, certainly, Mr. Harkins," said Mr. Toosypegs, briskly, drawing out his purse. "I'm real happy to be able to be of service to you. Here's two guineas, and don't put yourself out about paying it."
"Mr. Toosypegs, you're a brick!" said Mr. Harkins, grasping his hand with emotion. "I won't put myself hout in the least, since you're kind enough to request it; but hif you'll come and dine with me some day, I'll give you a dinner of b'iled pertaters and roast honions fit for a king. Will you come?" urged Mr. Harkins, giving him a friendly poke with his fore-finger.
"Certainly I will, Mr. Harkins; and it's real kind in you to ask me," said Mr. Toosypegs, politely. "I see you're in a hurry, so I'll bid you good-day, now. Most certainly I'll come, Mr. Harkins. I'm very much obliged to you."

CHAPTER IX

THE SECRET REVEALED

"I was so youngI loved him soI had
No motherGod forgive me!and I fell!"
Browning.

And how fell the news of Reginald Germaine's innocence of the crime for which he was condemned, and his sad end, on the other personages connected with our tale?

To his mother came the news in her far-off greenwood home; and as she heard he had perished forever in the64 stormy sea, Reason, already tottering in her half-crazed brain, entirely gave way, and she fled, a shrieking maniac, through the dim, old woods.

To Earl De Courcy it came in his stately home, to fill his heart with deepest sorrow and remorse. Hauntingly before him arose the agonized, despairing face of the lonely woman, as on that last night she had groveled at his feet, shrieking for that mercy he had refused. Proud, stern man as he was, no words can express the deep pity, the heartfelt sorrow he felt, as he thought of that lonely, despairing, childless woman, a wanderer over the wide world.

To Lord Ernest Villiers it came, bringing deepest regret for the bold-eyed, high-hearted youth, so unjustly condemned, so wrongly accused. He thought of him as he knew him firstproud, princely, handsome, and generous. And now! that young life, under the unjust sentence of the law, had passed away; that haughty head, noble even in its degradation, lay far under the deep sea, among the bleaching bones of those guilt-hardened men.

To one, in her father's castle halls, it came, bringing a feeling of untold relief. He had cruelly wronged her; but he was dead now, and she freely forgave him for all she had suffered. While he lived, incurable sorrow must be hers; but he was gone, and happy days might dawn for her yet. She might love another now, without feeling it a crime to do soone noble and generous, and worthy of her in every way. One deep breath of relief, one low sigh to the memory of his sad fate, and then a look of calm, deep happiness stole over the beautiful face, such as it had not worn for years, and the beautiful head, with its wealth of raven ringlets, dropped on her arm, in a voiceless thanksgiving, in a joy too intense for words.

And this was Lady Maude Percy.

In spite of her steady refusal of his suit, Lord Villiers had not despaired. He could not understand the cause of her strange melancholy and persistent refusal of her hand, knowing, as he did, that she loved him, but, believing the obstacle to be merely an imaginary one, he hoped on, and waited for the time to come when this singular fancy of hers would be gone. That time had come now. Calling, one morning, and finding her in the drawing-room, he was greeted with a brilliant smile, with a quick flush of pleasure,

and a manner so different from her customary one, that his heart bounded with sudden hope.
“I am truly rejoiced to see Lady Maude recovering her spirits again,” he said, his fine eyes lit up with pleasure. “She has been shadowed by the dark cloud of her nameless melancholy long enough.”
“If Lord Villiers only knew how much cause I had for that ‘nameless melancholy,’ he would forgive me any pain it may ever have caused him,” she said, while a shadow of the past fell darkly over her bright young face.
“And may I not know? Dearest Maude, when is this mystery to end? Am I never to be made happy by the possession of this dear hand?”
He took the little, white hand, small and snowy as a lily-leaf, and it was no longer withdrawn, but nestled lovingly in his, as if there it found its rightful home.
“Maude, Maude!” he cried, in a delirium of joy, “is your dark dream, then, in reality over? Oh, Maude, speak, and tell me! Am I to be made happy yet?”
“If you can take me as I am, if you can forgive and forget the past, I am yours, Ernest!” she said, in a thrilling whisper.
In a moment she was in his arms, held to the true heart whose every throb was for herher head upon the breast that was to pillow hers through life.
“Maude, Maude! My bride, my life, my peerless darling! Oh, Maude, this is too much happiness!” he cried, in a sort of transport between the passionate kisses pressed on her warm, yielding lips.
Blushingly she rose from his embrace, and gently extricated herself from his arms.
“Oh, Maude, my beautiful darling! May Heaven forever bless you for this!” he fervently exclaimed, all aglow with passionate love.
She had sunk into a seat, and bent her head into her hand, not daring to meet the full, falcon gaze, flashing with deepest tenderness, that she knew was bent upon her.
“Speak again, Maude! Once more let me hear those66 precious words from your own sweet lips, Maude! Maude, sweetest and fairest, speak!”
He wreathed his arms around her, while he seemed breathing out his very soul as he aspirated her name.
“But you have not heard all, my lord. This secretdo you not wish to hear it?” she faintly said, without lifting her dark, beautiful eyes.
“Not unless it is your wish to tell it. I want to hear nothing but that you are my own.”
“Yet, when you hear it, my lord, you may reject the hand I have offered.”
“Never, never! Nothing under heaven could make me do that!”
“You speak rashly, Lord Ernest. Wait until you have heard all. I dare not accept the noble heart and hand you offer, without revealing the one great error of my youth.”
“You commit error, my beautiful saint? You, who are as perfect in soul as in body. Oh, Maude, I cannot believe it.”
“It is true, nevertheless, my lord. But oh, how shall I tell you? How can I confess what I have beenwhat I am?”

There was a sharp agony in her voice, and her head dropped on her hands, and her fair bosom rose and fell like a tempest-tossed sea.
Encircling her with his arm, he drew her down until her white face lay hidden in his breast, and then pressing his lips to the dark ripples of hair sweeping against his cheek, he murmured, in tenderest whisper:
“Tell me now, Maude, and fear not; for nothing you can say will convince me you are not as pure and unsullied as the angels themselves. What is this terrible secret, sweetest love?”
“Oh, my dear lord, every word you speak, every caress you give me, makes my revelation the harder!” she passionately cried. “And yet it must be made, even though you should spurn me from you in loathing after. Listen, my lord. You think me Lady Maude Percy?”
“Yes, dear love.”
“That is not my name!”
“What, Maude?”
“That is not my name. No; I am not mad, Lord Villiers, though you look as if you thought so. I have been mad once! You and all the world are deceived. I am not what I seem.”
“What, in Heaven’s name do you mean? What then are you?”
“I was a wife! I have been a mother! I am a widow!”
“Maude!”
“You recoil from me in horror! I knew it would be so. I deserve itI deserve it! but oh, Lord Villiers, it will kill me!” she cried, passionately wringing her hands.
“Maude, are you mad?”
“I am notoh, I am not! if a grief-crazed brain, a blighted life, a broken heart be not madness.”
“But, Maude! Good heavens! You are so youngnot yet eighteen! Oh, it cannot be true!” he cried, incoherently.
“Would to God it were not! Yet four years ago I was a wedded wife!”
“Wife, mother, and widow at eighteen! Maude, Maude, how can I realize this?”
“Oh, I was crazed! I was mad! and I did love him so, then! Not as I love you, Lord Ernest, with a woman’s strong, undying affection, but with the wild, passionate fervor of youth. I must have inherited my dead mother’s Spanish blood; for no calm-pulsed English girl ever felt love like that.”
“Oh, Lady Maude!Lady Maude! I could hardly have believed a messenger from heaven had he told me this.”
“God be merciful to human error! A long life of sorrow and remorse must atone for that first rash fault.”
He was pacing up and down the long room with rapid, excited strides; his fine face flushed, and his hands tightly shut, as if to keep down the bitterness that rebelliously rose at this unlooked-for avowal. He had expected to hear some light, trivial fault, magnified by a morbid imagination; but not a clandestine marriage. No man likes to

hear that the woman he loves has ever loved another; and Lady Maud Percy had already seemed so angelic that this sudden “falling off” of his high ideal, brought with it a pang like the bitterness of death.

And therefore, pacing up and downup and down, with brain and heart in a tumultLord Ernest Villiers’ pride for one moment overcame and mastered his love. For one brief moment onlyfor then his eyes fell on the drooping figure and despair-bowed young head; and the anguished attitude went to his heart, bringing back a full tide of pity, love, and forgiveness. All was forgotten, but that she was the only one he ever did or could love; and lifting the sorrowing head and grief-bowed form in his arms, once more he clasped her closer to the manly young heart she could feel throbbing under her own, and whispered:

“My own life’s darling still! Oh, Maude! if you must grieve, it shall be on my breast. If you have erred, so, too, have Iso have we all often. I will forget all but that you have promised my arms shall be your home forever!”

“And you forgive and love me still? Oh, Lord Ernest!” He kissed away her tears as she wept aloud.

“One thing more, dearest. Who was my Maude’s first love!”

He felt a convulsive shiver run through the delicate form he held. He felt her breast heave and throb as if the name was struggling to leave it, and could not.

“Tell me, Maude, for I must know.”

“Oh, saints in heaven! how can I? Oh, Lord Ernest! this humiliation is more than I can endure.”

“Speak, Lady Maude! for I must know.”

She lifted her eyes to his, full of unspeakable anguish, and then dropped her head heavily again; for in that fixed, grave, noble face, full of love and pity as it was, there was no yielding now.

“Tell me, Maude, who was the husband of your childhood?”

From the pale, quivering lip, in a dying whisper, dropped the words: “Reginald Germaine, the gipsy!”

There was a moment’s death-like silence. The handsome face of Lord Ernest Villiers seemed turned to marble, and still motionless as if expiring, she lay in the arms that clasped her still in a close embrace. At last:

“Heaven be merciful to the dead! Look up, my precious Maude; for nothing on earth shall ever come between us more!”

Calm and clear, on the troubled wave of her tempest-tossed soul, the low words fell; but only her deep, convulsive sobs were his answer.

“Maude!my own dear Maude!” he cried, at last, alarmed by her passion of grief, “cease this wild weeping. Forget the troubled past, dear love; for there are many happy days in store for us yet.”

But still she wept onwildly, vehemently, at firstuntil her strong passion of grief had passed away. He let her sob on in quiet now, with no attempt to check her grief, except by his silent caresses.

She lifted her head and looked up, at last, thanking him by a radiant look, and the soft, thrilling clasp of her white arms.

"I will not ask you to explain now, sweet Maude," he softly whispered. "Some other time, when you are more composed, you shall tell me all."

"Nono; better nowfar better now; and then, while life lasts, neither you nor I, Ernest, will ever breathe one word of the dark sorrowful story again. Oh, Ernest! can all the fondest love of a lifetime suffice to repay you for the forgiveness you have shown me to-day?"

"I am more than repaid now, dear love. Speak of that no more. But now that the worst is over, will my Maude tell me all?"

"I have not much to tell, Ernest; but you shall hear it. Nearly three years before you and I met, when a child of fourteen, I was on a visit to my uncle Everly's. My cousin Hubert, home from college, brought with him a fellow-student to spend the vacation, who was presented to me as Count Germaine. What Reginald Germaine was then, you, who have seen him, do not need to know. Handsome, dashing, fascinating, he took every heart by storm, winning love by his gay, careless generosity, and respect by his talents and well-known daring. I was a dreamy, romantic school-girl; and in this bold, reckless boy, handsome as an angel, I saw the living embodiment of my most glorious ideal. From morning till night we were together; and, Ernest, can you understand that wild dream? How I loved him then, words are weak to express, how I loathed and despised him after no words can ever tell. Ernest, he persuaded me70 to elope with him one night; and we were married. I never stopped to think of the consequences then. I only knew I would have given up my hopes of heaven for him! Three weeks longer he remained at Everly Hall; and then papa sent me back to school, and he went to London.

"No one was in our secret, and we met frequently, unsuspected; though papa, thinking he was too presuming, had forbidden me to associate with him. One day we went out driving; the carriage was upset; I fainted; and for a long time I remembered nothing more.

"When reason returned, I was in a little cottage, nursed by an old woman; while he hovered by my bedside night and day. Then I learned that I had given birth to a childdead now and buried. I could recollect myself as people recollect things in a confused dreamof hearing for a time the feeble cries of an infant, and seeing a baby face, with the large, black, beautiful eyes of Reginald Germaine. I turned my face to the wall and wept, at first, in childish grief; but he caressed and soothed me, and I soon grew calm. I thought, at the time, a strange, unaccountable change had come over him; though I could not tell what. When I was well again I learned. Standing before me, one morning, he calmly and quietly told me how he had deceived methat, instead of being a

French count, he was the son of a strolling gipsy; but that, having repented of what he had done, he was willing to give me up.

“The very life seemed stricken out of my heart as I listened. Then my pridethe aroused pride of my racearose; and, oh! words are weak to tell how I loathed myself and him. That I, a Percythe daughter of a race that had mated with royalty hithertohad fallen so low as to wed a gipsy! I shrunk, in horror unspeakable, from the black, bottomless quagmire into which I had sunk. All my love in that instant turned to bitterest scorn, and I passionately bade him leave me, and never dare to come near me again, or breathe a word of the past. He obeyed; and from that day I never beheld him more.

“After that, I met you, Lord Ernest, and I loved you as I never loved him. For him, I cherished a blind, mad passion; for you, I felt the strong, earnest love of womanhood. You loved me; but I shrunk from the affection my71 very soul was crying out for, knowing I dared not love you without guilt. Now you know the secret of my coldness and mysterious melancholy.

“I heard often of Germaine; and his name was like a spear-thrust to my heart. When I was told of his arrest, trial and condemnation for grand larceny, you perhaps may imagine, but I can never tell, exactly what I felt. His name was the theme of every tongue; and day after day I was forced to listen to the agonizing details, knowinglow as he had fallen, guilty as he might behe was my husband still. Thank God! through all his ignominy, he had honor enough never to reveal our dark secret. Then came the news of his death; and Heaven forgive me if my heart bounded as I heard it!

“Oh, Lord Ernest! you were my first thought. I felt I could dare to love you now as you deserved to be loved, without sinning. I determined to tell you all, and to love you still, even though you spurned me from you forever. Oh, Ernest! my noble-hearted! may God forever bless you for forgiving me as you have done, and loving me still!”

Her voice ceased, but the dark, eloquent eyes were full of untold loveof love that could never die for all time.

“My own!my own! never so well beloved as now! My Maude!my bride!my wife! blot out from the leaves of your life that dark pagethat year of passion, of error, of sorrow and shame. We will never speak or think of it more, sweet Maude. Germaine has gone to answer for what he has done; if he has sinned while living, so also he has deeply suffered and sorrow-atoned for all. Fiery, passionate and impulsive, if he has wronged others, so also has he been deeply wronged. May God forgive him!”

“Amen,” was the solemn response.

“And now, Maude, what need of further delay? When shall this dear hand be mine?”

“Whenever you claim it, dear Ernest. I shall have no will but yours now,” she answered, with all a woman’s devotion in her deep eyes, “I am yoursyours through life, and beyond death, if I may.”

CHAPTER X

THE VOICE OF COMING DOOM

"They spake not a word.
But like dumb statues or breathless stones,
Stared on each other and looked deadly pale."
Shakspeare.

"Oh! positively, your ladyship is looking perfectly dazzling! I never, no, never saw anybody half so beautiful in my life! Oh, Lady Kate! isn't she charming?" And little Miss Clara Jernyngham, in an outburst of enthusiasm, earnestly clasped her little white hands, flashing with jewels, together, and went off into a look of ecstasy wonderful to behold.

Lady Kate McGregor, the proud, dark-eyed daughter of an impoverished Scottish nobleman, smiled quietly as she replied:

"Lady Maude is always lovely, and like all brides, looks doubly so now. How many of the gentlemen will envy Lord Villiers to-night!"

"Yes, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Clara, earnestly. "I am quite sure if I was a man (which, thank the gods! I am not), I would be tempted to shoot him, or do something else equally dreadful, for carrying off the reigning belle! I really don't see how any man in his proper senses could help falling in love with Maude. And yet there's brother George, now, he takes it as coolly asasI don't know what." The usual fate of Miss Clara's similes.

Had Miss Jernyngham's eyes not been so earnestly fixed on a certain superb set of diamonds that lay on a dressing-table near, she might have seen a sudden flush in the dark, handsome face of Lady Kate as she spoke, and that the lace on her bosom fluttered perceptibly, as if with the beating of the heart beneath.

"So Captain Jernyngham does not care?" said Lady Kate, in a voice not quite steady.

"No," answered Miss Clara, her eyes dancing from the blinding river of diamond-light on the table to a magnificent bridal veil lying near"no; which is a horrid proof of his insensibility. The fact is, George never was in love in his life, and never will be, so far as I can see. He will, most likely, die an old bachelor, if some rich heiress does not take pity on him, marry him, and pay his debts, before long. Did you see the Duke of Bthis evening, though, Lady Kate? What a dear old creature it is! Going about shaking so, like a lot of blanc mange. I'm going to marry him some day, for the family diamonds. Worth while, eh?"

"Miss Jernyngham is herself the best judge of that," coldly replied Lady Kate, her handsome face growing proud and pale, as she listened to Miss Clara's speech about her brother.

"Really, Lady Maude, it's my duty to tell you you are looking perfectly bewildering to-night, as all brides should look. If Lord Villiers had never been in love with you before, he must certainly have fallen into that melancholy predicament this evening," said little

Miss Clara, dancing off on a new tack. “This orange wreath and bridal veil are vastly becoming. I am sure no one would think you had been ill this morning, to look at you now.”

It was a pleasant scene on which the light of the rose-shaded chandelier fell. The superbly-furnished dressing-room of Lady Maude Percy was all ablaze with numberless little jets of flame, which the immense mirrors magnified four-fold. Priceless jewels lay carelessly strewn about on the inlaid dressing-table, mingling with rare bouquets, laces, gloves, and tiny satin slippers, that would scarcely have fitted Cinderella herself. Lady Kate McGregor, proud and stately, in white satin, and point-lace, and pale, delicate pearls, stood leaning against the marble mantel, her handsome eyes growing cold and scornful whenever they rested on Miss Clara Jernyngham. That frivolous little lady, quite bewildering in the same snowy robes, was all unconscious of those icy glances, as she fluttered, like a butterfly over a rose, around another lady standing before a full-length mirror, while her maid arranged the mist-like bridal veil on her head, and set the orange wreath on her dark, shining curls.

It was Lady Maude Percy; and this was her bridal eve. Peerlessly lovely she looked as she stood there, with the light of a happy heart flushing her rounded cheeks, swelling her white bosom, and flashing from her dark, Syrian eyes. The bridal dress she wore was worth a duke’s ransom. It fell around her like a summer cloud, three glistening folds of richest lace, so light, so gauzy, so brilliant, that it looked like a flashing mist. Diamonds that blinded the eyes with their insufferable light rose and fell on her white bosom with every tumultuous throb of the heart beneath. Like a floating cloud fell over all the bridal veil, and glittering above it rose the orange wreath of rarest jewels. There was a streaming light in her magnificent eyes, a living, glowing flush on her cheek, all unusual there; and little Miss Clara stood up and clasped her hands as she gazed in speechless admiration.

It was one month after the interview recorded in the last chapter. Lord Villiers, with a lover’s impatience, would consent to wait no longer; and as Lady Maude had not opposed him, this day had been fixed. The marriage was to have taken place at St. George’s, in the morning; but early that eventful day the bride had been seized with so severe a headache that she was unable to leave her room. Therefore, the ceremony had been necessarily delayed until the evening, when the august bishop of C himself was to come and perform the nuptial rite at the Percy mansion. Some were inclined to look upon this interruption in the light of an evil omen; but Lady Maude only smiled, and inwardly thought that, as his bride, nothing on earth could ever darken her life more. How little did she dream of the bitter cup of sorrow she was destined yet to drain to the dregs! How little did she dream of the dark, scathing, unresting revenge that hovered around her like a vulture waiting for its prey!

The old earl, her father, who was somewhat old-fashioned in his notions, and liked ancient customs kept up, had determined his daughter’s bridal should be celebrated by the grandest ball of the season.

“I don’t like this new-fangled way young people nowadays have, of getting married in the morning, coming home for a hasty breakfast, and then tearing off, post-haste, for75 France, or Germany, or somewhere, as if they wanted change of scene to reconcile them to what they have done,” said the old gentleman, in strict confidence, to Lord De Courcy. “It wasn’t so in my time. Then we had all our friends assembled, and enjoyed ourselves together over a bottle or two of old wine until morning. Ah! those were the days.” And the old earl heaved a deep sigh, and looked ruefully at his gouty foot.

Resolving, therefore, to keep up those halcyon days at all hazards, the great saloons of the stately hall were thrown open, and now they were filled with the elite of the city, all waiting impatiently for the coming of the bride.

Lord Hugh De Courcy, suave, stately, courteous, and bland, was there, conversing with the father of the bride, and two or three of the most distinguished politicians of the dayhis eyes now and then wandering from the faces of his friends, to rest proudly on the handsome form of his son, who, in the absence of Lady Maude, was the cynosure of all eyes, the “observed of all observers.”

The venerable and high-salaried bishop, attended by several other “journeyman soul-savers,” as Captain George Jernyngham irreverently called them, was there, too, in full pontificals, all ready, and waiting to tie the Gordian knot.

The rooms were filled with the low hum of conversation. There were waving of fans, and flirting of bouquets, and dropping of handkerchiefs, and rustling silks and satins, and flashing of jewels, and turning of many bright, impatient eyes towards the door where the bride and her attendants were presently expected to make their appearance. Ladies coquetted, and flirted, and turned masculine heads with brilliant smiles and entrancing glances, and gentlemen bowed and complimented, and talked all sorts of nonsense, just like gentlemen in general, and all things went “merry as a marriage-bell.”

Standing by themselves, as when we first saw them, were Lord Ernest Villiers and his friend, Captain Jernyngham, of the Guards.

Handsome, stately, and noble, Lord Villiers always looked; but more so now than ever. What man does not look well when happy, faultless in costume, and about to be married to the woman he loves?

Captain Jernyngham, first groomsman, etc., was also looking remarkably wella fact of which the young gentleman himself was well aware; and lounging in his usual listless attitude against a marble column, he languidly admired his aristocratically small foot in its shining boot.

“There are some men born to good luck, just as others are born to be hanged”he was saying, with the air of a man delivering an oration“born with a silver spoon in their mouths, to use a common, but rather incredible figure of speech. You, mi lor Villiers, are one of them; you were born above the power of Fortuneconsequently, the toadying jade shows you a face all smiles, and gives the cold shoulder to poor devils like me, who really stand in need of her good graces. This world’s a humbug! Virtuous poverty, illustrated in the person of Captain George Jernyngham, is snubbed and sent to Coventry, while

potent, rich, and depraved youths like you are borne along on beds of roses. Yes, I repeat it, the world's a humbug! society's a nuisance! friendship's a word of two syllables found in dictionaries, nowhere else! and cigars, kid gloves and pale ale are the only things worth living for. There's an 'opinion as is an opinion.'"

"Oh, come now, Jernyngham! things are by no means so desperate as you would have me believe," said Lord Villiers, laughing. "Young, good-looking, and adored by the ladies, what more would you have?"

"Well, there is a vulgar prejudice existing in favor of bread and butter, and neither of the three items mentioned will exactly supply me with that useful article. I intend trying the matrimonial dodge, some day, if I can pick up anything under fifty, with three or four thousand a year, who wants a nice youth to spend it for her."

"Love, of course, being out of the question."

"Love!" said the guardsman, contemptuously. "I lost all faith in that article since I was fourteen years old, when I fell in love with our cook, a young lady of six-and-thirty. My father forbade the banns; she ran off with a hump-backed chimney-sweep, and I awoke to the unpleasant consciousness that 'Love's young dream' was all bosh."

"And you have been heart whole ever since?"

"Well, I rather think so. I have felt a peculiar sensa77tion under my vest-pocket now and then, when Kate McGregor's black eyes met mine. But pshaw! where's the use of talking? She's as poor as a church-mouse, and so am I; and, unless we should set up a chandler-shop, there would be a paragraph in the Times headed: 'Melancholy death by starvation. The bodies of an unfortune couple were found yesterday in the attic of a rickety, six-story house, and the coroner's inquest returned a verdict of "Death for want of something to eat." The unfortunate man was dressed in a pair of spurs and a military shakohaving pawned the rest of his clothing, and held in his hand the jugular bone of a red herring half-devoured.' Not any, thank you!"

Captain George stroked his mustache complacently, while Lord Villiers laughed.

"A pleasant picture that! Well, I shouldn't wonder if it's what 'love in a cottage' often comes to."

A servant approached at this moment, and whispered something to Lord Villiers.

"The ladies are waiting, Jernyngham," he said hastily. "Call Howard, and come along."

He hastened out to the lofty hall, and at the foot of the grand staircase he was joined by Jernyngham and Howard, the second groomsman, Lord De Courcy, Earl Percy and a few other intimate family friends.

The bride and her attendants had already left her "maiden bower," and Lady Maude was met at the foot of the stairs by Lord Villiers, who drew her arm within his, and whispered, in a thrilling voice:

"My bride! my wife! my queen! my beautiful Maude! never so beautiful as now! Mine, mine forever!"

"Yes, yours forever!" she softly and earnestly said, looking up in his face with a joy too intense for smiles.

There was no time for further speech. Captain Jernyngham had drawn the willing hand of the proud Kate within his arm, and felt his heart throb in a most unaccountable manner beneath her light touch. Young Howard took possession of our gay Miss Clara, whose whole heart and soul was bent on the conquest she was about to make of that "dear, old thing," the Duke of B, and the bridal cortege passed into the grand, flower-strewn saloon.

The company parted on either side as they advanced, and under the battery of many hundred eyes they approached the bishop. Book in hand, that reverend personage stood, patiently awaiting their coming, and looked approvingly over his spectacles at the beautiful bride and handsome, stately bridegroom as they stood up before him.

And then, amid the profoundest silence, the marriage ceremony was begun.

You might have heard a pin drop, so deep was the stillness that reignedas every one held their breath to catch each word of that most interesting of ritesdoubly interesting to ladies. Of the three standing before him, one heart was beating with a joy too deep and intense for words to tell. Lady Kate's handsome eyes stole quick glances now and then at the gay, young guardsman, as she thought, with a thrilling heart, how much she could love him, but for the humiliation of loving unsought. Little Miss Clara, with her head poised on one side, and her finger on her lip, was building a castle in Spain, where she saw herself blazing with "family diamonds," and addressed as "Duchess of B." As for the gentlemen, I don't intend describing their sensationnever having been a gentleman myself (more's the pity!) but will leave it to the imagination of my readers.

The last "I will" had been uttered; and amid that breathless silence Ernest Seyton, Viscount Villiers, and Maude Percy were pronounced man and wife.

There was an instant's pause, and the guests were about to press forward to offer their congratulations, when pealing through the silence came an unseen voice, in clear, bell-like tones that thrilled every heart, with the words:

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life! My curse, and the curse of Heaven rest on all of the house of De Courcy!"

Blanched with wonder, horror and consternation, every face was turned in the direction whence the voice came; but nothing was to be seen. So sudden, so unlooked for was this awful interruption; so terrific was that deep, hollow voice, that the shrieks they would have uttered were frozen to the lips of the terrified women. And while they still stood speechless, horror-struck, gazing in silence, the deep, direful voice pealed again through the silent apartment like the knell of doom.

"As the rich man who stole the one ewe-lamb was accursed, so also be all who bear the name of De Courcy! May their bridal robes turn to funeral-palls! may their hours of rejoicing end in blackest misery! Blighted be their lives! doomed be all they lovehated by earth, and accursed by Heaven!"

The voice ceased. A wild shriek resounded through the room and the bride fell fainting on the ground.

In an instant all was confusion. Ladies shrieked and screamed; servants came rushing in; gentlemen, pale and horror-struck, hurried hither and thither in wildest confusion. All was uproar and dismay. Lord Villiers, with his senseless bride in his arms, was struggling to force his way from the room; and then high above the din resounded the clear, commanding voice of Earl De Courcy:

“Let all be quiet! There is no danger! Secure the doors, and look for the intruder. This is the trick of some evil-minded person to create a sensation.”

His words broke the spell of superstitious terror that bound them. Every one flew to obeyguests, servants and all. Each room was searchedevery corner and crevice was examined. If a pin had been lost, it must have been found; but they searched in vain. The owner of the mysterious voice could not be discovered.

Looking in each other’s faces, white with wonder, they gave up the fruitless search, and returned to the saloon.

Like a flock of frightened birds, the ladies, pale with mortal apprehension, were huddled togethernot daring even to speak. In brief, awe-struck whispers the result was told; and then, chill with apprehension, the guests began rapidly to disperse. And in less than an hour the stately house of Maude Percy was wrapt in silence, solitude and gloom. The bride, surrounded by her attendants, lay still unconscious, while all over London the news was spreading of the appalling termination of the wedding.

CHAPTER XI

LITTLE ERMINIE

"Sleep, little baby, sleep,
Not in thy cradle bed,
Not on thy mother's breast,
But with the quiet dead."
Mrs. Southey.

Into the great dark gulf of the Past, nearly two years, like two waves from an ever-flowing sea, had vanished, freighted with their usual modicum of sorrow, joy, happiness, and despair.

And what changes had those two years brought to the various personages connected with our tale?

First, Mr. O. C. Toosypegs, in whom I hope my fair readers feel an interest, had closed the eyes of his rich uncle, pocketed two thousand pounds, attired himself in the very deepest weeds, and began to turn his thoughts toward Dismal Hollow, and all "the real nice people around there."

Miss Clara Jernyngham had obtained the desire of her heart at last, was "Her Grace of B.," and, blazing in "family diamonds," was toasted as one of the reigning beauties and belles of the London haut ton. As to that "dear old thing," the duke, the pretty little duchess troubled her head very little about him; and he was left at home, to amuse himself with alternate fits of the palsy and gout, and the other diseases old gentlemen are heir to.

Captain George Jernyngham had risen to the rank of colonel, now, having been promoted for his bravery in a certain action; and an old uncle, whom he had hardly heard of before, coming at the same time from the East Indies with an uncountable lot of money, and the liver disease, was accommodating enough to die in the nick of time, leaving all his wealth to our gay guardsman. These two strokes81 of good fortune enabled Master George to offer his hand, with a safe conscience, to handsome Lady Kate, which he did, without even hinting at such a thing as a chandler's shop. Lady Kate showed her good taste in the selection of a husband, by accepting him on the spot; and two weeks after, the Times, under the heading of "Marriage in High Life," announced the melancholy fact that Colonel Jernyngham was a bachelor no longer.

Of the gipsy Ketura, nothing was known. Now and then, at intervals, Earl De Courcy would catch a glimpse of a dark, wild face, with streaming hair, and hollow, sunken eyes, flitting after him like a haunting shadow from the grave. Wherever he went, night or day, that dusky, ominous shadow followed, dogging his steps like a sleuth-hound, until the dread of it grew to be a horror unspeakablethe vague, mysterious terror of his life. No precautions could rid him of it, until it became the very bane of his existence. If he walked, looking over his shoulder he would see that tall, spectral figure coming after; if

he sat in his carriage, and it chanced to stop for a moment, a white, wild face, with great burning eyes, would gleam in upon him for an instant with deadly hate and menace in every feature, and then vanish like a face from the dead. Neither night or day was he safe from his terrible pursuer, until the dread of this ghostly ghoul wore the very flesh off his bones, reduced him to a mere living skeleton, poisoned every joy of his existence, made death and life a blank and a horror, until the birth of his little granddaughter. And the only tender feeling in his stony heart centered in her; she became the only thing that rendered life desirable. His love for the child amounted to idolatry; in its infant innocence and beauty, it seemed like a protecting angel between him and his terrible pursuer, lighting the gloom of that awful haunting shadow with the brightness of unseen wings.

The last cold gleam of yellow sunshine faded from the dull March sky. Night, with black, starless, moonless face, with cold, piercing wind and sleet, was falling over London.

The gorgeous rooms, the glittering salons, the spacious halls of the De Courcy mansion were one blaze of light and magnificence, just as they were that very night two years82 beforethat awful night of darkest doom. By all but one that night was forgotten now; for a gay family-party were to meet to celebrate the first birthnight of Lord De Courcy's grandchild. Strange, that on the very anniversary of that dreadful night, another scion should be born to the house of De Courcy.

The guests had not yet begun to assemble; and standing by himself, wrapt in gloomy thought, the earl gazed darkly out into the deepening night. You would scarcely have known him, so changed had he grown by the blighting influence of that horrible incubus. Thin and haggard, with sunken eyes, projecting brows, snow-white hair and care-worn look, he stood the very shadow of his former selfa stricken, bowed, gloomy old man.

Through the inky darkness the rays from the street-lamp sent long lines of light and shade across the pavement. That very night, two years before, a face, white with woman's utmost woe, had gleamed upon him in that very light, as he stood in that self-same spot. He thought of it now with a convulsive shudder; and the flickering light seemed like a finger of blood-red flame pointing up to heaven, and invoking its wrath upon him. With an inward presentiment he looked through the darkness as if expecting that same dark, unearthly face to appear; and, lo! while he gazed, as if she had sprung up through the earth, a tall, shadowy figure emerged from the darkness, and that awful spectral face, he dreaded more than that of the arch fiend himself, gleamed white and awful through the gloom. She beheld him there in the light, and again that long, bony arm was raised, and that flickering finger pointed up to the lowering sky above, in darkest, voiceless menace. Then, flitting away in the darkness, to which she seemed to belong, the ghastly vision was gone, and Earl De Courcy stood frozen with horror to the spot, unable to speak or move.

At that same hour, a far pleasanter scene was going on in one of the rooms above.

It was the dressing-room of Lady Maude, into which we once before introduced the reader. Once again she stood before the mirror while her maid assisted at her toilet, and chatted with the little Duchess of B., who, magnificent in83 white velvet and emeralds, sat (or rather lay) half-buried in the downy depths of a loungehaving taken advantage of her girlhood's intimacy with Lady Maude to come early, and indulge in what she phrased the "sweetest of talks," before she should descend to the drawing-room, and begin her nightly occupation of breaking masculine hearts.

Very fair, very sweet, very lovely looked Lady Maude, as she stood there with a soft smile on her gentle lips, and a calm, deep joy welling from the brooding depths of her soft dark eyes.

Her dress was white, even as it had been that nightwhite blonde over white satinwith her favorite jewels (pale oriental pearls) wreathing her shining ringlets of jet, and fluttering and shimmering in sparks of subdued fire on her white arms and bosom. The lovely young face looking out from those silky curls was sweeter and fairer now in her gentle maturity than it had ever been in the brilliant beauty of her girlhood. Scarcely twenty, her form had not attained the roundness of perfect womanhood, but was slight and slender as a girl of fourteen, yet perfect in its elegant contour.

"And the baby is well?" the duchess was languidly saying, as she played with a beautiful little water-spaniel.

"Quite well, thank you," replied the low, sweet voice of Lady Maude, with her soft, musing smile.

"I need not ask for his lordship, for I saw him last night at the bal masque of Madame la Comtesse De St. Rimy!" said the duchess, with some animation. "He was looking quite kingly as 'Leicester.' By the way, Lady Maude, why were you not there?"

"Erminie seemed slightly indisposed, I fancied, and I would not leave her," answered the young mother.

"Is it possible? Well, I am very fond of children; but I do not think I could give up so brilliant an affair as last night's masquerade even for such a sweet little angel as Erminie. What do you think, I made a complete conquest of that handsome melancholy Turkish ambassador, who is all the rage now! I had him all to myself the whole evening!"

"Was his grace present?" said Lady Maude, a little gravely.

The question took the little duchess so much by surprise, that she raised herself on her elbow, opened her blue eyes to their widest extent, and stared in silence at her questioner. Then, seeing Lady Maude was quite serious, she lay back among the velvet pillows, and burst into a silvery peal of laughter.

"His grace! Oh, that is too good! Why, Lady Maude, the last time I saw the poor, dear, old man, which is a week or two ago, he could not stir either hand or foot, and had to be carried about by that odious Italian valet of his, in a chair, whenever he wanted to move. The dear, helpless old thing! he did look so old and so absurd, shaking all over with that disagreeable palsy of his, that I could not bear to go into his room since. My maid,

Fanchette, always finds out how he is, and tells me. But the idea of his going to the masquerade! Oh, dear me!"

And the affectionate wife went off into another low, musical peal that made the pretty, soft-eyed water-spaniel shake his necklace of tiny silver bells from sympathy, till they tingled again.

Lady Maude looked as she felta little shockedat this heartless levity; and madame la duchesse perceiving it, began:

"Now, Maude, there is no use in your looking so profoundly scandalized about it, because I have done nothing so very naughty. You don't expect me to go and shut myself up, and nurse himdo you? Though I dare say you, having the elements of a martyr in you, would do it just as soon as not!"

"I would not flirt with that Turkish ambassador, at all events!" said Lady Maude, in a tone of slight rebuke. "Have you not heard he has four wives already?"

"Perhaps he thinks I'll make a fifth some day!" said the duchess, laughing. "Well, I wouldn't mind much; he is handsome enough for anything. There! I knew I would shock you again. How saintly you have grown of late, Maude!"

"Oh, Clara!Clara! what a mad little flirt you are!" said Lady Maude, half-smilinghalf sorrowful.

"Well, you see it's my nature. What a love of a little dog this is! I made a mariage de convenance; and what85 other result could you anticipate? I married the Duke of B. for his coronet; he married me because he wanted some one to nurse him, and poultice up his constitution, and sit at the head of his table, and make herself generally useful. I got what I aimed at; and if he has not, it shows I am the better politician of the two. Stand upon your hind-legs, Prince! And, therefore, oh, wise and discreet Lady Villiers! model wife and happy mother, you must not expect one who is neither to do otherwise than as she does. If my sole earthly happiness consists in a 'coach-and-four,' superb diamonds, an unlimited number of lovers, and a box at the opera, why, I rather think I should be permitted to enjoy them, since I am really not a bad girl after all, and never mean to be. And now, as your toilet is completed, and I have made quite a long speech, will your ladyship be good enough to lead the way to the nursery? I want to see this little stray angel of yours before I descend among the sinners below."

Smiling, and passing her arm around the slender waist of the thoughtless little duchess, Lady Maude passed with her from the room, and the two young girls entered the nursery.

It was a beautiful room, all draped in white and pale-green, pure and peaceful as a glimpse of heaven. And in the center of the room stood a little rosewood crib, with snowy hangings, wherein lay a young infant, so surpassingly lovely that the duchess might well call it a "stray angel."

Little Erminiesweet Erminiethe child of noble, princely Lord Villiers and beautiful Maude Percyhow shall I describe her? It is not often young babies are really prettydoting grandmammas and aunties to the contrary notwithstanding; but this one really was. A

snow-white complexion, with the softest pink tinge on the rounded cheeks and lips, as faint and delicate as the heart of a sea-shell; a profusion of palest golden hair falling in slight, rippling waves, like raveled silk, on the white, rounded forehead. Two tiny blue-veined hands grasped, even in sleep, a pretty French doll, holding it close to the soft, white bosom, and the long, golden lashes lay brightly on the rosy, sleep-flushed cheeks.

The lovely face of Lady Maude flushed with pride, love86 and happiness; and bending down, softly as the west wind kisses the sleeping flowers, her lips touched the babe's.

Light as the caress was, it awoke little Erminie. The golden lashes slowly lifted, and a pair of sweet blue eyes looked fearlessly up.

"Mamma," she cried, joyfully, holding up her rosy little arms, "mamma, tate Minnie."

"Oh, the little darling!" exclaimed the duchess, catching her impulsively up, and half-smothering her with kisses. "Oh, did you ever see such a sweet little cherub? Oh, there never was such a lovely little angel! It's just the sweetest, dearest, b'essed, tidsy ickle sing that ever was, so it is!"

Baby, who evidently was an adept in broken English, and fully understood that profoundly-mysterious language known as "baby-talk," immediately, as if in reward for these exclamatory sentences, emphasized by the strongest italics, held up her rosy little mouth to be kissed again, being evidently (like all of her sex) fond of that operation.

"Oh, I never never, saw such a perfectly lovely little duck!" exclaimed the Duchess Clara, in a sudden burst of enthusiasm. "Such sweet hair, and such splendid eyes! Who does she look like, Maude? Not like you, I'm sure."

"She has her father's blue eyes and fair hair," said the happy young mother, smiling at Clara's emphasis, which rendered every other word not only into italics, but, in some cases, even into capitals.

"Oh, she is the most charming little ducks o' diamonds I ever beheld in my life! Such a beautiful skin, just like white satin!" reiterated the duchess, punctuating her remarks by a series of short, sharp little kisses, that made sweet Erminie open her large blue eyes in subdued wonder. "Oh, Maude! I don't wonder you are so saintly, with this little beautiful seraph ever with you! Sweet little angel Erminie! thou almost persuadest me to be a Christian!"

There was a soft tap at the door, and the nurse, who had hitherto remained in the back-ground, and listened with professional stoicism to these raptures, went and opened it; and Lord Villiers entered.

He started in some surprise, as he beheld how the room87 was tenanted, and then advanced with a smile. Lady Maude, with more than the adoring love of two years before, went over, and, laying her hand on his shoulder, said:

"Clara wanted to see Erminie before we descended to the drawing-room, dearest Ernest, and has fallen even more deeply in love with her than she has with the Turkish ambassador, the fortunate possessor of the interestingly melancholy dark eyes."

Lord Villiers smiled, and looked, with eyes full of love, on sweet Erminie, who sprung up, crowing gleefully, and crying, "Papa!"

“Wait one moment, till I see. Why, she’s the very picture of your lordship! Keep still, little girl, till I compare you with your papa. There’s the same large, blue, Saxon eyes; the same fair, curling hair; the same high, princely forehead; the same handsome mouth (no harm to compliment a married maneh, Maude); the same long, aristocratic, white fingersyour very image, my lord!”
“I had rather she looked like Maude,” said the young husband, encircling his wife’s small waist fondly with his arm.
“Well, so she does when she smiles. Don’t you perceive the resemblance now? Miss Erminie, will you be still? What a restless little creature it is.”
“Papa, papa, tate Minnie,” crowed that small individual, holding out her little arms, and looking pathetic and imploring.
“Here, papa, take the young lady,” said the duchess, depositing her in the young man’s arms, and shaking out her glittering plumage, slightly discomposed by the frantic exertions of the “young lady” in question. “She is fonder of gentlemen than ladies, I perceive. She wouldn’t be a true female, though, if she wasn’t.”
Miss Erminie, in a paroxysm of delight, immediately buried her “long, aristocratic, white fingers” in papa’s thick burnished locks, with variations of pulling his whiskers and mustache and then tenderly kissing the above hirsute appendages to make them well again. And papa, like all other young papas, looked, as if he thought her the most wonderful baby that ever lived, and danced her up and88 down until she forgot all sense of etiquette and propriety, and fairly screamed with delight.
“Now, nurse, take Miss Minnie,” he said, rising at last, and laughingly shaking back his thick, fair hair. “Come, Minnie, be good now; papa must go.”
Still crowing as if she considered she had done something rather extraordinary than otherwise, Miss Minnie allowed herself to be taken by the nurse, and saw papa and mamma, and the little lady in velvet and diamonds, smile a good-bye, and turn to leave the room.
“Foolish little wife,” said Lord Villiers, laughing, as he saw Lady Maude cast a “longing, lingering look behind” at her heart’s treasure, “can you not even tear yourself away from your darling for a few hours, without straining your eyes to catch a last glimpse?”
“I know it is foolish,” said Lady Maude, half-apologetically, yet still keeping her yearning eyes fixed on little Erminie; “but I feel so strangely about leaving her tonight. You will be sure to take good care of her, Martha?”
“Sartin, my lady,” responded Martha, rather offended at their want of trust in her care.
“Now, Maude,” said Lord Villiers, amused at her still-apparent anxiety.
Half-laughing, half-reluctant, she allowed herself to be drawn from the room, and saw the door close between her and her child.
Down in the spacious drawing-room, Lady Maude soon found herself fully occupied in receiving the guests, who began to arrive thick and fast. But this did not remove her strange anxiety concerning Erminie; and about an hour after, she stole away for a moment to pay a hurried visit to the nursery.

All was calm and peaceful there. Little Erminie lay asleep once more in her crib, and Martha sat dozing in her rocking-chair. Half ashamed of her groundless fears, Lady Maude lightly kissed her sleeping infant and hurried away. Little did she dream how many suns would rise and sethow many years would come and gobefore they two should meet again.

The night in mirth and music was passing on, and the hour of midnight approached.

The Duchess of B., Earl De Courcy, and Lady Maude were standing conversing together, when, as if struck by a sudden thought, the duchess exclaimed:

"Oh! by the way, Lady Maude, do you recollect the strange voice that interrupted the ceremony the night you were married? Have you ever discovered who that was?"

Both Lady Maude and the earl grew pale.

"Never! The whole affair has been wrapped in mystery ever since," said Lady Maude, with a slight shudder.

"Dear me, how frightened I was that night!" said the duchess, arranging her bracelets. "It was quite dreadful; the most mysterious thingjust like a ghost, or something in a play."

The duchess broke off suddenly and listened, as the great hall-clock tolled the hour of twelve.

And just as the last stroke died away, that same terrific voice they had heard years before pealed through the spacious room like the deep tolling of a death-bell.

"Two years ago this night a legal murder was committed, and now the hour of retribution is at hand. The sins of the father shall be visited upon the children, and the children's children, even to the third and fourth generations. Woe to all the house of De Courcy."

As if the angel of death had suddenly descended in their midst, every face blanched, and every heart stood still with nameless horror. For one moment the silence of the grave reigned, then a wild, piercing shriek was heard through the house, and the nurse Martha, with terror-blanched face, and uplifted arms, rushed into the midst of the assembled guests, screaming:

"Oh, Miss Minnie! Miss Minnie! Miss Minnie!"

"Oh, God! my child!" came from the white lips of Lady Maude, in a voice that those who heard never forgot, as she fled from the room, up the long staircase, and into the nursery.

But the crib was empty; the babe was gone.

The wild, wild shriek of a mother's woe resounded through the house, and Lady Maude fell in a deadly swoon on the floor.

And when Lord Villiershis own noble face white and90 set with unutterable anguishburst into the room, he found her lying cold and lifeless on the floor.

Meantime, some of the most self-possessed of the guests had assembled round Martha, in order to extract from her, if possible, what had happened.

But half insane with terror already, the continuous screaming of the frightened ladies completely drove every remaining gleam of sense out of her head, and her words were so wild and incoherent, that but little could be made out of them. It appeared from what she said, that she had been sitting half asleep in her chair, with her little charge wholly asleep in the cradle beside her, when suddenly a tall, dark shadow seemed to obscure the light in the room; and looking up with a start of terror, she beheld the most awful monsterwhether man, or woman, or demon, she could not tellin the act of snatching little Erminie from the cradle, and flying from the room. Frozen with horror, she had remained in her seat unable to move, until at last, fully conscious of what had taken place, she had fled screaming down-stairs. And that was all she could tell. In vain they questioned and cross-questioned; they could obtain nothing further from the terrified Martha, and only succeeded in driving the few remaining wits she had, out of her head.

Lord Villiers, leaving his still-senseless wife in the care of her maid, with a face that seemed turned to marble, gave orders to have the house, the grounds, the whole of London, if necessary, ransacked in search of the abductor.

But there was one who sat bowed, collapsed, shuddering in his seat, who recognized that voice, and knew what those awful words meant; and that one was Earl De Courcy.

“She has murdered her! she has murdered her!” was the cry that seemed rending his very heart with horror and despair.

CHAPTER XII

WOMAN'S HATE

"Oh! woman wronged can cherish hate
More deep and dark than manhood may;
And when the mockery of fate
Hath left revenge her chosen way,
Then all the wrongs which time hath nursed
Upon her spoiler's head shall burst,
And all her grief, and woe, and pain,
Burn fiercely on his heart and brain."
Whittier.

Maddened, despairing, blaspheming, cursing earth and heaven, God and man, hating life, and sunshine, and the world, the wretched gipsy queen had fled from those who gathered around her on that morning full of woe, and fled far away, she neither knew nor cared whither.

She sped along through lanes, streets, and crowded thoroughfares, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, conscious of nothing but her own maddening wrongs, glaring before her like a maniac, and dashing fiercely to the ground with her clenched fist all those who, moved by pity, would have stopped her. On, like a bolt from a bow, until the city seemed to fade away, and she saw green fields, and pretty cottages, and waving trees, and knew that she had left London behind her.

Night came on before she thought of stopping for a single instant to rest. She had walked far that day; her feet were bleeding and blistered; for nearly three days she had touched nothing but cold water, yet her iron frame was unsubduedshe felt no weariness, no faintness, no hunger. The indomitable spirit within, sustained her. She thought of nothing, cared for nothing, but revenge; and for that her very soul was crying out with a longinga hunger that nothing could appease. She dared not stop for one moment to think; she felt she would go mad if she did; so she hurried on and on, as if driven on by some fierce, inward power, against which it was useless to contend.

How the night passed, how the morning came, how she found herself in the peaceful depths of the forest, she never could tell. How, ere that sun set, she found herself with her tribe, lying prostrate on the cold ground, conscious, like one in the most frightful nightmare, of what was passing around her, yet unable to comprehend what it meantall was vague and unreal still. Past, and present, and future, all were mingled together in one dark, dreadful chaos, of which nothing was real but the dull, muffled pain at her heart, and the word revenge, that kept ever dancing in letters of blood-red flame before her hot, scorching eyes.

She was conscious, in a lost, dreamy sort of way, that suns rose and set, and the insufferable light departed, and the dark, cool night came again and again; of seeing

anxious eyes bent on her, and hearing hushed voices and subdued footfalls, and dusky, troubled faces stooping over her; but, like all the rest, it was a mocking unreality. The first shock of the blow had crushed and stunned her, numbing the sense of pain, and leaving nothing but the heavy throbbing aching at her strong, fierce heart. The woman of mighty frame, and fierce, stormy passions, lay there, motionlessstricken to the dust.

And then this departed, and another mood came.

One by one the broken links of memory returned, and then all other feelings were submerged and lost in a strong, deadly, burning desire of revengea revenge as fierce and undying as that of a tigress robbed of her cubsa revenge as strong and unconquerable as the heart that bore it. With it came the recollection of his child; and drawing from her bosom the packet he had given her, she read (for gipsy as she was she could read) the woman's address. There were two motives to preserve life; and, like a lioness rousing herself from a lethargy, the gypsy queen arose, and resolutely set her face to the task. One determination she made, never to lose sight of him whom she hated, until her revenge was satiated. For she could waitthere would be no sudden stabbing or killing; she did not believe in such vengeance as thatvengeance that tortures its victim but for a moment. Revenge might be slow, but it would be sureshe would hunt him, pursue him, torture him, until life was worse than death, until he would look upon death93 as a mercy; then he would have felt a tithe of the misery he had made her endure.

Another determination was, to leave her son's child with the tribe until such time as she should again claim it. She knew it would be well cared for with them, for they all loved their queen. And taking with her a lad whom she could trust, she left them one morning, and started for the child.

Leaving the gypsy youth some miles from the place, she approached the cottage, which was opened by the widow herself, who looked considerably startled by her dark, stern visitor. In the briefest possible terms, Ketura made known her errand, and imperiously demanded the child.

The woman, a mild, gentle-looking person, seemed grieved and troubled, and began something about her affection for the little one, and her hope that it would not be taken away.

"I want the child!bring it here!" broke in the gipsy, with a fiercely-impatient gesture.

The woman, terrified into silence by her dark, imperious visitor went to the door and called:

"Ray, Ray!"

"Here, Susan," answered a spirited young voice; and, with a gleeful laugh, a bright little fellow of three years bounded into the room, dragging after him, by the collar, a huge, savage-looking bulldog, who snapped fiercely at his captor.

The woman Susan uttered a scream, and fled from the dog to the other side of the room.

"I caught him, Susan, and pulled him in! He can't bite me!" said the little fellow, triumphantly, his black eyes flashing with the consciousness of victory. Then, catching sight of the stranger, he stopped, and stared at her in silent wonder.

“He does beat all I ever seenhe bean’t afeerd o’ nothin’,” said the woman, half-apologetically. “It be no fault o’ mine, mistress; he will ha’e his own way, spite o’ all I can say.”

The gypsy fixed her piercing eyes keenly upon him, and started to behold the living counterpart of her own son when at the same age. There was the same clear olive complexion, with a warm, healthy flush on the cheeks and94 lips; the same bold, bright-black eyes, fringed by long silken lashes; the same high, noble brow; the same daring, undaunted, fearless spirit, flashing already in his young eyes. Her hard face softened for an instant; but when she saw the thick, curling black hair clustering round his head; noted the small, aristocratically fastidious mouth, the long, delicate hand, she knew he must have inherited them from his motherand she grew dark and stern again. His smile, too, that lit up his beautiful face, and softened its dazzling splendor, was not his father’s; but still he was sufficiently like him to bring a last ray of human feeling back to her iron heart.

“Little boy, come here,” she said, holding out her hand.

Any other child would have been frightened by her odd dress, her harsh voice, and darkly-gleaming face; but he was not. It might be that, child as he was, he had an inherent liking for strength and power; or it might have been his kindred blood that drew him to herfor he fearlessly went over, put his hand in hers, and looked up in her face.

“What is your name?” she said, in a softer voice, as she parted his thick, silky curls, and looked down into the dark splendor of his eyes.

“Raymond Germaine,” was his answer.

The gypsy looked at Susan.

“His father’s name was Germaine,” the woman hastened to explain, “and I called him Raymond because I saw R. G. on his father’s handkerchief; and I thought maybe it might have been that.”

“Very good. Will you come with me, Raymond?”

“If Susan lets me,” answered the boy, looking at his foster-mother.

“She will let you,” said the gipsy, calmly. “Get him ready instantly. I have no time to lose.”

The woman, though looking deeply grieved and sorry, did not hesitate to obey, for there was something in the age of Ketura that might have made a bolder woman yield. So she dressed little Raymond in silence, made up the rest of his clothing in a bundle, kissed him, and said good-by amid many tears and sobs, and saw him depart with Ketura.

“Let me carry youwe have a long way to go,” said the gipsy, stooping to lift him in her strong arms.

“I don’t want to be carried. I’ll walk,” said Master Ray, kicking manfully.

The gipsy smiled a hard, grim smile.

“His father’s spirit,” she muttered. “I like it. We’ll see how long he will hold out.”

For nearly an hour the little hero trudged sturdily along, but at the end of that time his steps began to grow slow and weary.
“Ain’t we most there?” he said, looking ruefully down the long muddy road.
“No; we’re a long way off. You had better let me carry you.”
With a somewhat sleepy look of mortification, Master Ray, permitted his grandmother to lift him up; and scarcely had she taken him in her arms, before his curly head dropped heavily on her shoulder, and he was fast asleep.
With the approach of night, feeling somewhat fatigued and footsore herself, she overtook our friend Mr. Harkins, who, as he related to Mr. Toosypegs, “took ’er hin,” and brought her to his own house, where “Missis ’Arkins” regaled young Mr. Germaine with a supper of bread and milk, to which that small youth did ample justice.
Another hour brought her to the place where the gipsy boy was waiting, and to his care she consigned her still-sleeping grandson, with many injunctions that he was to be taken the best care of. These commands were, however, unnecessary; for, looking upon the sleeping child as the future king of his tribe, the lad bore him along as reverentially as though he were a prince of the blood-royal.
Then the gipsy queen, Ketura, giving up all other thoughts but that of vengeance, turned her steps in the direction of London, where, by fortune-telling, and the other arts of her people, she could live and never lose sight of her deadly foe.
Everything concerning the De Courcys she learned. She heard of the marriage of Lord Villiers to Lady Maude Percy; and on the night of the wedding she had entered, unobserved by all, in the bustle, and, screened from view behind a side-door, she had uttered the words that had thrown the whole assembly into such dismay. Then, knowing what must be the consequence, she had fled instantly, and was far from96 danger ere the terrified guests had recovered sufficient presence of mind to begin the search.
How after that she haunted, harassed, and followed the earl, is well-known to the reader, and the success of this course was sufficient even to satisfy her, implacable as she was. She saw that life was beginning to be slow torture to himthat his dread of her was amounting to a monomania with him; and still she pursued him, like some awful nightmare, wherever he went, keeping him still in view.
With the birth of little Erminie, she saw a still more exquisite torture in store for him. Her very soul bounded with the thought of the life-long misery she might heap upon him through the means of this child, whom she had heard he idolized. From the first moment she had heard of its birth, her determination was to steal itto make ’way with itmurder itanythingshe did not care what, only something to make him feel what she had felt. She had been, for a time, delirious, when she first heard of her son’s death: but that grief lasted but for a short time; and then she rejoicedyes, actually rejoicedthat he was dead and free from all future earthly misery. Death would have been to her a relief, had she not been determined to live for revenge. She had lost a childso should they; and then, perhaps, they would be able to comprehend the wrong they had made her suffer.

But in spite of all her attempts, a year passed and she had found no means of carrying this threat into execution. The baby was so seldom taken out, and then always in a carriage with its mother and the nurse, that it was impossible to think of obtaining it. To enter the house, except on the occasion of a ball, or party, when servants and all would be busily occupied, was not to be thought of, either. But on the night of the abduction, hearing of the party to be given at the mansion, and remembering that it was the anniversary of her son's death, she had been wrought up to a perfect frenzy of madness, and, resolved to obtain the child, even at the cost of her life.

Toward midnight, she had cautiously entered, thinking all were most likely to be in the drawing-rooms at that hour, and having previously heard from the servants, by apparently careless questions, where the nursery was situated, bent her steps in that direction. Pausing at the door, which was ajar, she had glanced through, and beheld child and nurse both asleep.

To steal cautiously in, snatch up the child, muffle it so tightly in her cloak that if it cried it could not be heard, and fly down the staircase, was but the work of an instant. Pausing, for an instant, before the door of the grand salon, in her fleet descent, she had boldly uttered her denunciation, and then, with the speed of the wind, had flown through the long hall, out of the door, and away through the wind and sleet, as if pursued by the arch-demon himself.

When she paused, at last, from exhaustion, she was on London Bridge. Darkly came back the memory of the night, just two years before, when, with deadly despair in her heart, she had stood in that self-same spot, on the point of committing self-murder. With a fierce impulse, she opened her cloak and lifted the half-smothered infant high above her head, to dash it into the dark waters below. For one moment she held it poised in the air, and then she drew it back.

"No," she said, with a fiendish smile; "it will be a greater revenge to let it liveto let it grow up a tainted, corrupted, miserable outcast; and then, when spurned alike by God and man, present it to them as their child. Ha! ha! ha! that will be revenge indeed! Live, pretty onelive! You are far too precious to die yet."

Awakened from her sound sleep by the unusual and unpleasant sensation of the bitter March storm beating in her face, little Erminie began to cry. Wrapping it once more in her thick mantle, the gipsy, knowing there was no time to lose, fled away in the direction of a low house in St. Giles, where, with others of her tribe, she had often been, and the proprietor of which was a gipsy himself, and a member of her own tribe. Here, safe from all pursuit, she could stay with the child until the first heat of the search was past, and thenthen to begin her tortures once more.

Little Erminie grieved without ceasing for "mamma," at first, and seemed almost to know the difference between the miserable den wherein she was now located and the princely home she had left. It was not in any heart, however hard, to dislike the lovely infant; and much as Ketura hated the race from which she sprung, she really pitied the little, gentle, helpless babe. So, from two motivesone a feeling98 of commiseration for

the child, and the other a fierce, demoniacal desire that she should live to be the instrument of her vengeanceshe procured a nurse for little Erminie, a woman a shade better than the rest of her class, who had lately lost a child of her own; and owing to her care, little Erminie lived. Livedbut for what fate?

CHAPTER XIII

RETRIBUTION

"Ay, think upon the cause
Forget it not. When you lie down to rest,
Let it be black among your dreams; and when
The morn returns, so let it stand between
The sun and you, as an ill-omened cloud
Upon a summer-day of festival."
Byron.

A month passed. Night and day the search had been carried on; enormous rewards were offered; detectives were sent in every direction; but all in vain. No trace of the lost child was to be found.

Lady Maude had awoke from that deadly swoon, only to fall into another, and another, until her friends grew seriously alarmed for her life. From this, she sunk into a sort of low stupor; and for weeks, she lay still and motionless, unconscious of everything passing around her. White, frail, and shadowy, she lay, a breathing corpse, dead to the world and all it contained. She scarcely realized her loss, she felt like one who has received a heavy blow, stunning her for a time, and rendering her unable to comprehend the full extent of her loss. She received what they gave her in a passive sort of way, heard without understanding what they said, and watched them moving about from under her heavy eyelids without recognizing them. She did not even know her husband, who, the very shadow of his former self, gave up everything to remain by her bedside, night and day. They began to be alarmed for her reason, at last; but her physician said there was no dangershe would arouse from this99 dull, death-like lethargy, at last: they must only let nature have her way.

Earl De Courcy never left his room now. Feeling as if in some sort he was the cause of this awful calamity, he remained, day and night, in his chamber, a miserable, heart-broken, wretched old man.

Late one evening, early in May, as he sat bowed and collapsed in his chair, a servant entered to announce a stranger below, who earnestly desired to see his lordship.

"Is it a woman?" asked the earl, turning ghastly.

"No, my lord, a man, I think, wrapped in a long cloak, and with a hat slouched down over his face. He said he had something of the utmost importance to reveal to your lordship."

"Show him up," said the earl eagerly: while his heart gave a sudden bound, as he thought it might be some one with news of Erminie.

The next moment the door was thrown open, and a tall, dark figure, muffled in a cloak reaching to the ground, and with a hat pulled far over the face, entered, and stood silently confronting the earl.

“Well? Do you bring news of my son’s child? Speak quickly, for God’s sake, if you do!” said the earl, half rising in his eagerness.
Two fierce, black eyes, like living coals, glared at him from under the hat; but the tall stranger spoke not a word.
A deadly fear, like an iron hand, clutched the heart of the earl. That tall, motionless form; those glaring eyes; that ominous silence, made his very blood curdle. White and trembling, he fell back in his seat, for all his undaunted strength was gone now.

“Leave the room,” said the stranger, in a deep, stern voice, turning to the servant, who stood gazing from one to the other.
The man vanishedthe door closed. And Earl De Courcy was alone with his mysterious visitor, who still stood erect, towering and silent, before him.
“Man or devil, speak! With what evil purpose have you sought me to-night?” said the earl, at last finding voice.
Silently the stranger lifted his hat, and cast it on the floor. A mass of thick, streaming, black hair, on which, one wild100 March night, the pitiless rain had beat, fell over her shoulders. The long cloak was dropped off, and, stern, dark and menacing, he saw the lofty, commanding form, the fierce, black eyes, and dark, lowering brow of the wronged gipsy queen, Ketura, his relentless, implacable foe.
The last hue of life faded from the white face of the earl at the terrible sight; a horror unspeakable thrilled through his very soul. Twice he essayed to speak; his lips moved, but no sound came forth.
Silent, still, she stood before him, as rigid as a figure in bronze, her arms folded over her breast, her lips tightly compressed, every feature in perfect repose. You might have thought her some dark statue, but that lifeburning lifewas concentrated in those wild, dark eyes, that never for a single instant removed their uncompromising glare from his face.
So they stood for nearly five minutes, and then words came, at last, to the trembling lips of the earl.
“Dark, dreadful woman! what new crime have you come to perpetrate this night?”
“No crime, lord earl. I come to answer the questions you asked as I entered.”
“Of the child? You have stolen it?” he wildly demanded.
Her malignant eyes were on him still; her arms were still folded over her breast; no feature had moved; but now a strange, inexplicable smile flickered round her thin lips, as she quickly answered:
“I have!”
“And, woman!demon in woman’s form! what wrong had that helpless babe done you?” he cried out, in passionate grief.
No change came over the set, dark face, as from the lips, still wreathed with that dreadful, ominous smile, slowly dropped the words:

“‘The sins of the father shall be visited upon the children’s children, even to the third and fourth generation. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life, saith the Lord of Hosts!’”
“Devil incarnate! blaspheme not! Oh, Heaven of heavens! how had you the heart to murder that child?”
“You had the heart, lord earl, to murder mine.”
“I believed him guilty. You know I did! And she was an innocent babe, as pure from all guile as an angel from heaven.”
“So was he, my lord. He was as free from that crime as that babe; and yet for it you took his life.”
It was awful to hear her speak in that low, even voice, so unnaturally deep and calm. No pitch of passion could be half so terrific as that unearthly quiet.
“Devil!fiend! you shall die for this!” he cried, madly springing up. “What ho! without there! Secure this hag of perdition before”
A low, strangled gurgle finished the sentence; for, with the bound of a pythoness, she had sprung forward and grasped him by the throat. She had the strength of a giant. He was a weak, broken-down old man, as powerless in her strong, horny fingers as an infant.
He grew black in the face, his eyeballs projected, and he struggled, blindly and helplessly, to extricate himself. She laughed a low, jeering laugh at his ineffectual efforts, and said, insultingly, as she released him:
“Softly, softly, lord earl! such violent straining of your lungs is not good for your constitution. You are quite helpless in my hands, you perceive; and if you attempt to raise your voice in that unpleasant manner again, I shall be forced to give you a still more loving clutch next time. Your best policy is, to keep as quiet as possible just now.”
He ground his teeth in impotent fury, as he gasped for breath.
“Besides, you take things for granted too easily, my lord. What proof have you that I am a murderess? You are, and in the sight of God; but that is not saying I am!”
“Oh, woman! guilty, blood-stained fiendess! your own words confirm it!” he passionately cried out.
“Gently, my lord, gently! Have you heard me say I murdered her?”
“You did not deny it.”
“That is negative proof, very unsubstantial, as you evidently know, although you found it sufficient to condemn my son!”
“You are too much of a demon to spare her innocent life102 one moment when in your power. Oh, I knowI know she is dead! Dear little angel! Sweet, helpless little Erminie!”
He almost lost his dread of her in his passion of grief. His chest heaved as he buried his face in his hands, and something like a convulsive sob shook his frame. “Talk not of grief till thou hast seen the tears of stern-browed men.”
But the woman felt no remorse. No; an exultant sense of triumpha fiendish joy filled her heart, at the proof of what she had made him suffer. She had still a fiercer pang in store

for him; and waiting till he had lifted his pale face again, she began, in a low, mocking voice:
“And thinkest thou, oh, Lord De Courcy, there is no darker doom than death? Do you think vengeance such as mine is to be sated by such paltry revenge as that? Pshaw, man! You are only a novice in the art of torture, I see; though you commenced a dangerous game when you practiced first on me. Why, if I had slain her, that would have been momentary revenge, and fifty thousand lives such as hers could not sate mine. Other children might be born, years would pass, and she, in course of time, would be almost forgotten. No, my lord; such vengeance as that would never satisfy the gipsy Ketura!”
“Saints in heaven! Am I sane or mad? Oh, woman, woman! speak, and tell me truly. Does the child yet live?”
“It does!”
“Thank God! Oh, bless God for that!” he cried, passionately, while tears of joy fell fast from his eyes.
The same evil, sinister smile curled the lips of the gipsy.
“What a fool the man is!” she said, bitterly, “thanking God that her life is spared, when she will yet live to curse the hour she was born. Oh, man! can you comprehend the depths of a gipsy’s hateyou, with your cold, sluggish Northern blood? Yes; she shall live; but it will be for a doom so dark that even the fiends themselves will shudder to hear it; she will live to invoke death as a blessing, and yet will not dare to die! And then I will return your Erminie to her doting grandsire, a thing so foul and polluted that the103 very earth will refuse her a grave. Then, Lord De Courcy, my revenge will be complete!”
His hands dropped from his face as if he had been stricken with sudden death; the sight seemed leaving his eyes; the very life seemed palsied in his heart. He was conscious, for one dizzy moment, of nothing but of the blasting sight of that terrific woman, who, with her flaming eyes piercing him like two drawn stilettoes, towered there above him, like a vision from the infernal regions.
She was calm still; that terrible, exultant smile had not left her lips; but he would sooner have seen her foaming with passion than as she looked at that moment, standing there.
“This is our second interview, lord earl,” she said, while he sat speechless. “The first time I pleaded on my knees to you, and you spurned me from you as if I had been a dog. This time it should be your turn to plead; for you have almost as much at stake as I had then. If you do not choose to do so, that is your affair, not mine. The third timewhen it comesyou will have realized what a gipsy’s revenge is like.”
“Oh, woman! if there be one spark of human nature in your savage breast, for God’s sake, spare that child!” cried the earl, wrought up to a perfect agony by her words.
She stepped back a pace, and looked at him for an instant in silence. At last:
“I pleaded to you on my knees,” she said, with an icy smile.
Her words gave him hope. The proud man fell on his knees before her, and held up his clasped hands in supplication. The high born Earl De Courcy knelt in wildest agony at the feet of the outcast gipsy!

Her hour of triumph had come. Folding her arms over her breast, she looked down upon him as he knelt there, with a look no words can ever describe.
“Spare herspare her! For God’s sake, spare that child!”
There was no reply. Erect, rigid and moveless as a figure in stone, she stood, looking down upon him with her blazing eyes.
“Slay her, if you will; let her go to heaven guileless and104 unstainedanything rather than the doom you have destined for her!”
Still no reply. With that triumphant smilea smile such as Satan himself might have wornshe looked steadily and quietly down at the man at her feet.
“Besides, you dare not keep her!” he said, gathering courage from her silence; fancying, perhaps, it was a sign of relenting. “The officers of the law would find you out; and a worse fate than your son’s would be yours.”
It was an unfortunate allusion. Her brow grew black as a thunder-cloud; but she only laughed scornfully.
“Find me?” she repeated. “Yes, if they can find last year’s snow, last year’s partridges, or last summer’s rain. Let them find me. Why, if it came to that, I could dash its brains out in one instant, before its very mother’s eyes.”
“Oh, worst of fiends! does there linger a human heart in your body?”
“No; it turned to stone the night I groveled in vain at your feet.”
“Take any other revenge you like; haunt me, pursue me, as you will, but restore that child! She never injured you; if there is guilt anywhere, it rests on my head. Let me, therefore, suffer, and give back the child.”
She smiled in silence.
“You will relent; you are a woman, and not a devil. Consent to what I ask, and if wealth be any object, you shall have the halfthe whole of my fortune. Tell me you consent, and all I have in the world, together with my everlasting gratitude, will be yours.”
“You should have thought of this the night you refused to grant my prayer, my lord. Will your wealth and ‘every-lasting gratitude’ restore my son from the dead?”
“God knows, were it in my power, I would willingly give my life to restore him and cancel the past. All that remains for me to do I will do, if you restore the child.”
“Lord earl, when I knelt to you, you commanded me to get up. It is my turn now. You have been sufficiently humiliated, even to satisfy me. Rise!”
He rose, and stood before her, so faint with many emotions that he was obliged to grasp the chair for support.
“You will restore her?” he breathlessly asked.
“Never, so help me God; till my vow is fulfilled! Palsied be my heart, if it ever relents! Withered be my hand, if it ever confers a boon on you or one of your house! Blighted be my tongue, if it ever heap but curses on you! Doomed be my soul, if it ever forgives you for what you have done! Once again, lord earl, we are to meet, and then, beware!”
The last words were uttered with a maniac shriek, as she turned and fled from the room. There was a heavy fall; and the servants, rushing in in terror, found Earl De Courcy lying

on the floor, with a dark stream of blood flowing from his mouth. They raised him up, but they were too late. He had ruptured an artery of the heart; and with the clotted gore still foaming around his lips, he lay there before them, stark and dead!

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW HOME

"Yellow sheaves from rich Ceres the cottage had crowned,
Green rushes were strewed on the floor;
The casements sweet woodbine crept wantonly round,
And decked the sod-seats at the door."
Cunningham.

With that last terrible denunciation on her lips, Ketura had fled from the room, from the house, out into the night.

Half delirious with mingled triumph, fiendish joy, and the pitch of passion into which she had wrought herself, she walked with rapid, excited strides along, heedless of whither she went, until she suddenly ran with stunning force against another pedestrian who was coming toward her.

The force of the concussion sent the unfortunate individual sprawling, with rather unpleasant suddenness, on his back; while the gipsy herself, somewhat cooled by the shock, paused for a moment and grasped a lamp-post to steady herself.

"Good gracious!" gasped a deeply aggrieved voice from the pavement, "if this ain't too bad! To be run into this106 way and pitched heels over head on the broad of one's back without a minute's warning! Why, it's a shame!" reiterated the voice, in a still more aggrieved cadence, as its owner, a pale young man with a carpet-bag, slowly began to pick himself up.

The gipsy, having recovered from the sudden collision, was about to hurry on without paying the slightest attention to the injured owner of the carpet-bag, when that individual, catching a full view of her face, burst out in amazement:

"Why, if it ain't Mrs. Ketura! Well, if this isn't real surprising! How do you do? I am glad to see you, I'm sure; and I dare say it was all an accident. I hope you have been quite well since I saw you last, ma'am," said the pale young man, politely; "I've been very well myself, I'm obliged to you."

"Who are you?" said the gipsy, impatiently, scanning his mild, freckled frontispiece with her stiletto-like eyes.

"Why, you haven't forgotten me, have you?" said the young man, straightening out his beaver, which had got stove in during the late catastrophe; "why, I'm O. C. Toosypegs! I dare say you didn't expect to see me here, but we haven't left England yet, you know. We're going the day after to-morrow, aunt Prisciller and me; and I'm glad of it, too, for this here London ain't what it's cracked up to be. I had my pocket picked at least twenty times since I came here. They took my watch, my pocketbook, and my jack-knife, and didn't even leave me so much as a pocket-handkerchief to wipe my nose." And Mr. Toosypegs, who evidently considered this the climax of human depravity, gave his hat a

fierce thump, that sent that astonished head-piece away down over his eyes with rather alarming suddenness.
“I don’t know youlet me pass,” said the gipsy, harshly, trying to walk away from him; but Mr. Toosypegs quickened his pace likewise, and kept up with her.
“Why, you do know me, Mrs. Ketura, and I hope you haven’t went and forgotten me so soon,” said Mr. Toosypegs, in a deeply-injured tone. “Don’t you recollect that nasty wet night, a little over two years ago, when you was walking along the north road, and I made Mr. Harkins, who is a real nice man, only a little hasty at times, take you in107 and drive you to town? You didn’t seem in very good spirits that night, and I was real sorry for your troubleI really was, Mrs. Ketura.”
The gipsy made no reply. Bitterly her thoughts went back to that nightthat long, desolate, sorrowful nightwhen she had bidden her son a last farewell. She had had her revenge; she had wrenched cries of anguish from those who had tortured her; but oh! what revenge could remove the gnawing at her heart? what vengeance could restore her her son? With one of those hollow groans that seem rending the heart they burst from, her head dropped on her bosom. There was a world of anguish and despair in the sound, and it went right to the simple heart of the really kind Mr. Toosypegs.
“There, now, don’t take on so about it,” he began, piteously; “it’s real distressing to listen to such groans as that. Everything happens for the best, you know; and though, as I remarked at the time to my friend Mr. Harkins, it was real disagreeable of them to take and send your son away, when he didn’t want to go, still it can’t be helped now, and there’s no use whatever in making a fuss about it. As my uncle, who hadn’t the pleasure of your acquaintance, has left me two thousand pounds, I should be real glad to aid you as far as money will go, and you needn’t mind about giving me your note for it either. I ain’t particular about getting it back again, I’m very much obliged to you.”
During this well-meant attempt at consolation, not one word of which the gipsy had heard, Mr. Toosypegs had been fumbling uneasily in his pockets, and shifting his carpet-bag in a fidgety manner from one hand to the other. Having managed at last to extract a plump pocketbook from some mysterious recess inside of his coat, he held it out to his companion; but she, with her eyes gloomily fixed on the ground, seemed so totally oblivious of both himself and it, that, with a comical expression of distress, he was forced to replace it again where it came from.
“Now I wouldn’t mind it so much if I was you, you know,” he resumed, in a confidential tone. “Where’s the good of making a time when things can’t be helped? I’m going to to sail for America the day after to-morrow, in a great, nasty, tarry ship, and I would like to see you in good spirits before108 I go. It would make it a great deal nicer if I thought you weren’t taking on.”
The last words caught her ear. She lifted her haggard face and fixed her piercing eyes so suddenly full upon him, that, with an alarmed “Lord bless me,” he sprung back and gazed upon her in evident terror.
“Going to America, are you?to-morrow?” she asked, rapidly.

“Whyano, sirthat is, yes, ma’am,” stammered Mr. Toosypegs, his self-possession considerably shaken by those needle-like glances.
With lightning-like rapidity there flashed through the gipsy’s mind a scheme. London was no longer a safe place for her; she was liable to be arrested, now, at any moment, and with her half-completed revenge this was not to be thought of. She felt her best course would be, to leave England altogether for some years; and she determined to avail herself of the present opportunity.
“If I go with you to America, will you pay my passage?” she abruptly asked, transfixing Mr. Toosypegs with her lightning eyes.
“Why, of course, with a great deal of pleasure,” responded the young man, with alacrity; “it will make it real pleasant to have you with us during the passage, I’m sure,” said Mr. Toosypegs, who felt politeness required of him to say as much, though his conscience gave him a severe twinge for telling such a fib. “Perhaps, as we start the day after to-morrow, you wouldn’t mind coming and stopping with us until then, so’s to have things handy. Aunt Prisciller will be delighted to make your acquaintance, I know,” concluded Mr. Toosypegs, whose conscience, at this announcement, gave him another rebuking pinch.
“There will be two children to bring,” said the gipsy, hurriedly: “I must go for them.”
“Half price,” muttered Mr. Toosypegs, sotto voce; “what will aunt Prisciller say?”
“I will meet you here by daybreak the day after to-morrow,” said the gipsy, stopping suddenly. “Will you come?”
“Why, certainly,” responded Mr. Toosypegs, who was too much in awe of her to refuse her anything she might109 ask; “I’ll be in this precise spot by daybreak the day after to-morrow, though I don’t approve of early rising as a general thing; it ain’t nice at all.”
“Very well, I will be hereyou need come with me no further,” said Ketura, dismissing him with a wave of her hand; and ere he could expostulate at this summary dismissal, she turned a corner and disappeared.
That night a trusty messenger was dispatched by Ketura to the gipsy camp for little Raymond, who arrived the following night. His free, gipsy life seemed to agree wonderfully well with that young gentleman, who appeared in the highest possible health and spirits; his rosy cheeks and sparkling black eyes all aglow from the woodland breezes. Five years old now, he was tall and well-grown for his age, could climb the highest trees like a squirrel, set bird-traps and rabbit-snares, and was as lithe, supple, and active as a young deer. The eyes of Ketura lit up with pride as she gazed upon him; and for the first time the idea occurred to her that he might live to avenge his father’s wrongs when she was dead. She would bring him up to hate all of the house of De Courcy; that hate should grow with his growth until it should become the one ruling passion and aim of his life, swamping, by its very intensity, every other feeling.
Master Raymond, who seemed quite as chary of caresses as his grandmother herself, met her with a good deal of indifference; but no sooner did he see little Erminie, than a rash and violent attachment was the result. Accustomed to the dirty, dusky gipsy babies,

who rolled all day unheeded in the grass, this little snowy-skinned, golden-haired, blue-eyed infant seemed so wondrously lovely that he had to give her sundry pokes with his finger to convince himself she was real, and not an illusion. Miss Erminie did not seem at all displeased by these attentions, but favored him with a coquettish smile, and with her finger in her rosy mouth, gave him every encouragement he could reasonably expect on so short an acquaintance. Being left alone together, Master Raymond, who did not altogether approve of her wasting her time, lying blinking at him in her cradle, began to think it was only a common act of politeness she owed him to get up, and seeing no symptoms of any such intention on the young lady's part, he resolved to give her a hint to that110 effect. Catching her, therefore, by one little plump leg and arm, he gave her a jerk that swung her completely out, and then grasping her by the waist, he dumped her down on the floor beside him, upon which she immediately clapped another finger in her mouth; and there they sat, silently staring at each other, until both were dispatched to bed.

Early in the morning Master Raymond and Miss Erminie found themselves awakened from an exceedingly sound slumber, and undergoing the unpleasant operation of dressing. The young gentleman kicked and plunged manfully for a while, but finding it all of no use, he gave up the struggle and yielded to fate in a second nap. Erminie, after crying a little, followed his example; and the gipsy, taking her in her arms, and followed by one of the tribe bearing the sleeping Raymond, hurried to the trysting-place.

There they found Mr. Toosypegs, looking green and sea-sick already, from anticipation. In a few words the gipsy gave him to understand that she wished to go on board immediatelya proposition which rather pleased Mr. Toosypegs, who was inwardly afraid she might desire to be brought to his house, where she would be confronted by Miss Toosypegs, of whom he stood in wholesome awe.

Half an hour brought them to the pier where the vessel lay, and consigning little Raymond to the care of one of the female passengers, she sought her berth with Erminie. Until England was out of sight she still dreaded detection; and, therefore, she sat with feverish impatience, longing to catch the last glimpse of the land wherein she was born. She watched every passing face with suspicion, and in every out-stretched hand she saw some one about to snatch her prize from her; and involuntarily her teeth set, and she held the sleeping child in a fiercer clasp.

Once she caught a passing glimpse of Mr. Toosypegs, a victim to "green and yellow melancholy" in its most aggravated form, as he walked toward his berth in an exceedingly limp state of mind and shirt-collar. Mr. Toosypegs knew what sea-sickness was from experience; he had a distinct and sad recollection of what he endured the last time he crossed the Atlantic; and with many an ominous foreboding, he ensconced himself in an arm-chair in the cabin, while111 the vessel rose and fell as she danced over the waves. Silently he sat, as men sit who await the heaviest blow Fate has in store for them. Suddenly a stentorian voice from the deck rose high above the creaking and straining of ropes and trampling of feet, with the words, "Heave ahead." Mr. Toosypegs

gave a convulsive start, an expression of intensest anguish passed over his face, and suddenly clapping his handkerchief to his mouth, he fled into the silent depths of the state-room, where, hidden from human view, what passed was never known.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated a tall, thin, sharp female, with a sour face, and a cantankerous expression of countenance generally, who sat with her hands folded over a shiny-brown Holland gown, as upright as a church-steeple and about as grim. "Well, I never! going hand being sea-sick hafore he's ten minutes hon board, which his something none of the family hever 'ad before, hand I've been hover to Hireland without hever thinking of such a thing; lying there on the broad hof his back, leaving me a poor, lone woman, and groanin' hevery time this dratted hold ship gives a plunge, which is something that's not pleasant for a hun-protected female to be, having a lot hof disagreeable sailors, smefling of oakum and tar and sich, has hif he couldn't wait to be sea-sick hafter we'd land. Ugh!" And Miss Priscilla Dorothea Toosypegsfor she it wasknit up her face in a bristle of the sourest kinks, and punctuated her rather rambling speech by sundry frowns of the most intensely acid character.

To describe that voyage is not my intention; suffice it to say, that it was an unusually speedy one. On the following morning, the gipsy had appeared on deck with little Erminie, whose gentle beauty attracted universal attention, as her nurse's dark, stern, moody face did fear and dread. Many hands were held out for her, and Ketura willingly gave her up, and consented to the request of a pleasant-faced young girl who offered to take charge of her until they should land. Master Raymond had already become prime favorite with all on board, more particularly with the sailors; and could soon run like a monkey up the shrouds into the rigging. At first he condescended to patronize Erminie occasionally; but on discovering she could not climbin fact, could not112 even stand on her feet properlyhe began to look down on her with a sort of lofty contempt. On the fifth day, Mr. Toosypegs made his appearance on deck, a walking skeleton. Everybody laughed at his wobegone looks; and so deeply disgusted was Miss Priscilla by his sea-green visage, that it seemed doubtful whether she would ever acknowledge the relationship again.

As every one but Miss Priscilla laughed at him, and she scolded him unmercifully, the unhappy young man was forced to fly for relief to Ketura, whose silent grimness was quite delightful compared with either of the others. Feeling that she owed him something for his kindness, she listened in silence to all his doleful complaints; and this so won upon the susceptible heart of that unfortunate youth, that he contracted quite an affection for herjust as a lap-dog has been known to make friends with a tiger before now.

"What do you intend to do when you get to America, Mrs. Ketura?" he asked one day as they sat together on the deck.

"I have not thought about it," she answered indifferently.

“You’ll have to do something, you know,” insinuated Mr. Toosypegs. “People always do something in America. They’re real smart people there. I’m an American, Mrs. Ketura,” added Mr. Toosypegs, complacently.
A grim sort of smile, haft contempt, half pity, passed over the face of the gipsy.
“Telling fortunes pays pretty well, I guess, but then it isn’t a nice way to make a living; and besides that little baby would be real inconvenient to lug round with you, not to speak of that dreadful little boy who climbs up that main-topgallant bowspritor whatever the nasty steep thing’s name is. No; I don’t think telling fortunes would be exactly the thing.”
“I shall manage some way; don’t bother me about it,” said gipsy, impatiently.
“What do you say to coming with us to Dismal Hollow? There’s plenty of room around there for you; and I should be real glad to have you near, so that I could drop in to see you now and then.”
Mr. Toosypegs was sincere in saying he would like it this time; for her stern, fierce character had a strange sort113 of fascination for him, and he really was beginning to feel a strong attachment to her.
The real kindliness of his tone, his simple generosity, touched even the granite heart of the hard gipsy queen. Lifting her eyes, that all this time had been moodily gazing into the dashing, foam-crested waves, she said, in a softer voice than he ever expected to hear from her lips:
“I thank you and accept your offer, and more for their sake, however, than my own”pointing to the children. “I could make my way through the world easily enough, but they are young and tender, and need care. I will go with you.”
She turned away as she ceased, as if there was no more to be said on the subject, and again looked fixedly down into the wide waste of waters.
“It’s real good of you to say so, Mrs. Ketura, and I’m very much obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs with a brightening up of his pallid features. “We will land at New York, and after that, go to Dismal Hollow via Baltimore, which means, Mrs. Ketura,” said Mr. Toosypegs, interrupting himself, to throw in a word of explanation, “‘by way of’ It’s Latin, or Greek, I guess, though I never learned either. Ugh! ain’t Latin nice, though!” added the owner of the sickly complexion, with a grimace of intensest disgust. “I tried it for six weeks one time, with an apothecary; and then, as it began to throw me into a decline, I gave it up. Not any more. I’m very much obliged to you.”
Three days after that the vessel touched the wharf at New York. And after two days’ delay, which Mr. Toosypegs required to get his “land legs” on, they set off for Baltimore.
In due course of time that goodly city was reached, and one week after, the whole party arrived at Judestowna thriving country town on the sea-coast, called then after the first settler, but known by another name, now.
Driving through the town, they reached the suburbs, and entered a more thinly-settled part of the country. Gleaming here and there through the trees, they could catch

occasional glimpses of the bright waters of the Chesapeake, and hear the booming of the waves on the low shore.

Turning an abrupt angle in the road, they drove down a long, steep, craggy path, toward a gloomy mountain gorge, at114 sight of which Mr. Toosypegs so far forgot himself as to take off his hat and wave it over his head, with a feeble "Hooray for Dismal Hollow!" which so scandalized that strict Christian, his aunt, that she gave him a look beneath which he wilted down, and was heard no more.

"What an ugly old place! I won't go there!" exclaimed little Raymond, with a strong expression of contempt.

And truly it did not look very inviting. The mountain, which, by some convulsion of nature, seemed to have been violently rent in twain, was only passable by a narrow, dangerous bridle-path. Down in the very bottom of this deep, gloomy gorge, stood an old, time-worn building of what had once been red brick, with dismal, black, broken window shutters, that at some far-distant time might have been green. A range of dilapidated barns and outhouses spread away behind, and in front, some hundred yards distant, ran a slender rivulet, which every spring became swollen into a foaming torrent.

Here the sun never penetrated; no living creature was to be seen, and a more gloomy and dismal spot could hardly have been found in the wide world. Even the gipsy queen looked round with a sort of still amaze that any one could be found to live here, while Miss Priscilla elevated both hands in horror, and in the dismay of the moment was surprised into the profanity of exclaiming: "Great Jemimi!"

"It's the ugliest old place ever was, and I won't go there!" reiterated Master Raymond, kicking viciously at Mr. Toosypegs, to whom, with an inward presentiment, he felt he owed his coming.

"It is rather dull-looking, now," said Mr. Toosypegs, apologetically; "but wait till we get it fixed up a little, after a spell. The niggers have let things go to waste since I went away."

"Humph! Should think they had!" said Miss Priscilla, with a disdainful sniff. "Nothing but treeses, and rockses, and mountainses split him two; hand what your blessed father, which lies now a hangel in some nasty, swampy graveyard, could have been thinking habout, with that 'orrid little river hafore the door, to build a 'ouse in sich a spot, which must hoverflow hevery time hit rains, his more than I can telldrowning us hin hour beds, as it will be sure to do115 some fine morning or hother. Wah! wah!" And with this final expression of disgust, given in a tone of scorn no words can express, the ancient virgin suffered herself to be handed from the wagon by her dutiful nephew and deposited in a mud-puddle before the door to the great benefit of her stockings and temper.

The noise of wheels, a very unusual noise therebrought some half-score of lean, hungry-looking curs from some unseen region, who instantly began a furious yelping and barking. Miss Priscilla set up a series of short, sharp little screams, and jumped up on a rock in mortal terror; little Erminie, terrified by the noise, began to cry; Master

Raymond yelled to the dogs at the top of his lungs, and plunged headforemost in among them; Mr. Toosypegs went through all the phases of the potential mood“exorting, entreating, commanding,”and a general uproar ensued that would have shamed Babel.
The hubbub and din roused the inmates, at last, as it might very easily have done the Seven Sleepers themselves.
A shuffling tread of feet was heard within, and then a trembling voice demanded:
“Who dar?”
“It’s me. Open the door, for goodness’ sake!” exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, in an agony of supplication.
“We’s got yarms, and dar ain’t notting in de house for you to rob, so you’d better go ’way,” said a quavering voice, that evidently strove in vain to be courageous.
“Will you open the door? I tell you it’s only me!” shouted the deeply-exasperated Mr. Toosypegs, seizing the handle of the door and giving it a furious shake.
Cautiously the door was partly opened, a terrified voice was heard to whisper: “You hit dem wid de poker arter I fire,” and then the frowning muzzles of two huge horse-pistols met their dismayed eyes.
“Don’t shootit’s me!” yelled the terror-stricken Mr. Toosypegs; but his words were lost in the bang! bang! of the pistols as they went off.
“Oh, Lord, have mercy on me! I’m shot!” shrieked the unhappy Mr. Toosypegs, as he dropped like a stone in the mud, and lay motionless.
“Hand me de brunderingbussquick, Pomp! Dar’s116 more o’ dem,” again whispered the chattering voice; and once more the warlike individual within blazed away, while Miss Priscilla lay kicking in the strongest hysterics, and Mr. Toosypegs, flat on his face in the mud, lay as rigid and still as a melancholy corpse.
So completely amazed was the gipsy queen by all this, that she stood motionless, with Erminie in her arms. Now the door was slowly opened, and a negro’s face, gray with terror, was protruded. His round, goggle eyes, starting from his head with fear, fell on the prostrate forms of Miss Priscilla and her unfortunate nephew.
“Two ob dem gone, bress de Lord!” piously ejaculated Cuffee. “It takes me for to do de bisiness. Well, bress Mars’r! if I ain’t had a fight for’t.” Then catching sight of the gipsy, he paused suddenly, and jumped back, and raised the discharged blunderbuss, but no effort could make it go off a second time.
“Are you mad, fellow?” exclaimed the deep, commanding voice of Ketura. “Would you murder your master?”
“Young mars’r hab gone; an’ef you don’t cl’ar right out dar’ll be more blood shed!” exclaimed the negro, still keeping his formidable weapon cocked.
“I tell you this is your master!” impatiently exclaimed Ketura. “He arrived to-day; and now you have shot him.”
Slowly the blunderbuss was lowered, as if the conviction that she might be speaking the truth was slowly coming home to the mind of her hearer. Cautiously he left his post of danger and approached his prostrate foe. Gathering courage from his apparent

lifelessness, he at last ventured to turn him over, and all smeared and clotted with mud, the pallid features of Mr. Toosypegs were upturned to the light. His arms were stretched stiffly out by his side, as much like a corpse as possible; his eyes were tightly closed; ditto his lips, all covered with soft mud.

There was no mistaking that face. With a loud howl of distress, the negro threw himself upon the lifeless form of poor Mr. Toosypegs.

"Ah! You've got your elbow in the pit of my stomach!" exclaimed the corpse, with a sharp yell of pain. "Can't you get out of that, and let me die in peace?"

For the first time in two years the gipsy, Ketura, laughed. In fact, they would have been more than mortal who could have beheld that unspeakably-ludicrous scene without doing so.

Miss Priscilla stopped her hysterical kicking and plunging, and raised herself on her elbow to look.

The negro, with a whoop of joy that might have startled a Shawnee Indian, seized Mr. Toosypegs, who had shut his eyes and composed himself for death again, save an occasional splutter as the mud went down his throat, and swinging him over his shoulder as if he had been a limp towel, rushed with him in triumph into the house.

"He warn't dead, then, hafter hall?" said Miss Priscilla, sharply, in a voice that seemed made of steel-springs. "Well, I never! Going hand fright'ning respectable parties hout their wits with 'orrid black niggers, firing hoff of pistols hand cannons; lying there in the mud making believe dead; hand shooting me somewherefor I can feel the balls hinside hof me; spoiling a good new suit hof clothes, rolling there like a pig, and not dead, hafter hall; hand that there nigger shooting away like mad hall the time, which his a mercy to be thankful for! Wah! wah!"

And, with her usual look of sour disgust immeasurably heightened, Miss Priscilla gathered up her own muddy skirts and marched, like a loaded rifle all ready to go off, into a long, black, chill, littered hall.

Half a dozen frightened darkies were crouching in the further corner, and on these Miss Priscilla turned the muzzle of the rifle, and a sharp volley of oddly-jumbled up sentences went off in tones of keenest irony.

"Yes; you may stand there, you hugly black leeches, hafter shooting us hevery onethough looks ain't hof no consequence in this horrid place; hand hif you don't get 'ung for it some day, my name hain't Priscilla Dorothea Toosypegs! Perhaps you'll show me where my nevvy his, which you've shot so nicely, hand make a fire, hafter keeping hus rolling hin the mud, getting our death hof cold in this 'orrid cold 'ouse, which, being a respectable female, hand not a pig, I hain't used to; hand Hamerica mud hain't the nicest thing I ever saw for to eat; so maybe you'll get hus some dinner, hand show me to where my nevvy his, hif118 you please," concluded Miss Priscilla, in tones of most cutting irony.

The terrified servants understood enough of this singular address to know Miss Toosypegs wished for a fire, her dinner, and her nephew. An old woman, therefore, in a

gaudy Madras turban, advanced, and led the way up a rickety flight of stairs into a comfortless-looking room, with a damp, unaired odor, where, on a bed, lay the mortal remains of O. C. Toosypegs, with the darkeywhose name I may as well say at once was Cupidgiving him a most vigorous rubbing, which extorted from the dead man sundry groans and grimaces and encouraged Cupid to still further exertions.

The loaded rifle advanced to the bedside, and a second volley went off.

"Come, Horlander Toosypegs, get hup hout o' that, lying there in this musty hold room, face and hall plastered hover with mud, which his enough to give you the rheumatism the longest day you live, without the first spark hof a fireso it is!"

"I'm dying, Aunt Priscilla; stay with me to the last!" in the faintest whisper, responded Mr. Toosypegs, languidly opening his eyes, and then shutting them again.

"Dying? Wah, wah!" grunted Miss Priscilla, catching him by the shoulder and shaking him with no gentle hand. "Pretty corpse you'll make, hall hover with mud, hand looks has much like dying has I do."

"De brunderingbuss an' de pissels war only loaded wid powderno shot in 'em at all. 'Deed, old missus, he ain't hurted the fustest mite, only he t'inks so."

"Hold!" shrieked Miss Priscilla, turning fiercely upon Cupid. "You impident black nigger, you! to call me hold! Leave the room this very minute, hand never let me see your hugly, black face hagain!"

"Comeyou are not hurtget up!" said Ketura, going over to the bedside, as poor Cupid, crestfallen, slunk away. "There is not a hair of your head injured. Up with you!"

"Am I not shot?" demanded Mr. Toosypegs, bewildered. "Did the bullet not enter my brain?"

"You never had any for it to enter," said the gipsy, en119couragingly. "Look yourself; there is neither wound nor blood."

"No; but it's bleeding inwardly," said Mr. Toosypegs, with a hollow groan. "Oh, I know I'm a dead man!"

"Chut! I have no patience with you! Get up, man! you are as well as ever!" impatiently exclaimed Ketura.

Slowly Mr. Toosypegs, who had immense faith in Ketura, lifted first one arm and then another to see if either were powerless. Satisfied on this point, he next lifted each leg; and finding, to his great astonishment, that his limbs were all sound, he carefully began to raise himself up in bed. No torrent of blood followed this desperate attempt, as he expected there would be; and the next minute, Mr. Orlando Toosypegs stood, safe and sound, on the floor, looking about as sheepish a young gentleman as you would find from Maine to Florida.

"You thought you was gonedidn't you?" said the little witch, Raymond, with a malicious chuckle of delight, as he watched the chopfallen hero of the pallid features.

Miss Toosypegs merely contented herself with a look of lofty contempt more withering than words, and then rustled out to rouse up the "hugly black leeches" on the subject of dinners and fires.

Having succeeded in both objects especially in the dinner department, which Aunt Bob, the presiding deity of the kitchen, had got up in sublime style, Miss Priscilla was in somewhat better humor; and having announced her intention of beginning a thorough reformation both out doors and in, turned briskly to her nephew, who sat in a very dejected state of mind, without so much as a word to say for himself, and exclaimed:

"Now, Horlander, the best thing you can do is, to go immediately hand see habout getting a 'ouse for Mrs. Ketura hand the children, which would never survive a day in this damp hold barn; besides, being to do some time or hother, it mayhas well be did first has last, hand save the 'spense hof a doctor's bill, which his the hunpleasantest thing hever was stuck hin hanybody's face."

Mr. Toosypegs, who felt he would never more dare to call his soul his own, meekly put on his hat, and said he would go and see about a cottage he knew of which would120 suit Mrs. Ketura to a T. The fact was, he was glad to escape from his aunt; and that good lady, who had classed Mrs. Ketura and the children under the somewhat indefinite title of "riff-raff" from the first, was equally anxious to be rid of them.

Late that evening, Mr. Toosypegs returned, with the satisfactory news that he had obtained the cottage, which belonged, he informed them, to a certain Admiral Havenful, who, not having any particular use for it himself, said they might have it rent free. The cottage was furnished; just as it had been let by its last tenant; and Mrs. Ketura might pitch her tent there, with a safe conscience, as fast as she liked.

"You had better take one of the servants with you, too," said Mr. Toosypegs, good-naturedly; "we have more than we want, and you will require one to mind the baby, and fetch water, and do chores. I think Lucy will do as well as any."

Miss Toosypegs frowned at first; but remembering, upon second thoughts, that there was already a tribe of useless negroes and dogs, eating them out of house and home, she gave a sharp assent, at last, to her nephew's arrangement.

Early the next morning, Mr. Toosypegs, Ketura, Raymond, Erminie, and the negress, Lucy, entered the wagon, and turned their backs upon Dismal Hollow.

Half an hour's drive through a forest-road, all aglow with the leafy splendor of early July, brought them to the seashore. Far removed from any other habitation, stood a pretty little whitewashed cottage, a little fairy-bandbox of a place, on a bank above the sea, nestling like a pearl set in emeralds as it gleamed through a wilderness of vines and shrubs. A wide, dry, arid expanse, overrun with blueberry and cranberry vines, spread before the door toward the north, as far as the eye could reach. Far in the distance, they could see a huge house, of a dazzling whiteness, unshaded by tree or vine, as it stood in the full glare of the hot sun, dazzling the eye of the gazer. This, Mr. Toosypegs gave them to understand, was the "White Squall," the residence of Admiral Havenful; and the dry plains spreading into the distance were very appropriately known as the "Barrens." South and east, a dense forest shut in the view, and to the west spread out the boundless sea.

“Now, Mrs. Ketura,” said Mr. Toosypegs, in a mysterious whisper, “you can’t live upon green vines and blueberries, nor yet you can’t stay in this cottage from morning till night, you know, though I dare say Aunt Priscilla thinks you can. Therefore you must take this pursehalf of which the admiral gave me for you last night, and the other halfwell, no matter. Then, as you’ll want to go to Judestown to market, and to church, sometimes, I’ll send over the pony and the old buggy; but don’t you say a word about it to Aunt Priscillawomen don’t need to know anything, you know, as they don’t always view things in their proper light; and Aunt Priscilla’s queer any way. If there’s anything else you want, just you send Lucy for it to Dismal Hollow, and you shall have it, Mrs. Ketura, for I like you real well.”

“You are very kind,” said the gipsy, again touched by his good-nature; “and I hope you will always regard yourself as one of the family.”

“Hark you, Mrs. Ketura,” said Mr. Toosypegs, in a tone of delight. “I certainly will, since you wish it. I’ll drop in very often. I’m very much obliged to you.”

And, waving his hand briskly, Mr. Toosypegs resumed his seat in the wagon, and drove off again to Dismal Hollow.

CHAPTER XV

AFTER MANY DAYS

"I will paint her as I see her.
Ten times have the lilies blown
Since she looked upon the sun."
Browning.

And ten years passed away.

It was a jocund morning in early spring. From the pine woods came the soft twittering of innumerable birds, filling the air with melody; while the soft, fragrant odor of the tall swinging pines came floating on every passing breeze. The sun rose in unclouded splendor above the dark tree-tops, and the bright waves of the Chesapeake danced and flashed in122 the golden rays. No sound broke the deep, profound stillness of the wide, dry moor; no living thing, save now and then some solitary bird that skimmed along over the fern, was to be seen. Far away in every direction nothing met the eye but the blue, unclouded sky above, and the bleak, arid barrens below, that lay hot and dry in the glare of the morning sunshine.

Suddenly the sylvan silence of the spot was broken by the clear, sweet notes of a hunting-horn, that startled the echoes far and near, and the next moment the forms of a horse and rider came dashing over the moor.

The horse was a splendid animal, a small, jet-black Arabian, with graceful, tapering limbs, arching neck, flowing mane, and small, erect head, and bright, fiery eyes. His rider was a young girl of some twelve years, who sat her horse like an Arab hunter, and whose dark, unique style of beauty merits a wider description.

She was very slight and rather tall for her age; but with a finely proportioned figure, displayed now to the best advantage by her well-fitting riding-habitwhich consisted of a skirt of dark-green cloth, a tight basque of black velvet. Her face was thin and dark and somewhat elfish, but the olive skin was smooth as satin, and deepening with deepest crimson in the thin cheeks and lips. Her forehead was low broad, and polished; her saucy little nose decidedly retrousse; her teeth like pearls, and her hands and feet perfect. And then her eyessuch great, black, lustrous, glorious eyes, through which at times a red light shonesuch splendid eyes, vailed by long, jetty, silken lashes, and arched by glossy black eyebrows, smooth and shining as water-leecheseyes full of fun, frolic, freedom, and dauntless daringeyes that would haunt the memory of the beholder for many a day. Her hair, "woman's crowning glory," was of intensest blackness, and clustered in short, dancing curls round her dark, bright, sparkling face. In the shade those curls were of midnight darkness, but in sunshine, red rings of fire shone through like tiny circlets of flame. She wore a small, black velvet hat, whose long sable plume just touched her warm, crimson cheek.

Such was the huntress, who with a pistol stuck in her belt, a little rifle swung across her shoulder, dashed along over123 the moor, holding the bridle lightly in one hand, and swinging jauntily, a silver-mounted riding-whip in the other.
As she reached the center of the moor, she reined in her horse so suddenly that he nearly reared upright, and then, lifting her little silver bugle again to her lips, she blew a blast that echoed in notes of clearest melody far over the heath.
This time her signal was answereda loud shout from a spirited voice met her ear, and in another instant another actor appeared upon the scene.
He, too, was mounted, and rode his horse well. He was a tall, slender stripling of about fifteen, and in some ways not unlike the girl. He had the same dark complexion, the same fiery black eyes and hair; but there all resemblance ceased. The look of saucy drollery on her face was replaced on his by a certain fierce pridean expression at once haughty and daring. He was handsome, exceedingly, with regular, classical features, a perfect form, and had that mark of high birth, the small and exquisitely-shaped ear, and thin curving nostril. Erect he sat in his saddle, like a young prince of the blood.
“Bon matin, Monsieur Raymond!” shouted the girl, as he gallantly raised his cap and let the morning breeze lift his dark locks. “I thought the sun would not find you in bed the first morning after your return home. How does your serene highness find yourself?”
“In excellent health and spirits. I’m very much obliged to youas our friend Mr. Toosypegs would say,” answered Master Raymond, for he it is, as he laughingly rode up beside her. “Where’s Ranty?”
“In bed. That fellow’s as lazy as sin, and would rather lie there, sleeping like some old grampus, than enjoy a ride over the hills the finest morning that ever was.”
“How do you know grampuses are fond of sleeping?” said Raymond.
“How do I know?” said the girl, in a high key, getting somewhat indignant. “I know very well they are? Doesn’t Miss Toosypegs, when she’s talking about Orlando sleeping in the morning, always say he’s ‘snoring like a grampus’? and if Miss Priscilla doesn’t know, that’s been to England, and every place else, I would like to know who does!”
“Well, I’ve been to England, too,” said Raymond.
“Yes, and a great deal of good it’s done you!” said the young lady, contemptuously. “But that’s the way always. Ever since Ranty and you went to college, you’ve got so stuck up, and full of Latin and Greek, and stuff, there’s no standing either of you. Last night, Ranty had to go and ask aunt Deb for the bootjack in Latin, and when she couldn’t understand him, he went round kicking the cat and my nine beautiful kittens, in the most awful manner that ever was; and swearing at her in Greekthe hateful wretch!”
And Miss Petronilla Lawless scowled at Raymond, who laughed outright.
“Oh! come now, Pet, don’t be angry!” he said. “Where’s the use of quarreling the very first morning we meet.”
“Quarreling!” repeated Miss Pet, shortly: “I’m sure I don’t want to quarrel; but you’re so aggravating. Boys always are just the hatefulest things”

“Most hateful, Miss Lawless,” amended Raymond, gravely. “There’s a great deal of good sense but bad grammar in that sentence. I don’t like boys myself half so well as I do girlsfor instance, you’re worth a dozen of Ranty.”
“Yes; you say so now, when Ranty ain’t listening; but if you wanted to go off on some mischief or other, I guess you wouldn’t think of me. But that’s the way I’m always treated, pitched round like an old shoe, without even daring to say a word for myself.”
This melancholy view of things, more particularly the idea of Miss Pet’s not having a “word to say for herself,” struck Raymond as so inexpressibly ludicrous, that he gave vent to a shout of laughter.
“Yes, you may laugh!” said Pet, indignantly; “but it’s true, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself, making fun of people in this way. I am not going to stand being imposed upon much longer, either! If Miss Priscilla keeps snubbing and putting down Mr. Toosypegs all the time, that ain’t no reason why I’m to be snubbed and put down toois it?”
“Why, Pet, what’s the matter with you this morning?” exclaimed Raymond. “I never knew you so cross; has the125 judge scolded you, or have you bagged no game, or has your pony cast a shoe, or”
“No, none of them things has happened!” broke in Pet, crossly. “I suppose you’d keep on or, or, or-ing till doomsday, if I let you! It’s worse still, and I wouldn’t mind much if you shot me on the spot!” said Pet, in a tone of such deep desperation that Raymond looked at her in real alarm.
“Why, Pet, what has happened?” he inquired, anxiously, “Nothing really serious, I hope.”
“Yes, it is really serious. I’m going to be sent to schoolthere now!” said Pet, as near crying as an elf could be.
“Oh! is that all?” said Raymond, immeasurably relieved. “Well, I don’t see anything so very dreadful in that.”
“Don’t you, indeed?” exclaimed Pet, with flashing eyes. “Well, if there’s anything more dreadful, I’d like to know what it is! To be cooped up in a great dismal dungeon of a schoolhouse from one year’s end to t’other, and never get a chance to sneeze without asking leave first. I won’t go, either, if I die for it!”
“And so you’ll grow up and not know B from a cow’s horn,” said Raymond. “I am sure you need to go bad enough.”
“I don’t need it, either!” angrily retorted Pet. “I can read first-rate now, without spelling more than half the words; and writeI wish you could see how beautifully I can make some of the letters!”
“Oh! I saw a specimen yesterdayMinnie showed it to melooked as if a hen had dipped her foot in an ink-bottle and clawed it over the paper.”
“Why, you horrid, hateful, sassy”
“Abandoned, impertinent young man!” interrupted Raymond. “There! I’ve helped you out with it. And now look here, Pet, how do you expect to be raised to the dignity of my

wife, some day, if you don't learn something? Why, when we are married, you'll have to make your mark!"
"I've a good mind to do that now with my whip!" exclaimed Pet, flourishing it in dangerous proximity to his head. "Your wife, indeed! I guess not! I'm to be a President's lady some day, Aunt Deb says. Catch me marrying you!"
"Well, that will be your loss. Where is the judge going to send you?"
"Why, he says to the Sacred Heart; but I ain't gone yet! I'd a heap sooner go to Judestown, with Minnie, to that school where all the boys and girls go together. Oh, Ray! there are just the nicest boys ever was there'specially one with the beautifulest red cheeks, and the loveliest bright buttons on his coat ever you seen!"
And Pet's eyes sparkled at the recollection.
"Who is he?" said Raymond, who did not look by any means so delighted as Pet fancied he should.
"His name's Bobby Brown; and only he's all as yellow as the yolk of an egg ever since he had the ja'nders, he'd be real pretty. But I'm getting hungry, Ray. I'll race you to the cottage, and bet you anything I'll beat you!"
"Done!" cried Ray, catching the excitement now sparkling in the dark, brilliant face of the little fay beside him; and crushing his cap down over his thick curls, he bounded after her as she dashed away.
But Pet was better mounted, and the best rider of the two; and a ringing, triumphant laugh came borne tantalizingly to his ears as she distanced him by full twenty yards, and galloped up to the little white cottage on the Barrens.
"Fairly beaten!" he said, laughing, as he sprung off. "I am forced to own myself conquered, though I hate to do it."
Though he laughed, his look of intense mortification showed how galling was defeat.
"Ahem! and how do you expect to be raised to the dignity of my husband some day, if you don't learn to ride better? Why, when we're married, I'll have to give you lessons!" said Pet, demurely; though her wicked eyes were twinkling with irrepressible fun under their long lashes.
"Oh, I see!" said Ray, gayly. "Poetical justice, eh? Paying me in my own coin? Well, if you can beat me in riding, you can't in anything else!"
"Can't I, though?" said Pet, defiantly. "Just you try target-shooting, or pulling a stroke oar with me, and you'll see! Schools where they teach you the Greek for bootjack ain't the best places for learning them sort of things, I reckon!"
The thunder of horses' hoofs had by this time brought another personage to the stage.
It was Erminie"sweet Erminie," the little beauty, and heiress of a princely fortune and estate.
The promise of Erminie's childhood had been more than fulfilled. Wondrously lovely she was! How could the child of Lord Ernest Villiers and Lady Maude Percy be otherwise? She had still the same snowy skin of her infancy, softly and brightly tinged with the most delicate pink on the rounded cheeks; her face was perfectly oval, and

almost transparent; her eyes were of the deepest, darkest violet hue; her long curls, that reached nearly to her waist, were like burnished gold, and the snow-white forehead and tapering limbs were perfect. In spite of the difference between them, though one was dark and impetuous, the other fair and gentle, yet there was a resemblance between Raymond and Erminie. You could see it most plainly when they smiled; it was the smile of Lady Maude that lit up both faces with that strange, nameless beauty.

"Oh, Pet! I'm so glad you've come!" she joyfully exclaimed. "Guess who's here?"

"Who? Ranty?" said Pet.

"No, indeed. Mr. Toosypegs. He heard Ray was come, and rode over this morning to see him."

"Oh, I must see Mr. Toosypegs!" exclaimed Ray, laughing, as he bounded past the two girls, and sprung into the house.

It was a neat, pleasant little sitting-room, with white-muslin blinds in the windows, that were already darkened with vines; clean, straw matting on the floor and chairs, table, and ceiling fairly glistening with cleanliness. There was a wide fireplace opposite the door, filled with fragrant pine-boughs, and sitting in a low rocking-chair of Erminie's, in the corner, was our old friend, Mr. O. C. Toosypegs, perfectly unchanged in every respect since we saw him last.

"Why, Mr. Toosypegs, how do you do? I hope you have been quite well since I saw you last!" cried the spirited voice of Ray as he grasped Mr. Toosypegs's hand and gave it a cordial shake.

"Thank you, Master Raymond, I've been quite well, I'm very much obliged to you," said Mr. Toosypegs, wriggling128 faintly in his grasp. "So is Miss Toosypegs, so is Aunt Bob, and all the rest of the familyI'm very much obliged to you."

"Dogs and all, I hope, Orlando?" said Pet, as she entered.

"Yes, Miss Pet, the dogs are quite well, I'm obliged to you. I hope you feel pretty well yourself?"

"No, I ain't, then. I'm not well at all. I've been in a state of mind all the week, and there's no telling how long it may last."

"Good gracious! you don't say so!" said the alarmed Mr. Toosypegs. "It's not anything dangerous, I hope?"

"Well, people generally think the smallpox is dangerous!" began Pet, with a sort of gloomy sternness, when she was interrupted by Mr. Toosypegs, who, seizing his hat, rushed to the door, shrieking out:

"The smallpox! Oh, my gracious! Why, Miss Pet, how could you go to come here, and give it to us all like this? Good gracious! for to think of being all full of holes like a potato-steamer!" said Mr. Toosypegs, wiping the cold perspiration off his face.

"But the smallpox ain't no circumstance to my trouble," went on Pet, as if she hadn't heard him. "I'm going to be sent to school!"

"Come back, Mr. Toosypegs; she hasn't got the smallpox," said Ray, laughing. "There is not the slightest danger, I assure you. Pet was only using an illustration that time."

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, dropping into a chair and wiping his face with his handkerchief, “if you didn’t pretty near scare the life out of me!”
“Well, you wouldn’t be the first one I’ve scared the life out of!” said Pet, swinging her riding-whip. “I’m apt to astonish people now and then!”
“I should think so,” said Ray. “Do you remember the night she coaxed you out sailing with her, Mr. Toosypegs, and upset the boat; and then added insult to injury by pulling you on shore by the hair of your head? That was an awful trick, Pet.”
“I haven’t got it out of my bones yet,” said Mr. Toosy129pegs, mournfully. “I never expected such treatment from. Miss Pet, I’m sure, and I don’t know what I had ever done to deserve it.”
“Well, don’t be mad, Orlando. I’ll never do it again,” said Pet, in a deeply-penitent tone. “But, I say, Minnie, when we are going to have breakfast? I’ve an awful appetite this morning.”
“In a moment. Hurry, Lucy,” said Erminie, as she entered the room.
“I was just up-stairs, bringing grandmother her breakfast.”
“Hem! How is the old lady?” inquired Miss Pet.
“As well as usual. She hardly ever comes down-stairs now. Do hurry, Lucy. Miss Lawless will soon be starved, if you keep on so slowly!”
“Lor’ sakes! I is hurryin’, Miss Minnie,” said Lucy, as, she bustled in, drew out a small, round table, laid the cloth, and prepared to arrange the breakfast-service. “’Spect dat ar’ little limb t’inks folks ought to git up de night afore, to have breakfast ready time ’nuff for her,” muttered Lucy to herself, looking daggers at Pet Lawless, who, swinging her riding-hat in one hand and her whip in the other, watched Lucy’s motions with a critical eye. Erminie, with her sunny face and ready hands, assisted in the arrangements; and soon the whole party were assembled round the table, doing ample justice to Lucy’s morning meal.
And while they were thus engaged, I shall claim your patience for a moment, dear reader, while we cast a brief retrospective glance over the various changes that have occurred during those ten years.
By the kind care of good-natured Mr. Toosypegs, and his friend, Admiral Havenful, the gipsy Ketura had been amply provided for. As Raymond and Erminie grew up, they had been sent to Judestown to school, with the children of Judge Lawless, whose daughter, Miss Pet, has already been introduced to the reader. The dark, gloomy recluse, Ketura, was an object of dread and dislike to the neighborhood around. She shunned and avoided them, lived her own inward life independent of them all, and was therefore hated by them. And when, about a year previous to the present, time, she received a severe paralytic stroke, from the effects130 of which she never fully recovered, very little sorrow was felt or expressed. Sweet, gentle little Erminie was, however, a favorite with all, and so was the bold, bright, high-spirited Raymond, to whom the somewhat eccentric old Admiral Havenful took such a fancy that he insisted on sending him to college with his nephew, Ranty, or Randolph Lawless. To college, therefore, the boys

went; and Erminie remained at the Barrens, and went every fine day to Judestown to the district school, sometimes, but very rarely, accompanied by Pet Lawless; for that wild young lady voted schools and school-teachers and "Committee men," unmitigated bores, all, and preferred her own "sweet will" and her pony Starlight to suffering through "reading, writin' and refmetic." In vain her father, the judge, stormed and threatened her with all sorts of calamities. Pet, metaphysically speaking, snapped her finger in the face of all authority; and the more they wanted her to go, the more she wouldn't, though she did offer to do her best to learn if they would let her go with Ray and Ranty. But gaiters were things forbidden inside the college gates; and besides Ranty very ungallantly protested that all girls in general, and "our Pet" in particular, were nothing but "pests," and that he wouldn't have her near him at any price. Master Ranty Lawless did not like the female persuasion, and once gruffly announced that his idea of heaven was, a place where boys could do as they liked, and where there were no girls. So as Pet had no mother to look after her, and queened it over the servants at home, she grew up pretty much as she liked, and was noted far and near as the wildest, maddest, skip-over-the-moon madcap that ever threw a peaceable community into convulsions.

This much being premised, it is only necessary to say that Ray and Ranty had returned from college for a few months' vacation, the day previous to the commencement of this chapter, and then go on with our story.

"When is Miss Priscilla coming over, Mr. Toosypegs?" asked Erminie, as she filled for the third time his cup with fragrant, golden coffee.

"'Morrer evening," replied Mr. Toosypegs, speaking with his mouth full; "she's going to bring you a parcel of muslin things to work for her."

"The collar and cape she was speaking of, I guess," said Erminie, with her pleasant smile.

"How in the world, Ermie," exclaimed Pet, "do you find time to work for everybody? I never saw you a moment idle yet."

"Well, it is pleasanter to be doing something," said Erminie; "and besides, Miss Priscilla can't do fine sewing, her eyes are so weak, you know. I can't bear to sit still and do nothing; I like to sew, or read, or something."

"Ugh! sewing is the most horrid thing," said Pet, with a shrug; "I don't mind reading a pretty story to pass time now and then; but to sit down and go stitchstitchstitching, for hours steadywell, I know I'd soon be in a strait-jacket if I tried it, that's all! I was reading a real nice book the other night."

"What was it?" asked Ray. "I should like to see the book you would like to read."

"Well, there ain't many I like, but, oh! this one was ever so nice. It was all about a hateful old Jew who lent money to a man that wanted to go somewhere a-courting; and then this Jew wanted to cut off a pound of his flesh, to eat, I expectthe nasty old cannibal! And then this lady, I forget her name, came and dressed herself up in man's clothes, and got himthe fellow who went courting, you knowoff somewheres. Oh, it was splendid! I'll lend you the book, sometime, Minnie."

“Why, it must have been the ‘Merchant of Venice’ you read,” said Ray, “though such a jumbled up account of it as that, I never heard. I’ll go over for the book to-morrow and read it to Min, if she cares about hearing it.”

Before Erminie could reply, a surprised ejaculation from Pet made her turn quickly round. Ray’s eyes wandered in the same direction, while Mr. Toosypegs sprung from his seat in terror; thereby badly scalding himself with the hot coffee, at the sight which met his astonished eyes.

CHAPTER XVI

MASTER RANTY

"A rare compound of oddity, frolic and fun."
Goldsmith.

A little, old, decrepit woman, bent double with age, leaning on a staff, and shaking with palsy, stood as suddenly before them as if she had sprung up through the earth. Her dress was the most astonishing complication of rags that ever hung together on a human back before. A long old-fashioned cloak that, a hundred years before, had probably been all the rage, swept behind her; and as it trailed along, seemed in imminent danger of throwing the unfortunate old lady over her own head, every minute. A brown, sunburned face, half hidden in masses of coarse, gray hairs, peered wildly out; and from under a pair of bushy, overhanging, gray eyebrows, gleamed two keen, needle-like eyes, as sharp as two-edged stilettos. This singular individual wore a man's old beaver hat on her head, which was forcibly retained on that palsy-shaking member by a scarlet bandanna handkerchief passed over the crown, and tied under the chin.

Altogether, the little, stooping, unearthly-looking crone was one of the most singular sights that mortal eyes ever beheld.

So completely amazed were the whole assembly that for some five minutes they stood staring in silent wonder at this unexpected and most startling apparition. The little old woman, steadying herself with some difficulty on her cane, shaded her eyes with one hand, and peered at them with her sharp eyes.

"Don't be afeard, pretty ladies and gentlemen," said the little old lady, in a shrill, sharp falsetto. "I won't hurt none o' you, ef you behave yourselves. I guess I may come in?"

And suiting the action to the word, the little owner of th133e extraordinary head-dress hobbled in, and composedly dumped herself down into the rocking-chair Mr. Toosypegs had lately vacated.

"Now, what in the name of Hecate and all the witches, does this mean?" exclaimed Pet, first recovering her presence of mind.

"It means that I'll take some breakfas', if you'll bring it down, Miss," said the little old woman, laying her formidable-looking stick across her lap; and favoring the company, one and all, with a prolonged stare from her keen bright eyes.

"Well, now, that's what I call cool," said Pet, completely taken aback by the old woman's sang froid. "Perhaps your ladyship will be condescending enough to sit over here and help yourself?"

"No thankee," squeaked her ladyship. "I'd rather have it here, if it's all the same to you. I ain't as smart as I used to was; and don't like to be getting up much. Perhaps t'other young gal wouldn't mind bringing it here," she added, looking at the astonished Erminie.

Roused out of her trance of astonishment, not unmingled with terror, by claims of hospitality, Erminie hastened to comply; and placing a cup of fragrant coffee and some buttered waffles on a light waiter, placed it on a chair within the old woman's reach.

That small individual immediately fell to, with an alacrity quite astonishing, considering her size and age; and coffee and waffles in a remarkably short space of time were "among the things that were, but are no longer."
"Thankee, young 'oman, that was very nice," said the old woman, drawing out a flaming yellow cotton pocket-handkerchief, and wiping her mouth, as a sign she had finished; "my appetite ain't so good as it used to be; I reckon that'll do for the present. What's your dinner hour, young gals?"
"Little after midnight," said Pet.
"Humph! I reckon you're trying to poke fun at me, Miss Pet Lawless; but no good ever comes of telling lies. Have ye ever heard tell on Ananias and Sapphira?" asked the old woman, turning sharply on Pet.
"Whew! ghosts, and goblins, and warlocks! She knows my name!" whistled Pet, in unbounded astonishment.
"Yes; I know more about you than I want to know," said the little old woman, with a scowl.
"Well, you ain't the only one in that plight, if that's any consolation," said Pet, carelessly.
"Do you know who I am, too?" said Ray.
"Yes, I've heern tell on you," said the old woman, shortly.
"And no good either, I'll be bound!" said Pet.
"Well, no; sence you say it I never did hear any good of him," said the old woman, taking out a huge snuff-box, and composedly helping herself to a pinch.
"What did you hear about me, mother?" said Ray, laughing, as he shook his curly black locks.
"Well, I heard you was a noisy, disagreeable, fightin' character; allus a-kickin' up a row with somebody, and forever a-tormentin' of that nice young gentleman, Master Ranty Lawless, who is a brother of that little yeller gal over there, and worth a dozen like her!" said the little old woman, with asperity.
"Well, upon my word, if that ain't polite, not to say complimentary," said Pet, drawing a long breath. "'Little yeller gal!' Good gracious!"
"Well, you ain't white, you know," said the old womanwho, whatever her other infirmities might be, was certainly not deaf. "You're rayther of the tawniest, as everybody what's got eyes can see for themselves. It's a pity you ain't good-looking, like your brother Ranty; I don't think I ever saw a prettier young man nor he is, in my life."
"Why, you hateful old thing!" burst out Pet, indignantly; losing all her customary respect for old age in these unflattering remarks. "I ain't tawny; and I am prettyI just am! and I'm not going to believe anybody that says anything else. If you and everybody else think

I'm ugly, it's all your bad taste! Ranty prettier than me! Likely story!" said Pet, between contempt and indignation.
"Well, look what a nice white skin he has!" said the old woman, with whom Master Ranty appeared to be an immense favorite.
"White skin! bleached saffron, more like!" exclaimed Pet; "if our Ranty's good-looking, I guess he keeps his beauty in his pocket; for nobody but you ever discovered it. Humph! 'Little yeller gal!' I vow, it's enough to pro135voke a saint!" exclaimed Pet, in a higher key, at the remembrance of this insult.
"May we ask the name of the lady who has favored us with her company this morning?" said Ray, at this point, bowing to the old woman with most ceremonious politeness.
"Yes, you may, young man," said the old lady, with a sharp asperity that seemed rather uncalled for; "it's a name I ain't never ashamed of, and that's more'n some folks can say. I'm Goody Two-Shoes; and if you don't like it you may lump it." And the shrill falsetto rose an octave higher, as she gave the snuff-box a furious tap on the lid.
"A mighty pretty name," remarked Pet.
"And we like it, exceedingly," said Ray; "though, if we didn't, what awful meaning lies hidden under the mysterious phrase of 'lumping it'? I confess, it passes my comprehension. Perhaps, my dear madam, you would be good enough to translate it from the original Greek, to which language I should judge it belongs, and let us know its import in the vulgar tongue, commonly called plain English."
"Young man!" exclaimed the beldame, facing sharply round, "I dare say you think it mighty amusing to keep poking fun at mewhich shows all the broughten up ever you had, to go showing no respect to people what's in their old ages of life. But if you think sich onchristian conduct"here the sharp voice rose to the shrillest possible treble"will go onpunished on this airth, or in the airth to come, you're very much deceived, young man: let me tell you that! I have power, though you mayn't think so, and could turn you into a cracked jug, or a mustard-pot, just as easy as not."
"I wish to mercy you would, then, old Goody Two-Shoes! Lor'! what a showy appearance you'd make, Ray, as a mustard-pot!" said Pet, bursting into a fit of laughter.
"Why, my dear madam, I hadn't the slightest idea of 'poking fun' at you, as you elegantly expressed it," said Ray, looking deeply persecuted and patient; "and as to being turned into a cracked jug, or a mustard-pot, I think would rather retain my present shape if it's all the same to you."
"Take care, then, how you rouse my wrath," said the old woman, with a scowl, which was unfortunately lost in a succession of short, sharp sneezes, as her pinch of snuff went136 the wrong way. "I'm a patient woman; but I can't stand everything. I'm used to be treated with respect. Where I came from, no such conduct was ever heerd tell on."
"It's a warm climate thereain't it?" insinuated Pet, meekly.
"Humph! there's some inference in that, if a body only could make it out," grunted the old woman; "anyways, I was always treated with respect there, young 'oman; which I'd advise you to remember, for you need it."

“Now, who would think the little demons would treat the old one with respect?” said Pet, musingly, but in an exceedingly audible tone. “I never knew they were so polite down there, before.”
“Young woman,” began Goody, with kindling eyes, when Pet interrupted her impatiently with:
“Look here, now! old Goody Two-Shoes, I ain’t a young woman, and I never intend to be; and I’d thank you not to keep calling me out of my name. I’m Miss Petronilla Lawless, and if it’s not too much trouble, I’d feel grateful to you if you’d call me so. There!”
“Good gracious! Miss Pet, take care!” whispered Mr. Toosypegs, who, gray with terror, had been all this time crouching out of sight, in a corner; “it’s real dangerous to rouse her; she might bring the roof down about our heads, and kill us all, if you angered her.”
“Who is that young man?” said the old woman, in an appalling voice, as she slowly raised her finger, and pointed it, like a pistol, at the trembling head of Mr. O. C. Toosypegs.
“III’m Orlando C. Toosypegs, II’m very much obliged to you,” stammered Mr. Toosypegs, dodging behind Pet, in evident alarm.
“Young man, come over here,” solemnly said the beldame, keeping her long finger pointed, as if about to take aim, and never removing her chain-lightning eyes from the pallid physiognomy of the unhappy Mr. Toosypegs.
“Go, Horlander,” said Pet, giving him an encouraging push. “Bear it like a man; which means, hold up your head, and take your finger out of your mouth, like a good boy. I’ll stick to you to the last.”
With chattering teeth, trembling limbs, bristling hair, and terror-stricken face, Mr Toosypegs found himself standing137 before the ancient sibyl, by dint of a series of pushes from the encouraging hand of Pet.
“Young man, wouldst thou know the future?” began the old woman, in a deep, stern, impressive voice.
“IIII’m very much obliged to you, Mrs. Two-Shoes,” replied poor Mr. Toosypegs. “It’s real kind of you, I’m sure, and”
“Vain mortal, spare thy superfluous thanks,” interrupted the mysterious one, with a wave of her hand, “Dark and terrific is the doom Fate has in store for theea doom so dreadful that dogs will cease to bark, the stars in the firmament hold their breath, and even the poultry in the barnyard turn pale to hear it. Woe to thee, unhappy man! Better for thee somebody else had a millstone tied round his neck, and were plunged into the middle of a frog-pond, than that thou shouldst live to see that day.”
“Good gracious!” ejaculated the horror-stricken Mr. Toosypegs, wiping the cold drops of perspiration off his face, as the sibyl flourished her snuff-box in the air, as if invoking kindred spirits to come to her aid.
“Sublime peroration!” exclaimed Ray, laughing inwardly.

“Live to see what day?” inquired Pet, whose curiosity was aroused. “The day he gets married, maybe.”
“Awful will be the results that will follow that day,” went on the seeress, scowling darkly at the irreverent Pet. “Tremendous clouds will flash vividly through the sky, the blinding thunder will show itself in all the colors of a dying dolphin, and a severe rain-storm will probably be the result. On thyself, oh, unhappiest of mortals, terrific will be the effects it will produce! These beautiful snuff-colored freckles will shake to their very center; these magnificent whiskers, which, I perceive, in two or three places show symptoms of sprouting, will wither away in dread, like the grass which perisheth. This courageous form, brave as a lion, which has never yet quailed before man or ghost, will be rent in twain like a mountain in a gale of wind; and an attack of influenza in your great toe will mercifully put an end to all your earthly agonies and troubles at once! Unhappy mortal, go! Thou hast heard thy doom.”
A more wretched and woebegone face than Mr. Toosypegs displayed, as he turned round, no earthly eye ever fell on138 before. Ray had turned to the window in convulsions of laughter.
“I ain’t well,” said Mr. Toosypegs, mournfully, as he took up his hat. “I’ve got a pain somewhere, and I guess I’ll go home. Good-morning, Mrs. Two-Shoes. I’m very much obliged to you, I’m sure.”
And slowly and dejectedly Mr. Toosypegs crushed his hat over his eyes, and turned his steps in the direction of Dismal Hollow.
“Poor Horlander!” said Pet; “if he isn’t scared out of his wits, if he ever had any. Say, Goody, won’t you tell my fortune, too?”
“Come hither, scoffer,” said the sibyl, with solemn sternness. “Appear, and learn the dark doom Destiny has in store for thee. Fate, that rules the fortunes of men as well as little yaller gals, will make you laugh on ’tother side of your mouth, one of these days.”
“Oh, Hamlet! what a falling off was there!” quoted Ray, laughing. “What a short jump that was from the sublime! Don’t pile on the agony too high, Mother Awful.”
“Peace, irreverent mortal!” said Goody Two-Shoes giving her snuff-box a solemn wave; “peace, while I foretell the future fate of this tawny little mortal before me!”
“Well, if you ain’t the politest old lady!” ejaculated Pet. “But go on; I don’t mind being called ugly, now. I’m getting used to it, and rather like it.”
“You’ll never be drowned,” began the sibyl, looking down prophetically in Pet’s little dark palm.
“Well, that’s pleasant, anyway,” said Pet.
“Because you were born to be hanged,” went on the old woman, unheeding the interruption.
“Whew!” whistled Pet.
“Your days are numbered”
“Well, I never saw a number on one of ’em yet,” interrupted the incorrigible Petronilla.

“Peace, scoffer!” exclaimed the beldame, fiercely. “The fates disclose a speedy change in thy destiny.”
“I expect they do,” said Pet; “for I’m going to be sent to school soon.”
“Some dark torture is in store for you, an agony that nothing can alleviate, a nameless secret misery”
“Perhaps it’s the colic,” suggested Pet “If it is, I ain’t afraid; ’cause gin and water will cure it.”
“Silence, girl! and mock not destiny thus. At some future day, you will be a wife.”
“Well there ain’t anything very wonderful in that, I’m sure; I didn’t need to be told that. You didn’t expect I’d be an old maiddid you?” said Pet.
“I behold here,” continued the seeress, peering into the little palm quite heedless of the interruption, “a miserable little hut, where thirteen red-haired children are playing, and a tawny woman, with a dirty face, in the midst of them, is”
“Spanking them all round!” interrupted Pet, eagerly. “If she isn’t, it ain’t me.”
“Will you be silent?” vociferated the ancient prophetess, with increasing sharpness. “Terrible is the doom of those who scoff at fortune as thou dost! Don’t withdraw your hand. It is here plainly revealed that if you travel much you’ll see a good deal.”
“Go ’way!” ejaculated Pet, incredulously.
“And if you have a great deal of money you’ll be rich.”
“It ain’t possible!” once more broke in the unbelieving Miss Lawless.
“And if you don’t die, you’ll live to be pretty old.”
“Now, who’d ’a’ thought it,” said Pet.
“Leave me, wretched unbeliever!” said the old woman, flinging away Pet’s hand, with angry disdain. “Leave me; but beware! I am not to be mocked with impunity.”
“Neither am I,” said Pet; “so I’m not going to believe a word about them thirteen red-headed children. A baker’s dozen, too; as if twelve wasn’t enough! Poh! I ain’t such a goose, Goody Two-Shoes.”
“Well, wait, you misdirected, sunburned, unfortunate, turned-up-nosed misbeliever!” exclaimed the old virago, shaking her fist at Pet, in a rage. “Wait! And when my words come true, remember they were foretold by Goody Two-shoes.”
“Well, I declare!” said Pet. “If I wasn’t the patientest, best-tempered little girl in Maryland, I wouldn’t put up with all this abuse. Not even my nose is allowed to escape; and it never injured you or anybody else in its life.”
And Pet, with a deeply-wounded look, ran her finger along the insulted proboscis, as if to soothe its injured feelings.
“Will you tell my fortune, Mother Two-Shoes?” said Ray, turning round. “I am particularly anxious to know the future.”
“Well, you needn’t be, then,” said Goody, snappishly; “for it has nothing good in store for a miserable scapegoat like you. I won’t tell it; but I will tell that little gal’s,” pointing to Erminie, who all the time had been quietly looking on, not knowing whether to laugh

or be afraid, and wholly puzzled by it all. “She gave me some breakfast; and ‘one good turn deserves another,’ as the Bible says. Give me your hand.”
Afraid of offending the old lady, Erminie held it out.
“You’ll be rather a nice-looking young woman, if you don’t grow up ugly,” began the seeress, looking intently at the little white palm that lay in hers like a lily-leaf; “and will have some sense, if not more, unless you get beside yourself, as most young gals nowadays mostly do. It’s likely you’ll be married to somebody, some time; very likely the first letter of his name will be Ranty Lawless, who, by that time, will be one of the nicest young men you or anybody else will ever see. If he makes you his wifewhich is a blessing you ought to pray for every daydon’t forget to learn to make slap-jacks and Johnny-cake, two things that good youth is very fond of, as I am given to understand. As he will probably be away up there among the big-wigs in Congress every day, don’t forget to give him your blessing, and a paper of sandwiches every morning before he starts; and meet him at night, when he returns, with a smile on your lip, and a cup of tea in your hand. By following these directions, an unclouded future will be yours, and you will probably be translated, at last, in a cloud of fire and brimstone, and your virtues inscribed on a pewter-plate, as an example for all future generations.”
“What an enviable fate, Erminie!” exclaimed Ray.
“Seems to me, old lady, our Ranty’s a great bother to you,” said Pet, suspiciously, as she fixed her bright, searching eyes keenly on her face.
“I always take an interest in nice youths,” said the old woman, rising and grasping her stick, preparatory to starting. “I guess I won’t mind staying for dinner. I’ll call some, other day, thankee.”
“Not so fast, Goody Two-Shoes,” exclaimed Ray, coolly, catching the old woman by the collar. “I’ve discovered you at last. ‘Off, ye lendings.’”
And to the horror of Erminie, he grasped the cloak and tore it off, in spite of the vigorous struggles of the beldame. Then followed the hat, and red handkerchief, and the venerable gray locks; and Erminie stifled a scream as she fancied head and all was coming. The bushy gray eyebrows came off, too, and the bright, handsome, mischievous face of Master Ranty Lawless stood revealed.

CHAPTER XVII

OUR ERMINIE

"A lovely being scarcely formed or molded
A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded."
Byron.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Pet.

"Why, it's Ranty!" said the surprised Erminie.

"Yes," said Ranty, giving his hat so well-aimed a kick that it struck the cat, and hurled that unfortunate quadruped over on her back, "and this is a nice way to treat a 'lone woman,' as Miss Priscilla saysain't it? Going and tearing the clothes off her back, without any regard for decency, or the slightest veneration for gray hairs. By the way, I must take care of that wig. It belongs to Uncle Harry, and I stole it last night when he was in bed. What do you think of my'get-up,' Ray? I laid on the brown and black unsparingly."

"Well, your complexion would be improved by having your face washed," replied Ray. "However, it's very creditable, and shows how usefully you can employ your time when you like. Where, in the name of all the witches that were ever ducked, did you get all this trumpery?"

"Trumpery! Just listen to that, now," said Ranty, appealing to society in general. "Calling this hat, and cloak, and the rest of my drapery, trumpery. Well, most irreverent youth, I got it up in the garret among a lot of lumber and stuff, and I coaxed one of the housemaids to dress me. I flatter myself I made a showy appearance when I enteredeh? Poor Orlando Toosypegs! Unhook this confounded frock, Pet."

"Well, now, to think I never knew you," said Pet, as she obeyed. "I thought it might be a trick, but I never suspected such a stupid thing as you could have done it."

"That's the way! Merit never is appreciated in this world," said Ranty, as he stepped out of his rather dilapidated garment. "I expect nobody will find out what a genius I am until it is too late. Darn the thing! I can't get it off at all."

"Patience, Ranty! patience, and smoke your pipe," said Ray, as he assisted him off with his dress, and Ranty stepped out in his proper costume, and stood there, tall, human, handsome, and as different from the old witch of a few moments before as it was possible to be.

"Oh, Ranty! what a trick!" said Erminie, laughing. "It was a shame to frighten poor Mr. Toosypegs, though."

"He won't get much sympathy from Miss Priscilla, I guess," said Ranty. "I do think he believed every word of it."

"To be sure he did," said Ray; "and such an expression of utter wretchedness as his face wore when he went out, I never want to see again. It will be as good as a play to see him when he goes home, and tells Miss Priscilla."

“I’m going there to spend the day,” said Pet. “Miss Priscilla can’t bear me, so I go there as often as I can. I’ll be able to tell you all about it when I come back.”
“You had better not,” said Ray. “There are two or three runaway niggers in the woods, and it’s dangerous for you to go alone.”
“Now, you might have known that would just make that intensely-disagreeable girl go,” said Ranty, rocking himself backward and forward in Erminie’s chair. “Tell her there’s danger anywhere, and there she’ll be sure to fly. The other day, some one told her the typhus fever was down at the quarters, and nothing would serve her but she must instantly make her appearance there, to see what it was like. Luckily, it turned out to be something else; but if it had been the fever, Nilla would have been a case by this timeand serve her right, too. It’s very distressing to a quiet, peaceable143 individual like myself,” said Master Ranty, pensively, leaning his head on his hand with a deep sigh. “But there’s no use in me exhorting her, she don’t mind in the least. I’ve talked to her like a father; I’ve preached to her on the evil of her ways till all was blue, I’ve lectured her time and again, like a pocket-edition of Chrysostom, and look at the result! I don’t expect to live out half my days ’long of that ’ere little limb, as our Dell says.”
And Master Ranty sighed deeply over the degeneracy of the human race in general, and Nilla in particular.
“Spoken like an oracle,” cried Ray; “but though Nilla won’t take your advice, as a general thing, I hope she’ll take mine.”
“No, I won’t!” was Miss Petronilla’s short, sharp and decisive reply. “I won’t take you nor your advice, neither! I’m just going to Dismal Hollow, and I’d like to see who’ll stop me!”
“Why, the half-starved niggers will,” said Ranty; “and, what’s more, they’ll swallow you, body and bones, and without salt, too, which will be adding insult to injury. They’ll find you sharp and arid enough, though, if that’s any consolation.”
“Indeed, Pet, I wouldn’t go if I were you,” said Erminie, anxiously.
“Well, you ain’t me; so you needn’t,” said Pet. “But I’m going; and you may all talk till you are black in the face, and then I won’t stop.”
And the wilful elf put on her hat, and took her whip and gloves, and looked defiantly at the assembled trio.
“Very well; when you’ve departed this life and gone to the place all disagreeable little girls go to, don’t say I didn’t warn you of your danger,” said Ranty. “We’ll put up a monument to your memory, with the inscription:
‘Sacred to the Memory
Of that sunburned, self-willed female Nimrod,
Petronilla Lawless,
Who ought to lie here, but she doesn’t.
For, having lied all the time she afflicted this earth,
Now that she has departed to a worser land,
She lies in the stomach of a great big nigger,
Who swallowed her at a mouthful one night.

Of such is the Kingdom of Maryland.'"
"You had better let me go with you," said Ray.
"No; you sha'n't," said Pet, whose wilful nature was now thoroughly aroused by opposition, and who fancied, if she accepted this offer, they might think it was cowardice; "I'll go myself. You ride with me, indeed! Why, I'd leave you out of sight in ten minutes."
Ray's dark cheek flushed, and he turned angrily away.
"Well, be sure to come home before darkwon't you, Pet?" said Erminie, following the capricious fairy to the door.
"No, I sha'n't leave Dismal Hollow till nine o'clock," said Pet, looking back defiantly at the boys. "I'm just going to show them that if two great boys, like they are, are afraid, little Pet Lawless ain't. I'll ride through the woods after dark, in spite of all the runaway niggers this side of Baltimore."
"All right," said Ranty, "I'd rather they'd eat you, though, than me; for you're like the Starved Apothecaryall skin and bones. They'll have hard crunching of it, I'll be bound! Luckily, though, darkeys have good teeth!"
"Oh, Pet! what will you do, if the niggers should see you?" said Erminie, clasping her hands.
Pet touched her pistols significantly.
"Two years ago, Ranty taught me to shoot, you little pinch of cotton-wool! and I haven't forgotten the way for want of practice since, I can tell you. I can see by the light of a nigger's eye, in the dark, how to take aim as well as any one."
"You shoot!" said Ranty, contemptuously. "You're nothing but a little boaster and a coward at that; all boasters are. You'd fall into fits at the first glimpse of a woolly head."
"I wouldn't! and I ain't a coward!" cried Pet, stamping her foot passionately, while her fierce black eyes seemed fairly to scintillate sparks of fire. "I hate you, Ranty Lawless, and I'll just do as I like, in spite of you all!" And flushed with passion, Pet fled out, sprung on her fleet Arabian, as wild and fiery as herself, and striking him fiercely with her whip, he bounded away as if mad. Two minutes after and the black, fiery horse and little, dark, fiery rider were both out of sight.
And looking deeply troubled and anxious, gentle little Erminie returned to the house.
"Whew! what a little tempest! what a tornado! what a bombshell she is! Now, who in the world but her would fire up in that way for a trifle? This getting up steam for nothing is all a humbug! Girls always are a humbug, though, anyway," said the polite and gallant Mr. Lawless. "Luckily there's one sensible individual in the family."
"Yourself, I suppose," said Erminie, as she proceeded to set the room to rights, like the neat little housewife that she was.
"Yes," said Ranty; "all the good sense and good looks, too, of the family have fallen to my share, except what uncle Harry Havenful has got."
"You seem to have a great idea of your own beauty," said Ray, turning from the window, where he had stood to hide his mortification, ever since his rebuff from Pet.

“To be sure I have,” said Master Ranty, stretching out his legs, and glancing complacently in the mirror. “Nobody can see my perfections but myself; so I lose no chance of impressing them on the minds of the community in general. But I say, Ray, come out, down to the trout streams. I’ve got a plan in my head that promises good fun, which I’ll tell you while we’re catching something for Minnie’s dinner-table.”

“All right,” said Ray, as he turned and went out with him, little dreaming how dearly he was destined to pay for Ranty’s “fun.”

“Now, I know they’re going to torment somebody, and it’s such a shame,” said Erminie to herself, as she took the pocket-handkerchief she was hemming, and sat down by the window. “I guess it’s the admiral; Ranty’s always plaguing him when he’s at home, and it’s too bad; ’cause the admiral’s the nicest old man ever was. My! I hope the niggers won’t catch Pet,” she added, half-aloud, as her thoughts strayed to that self-willed young lady.

A shadow fell suddenly across the sunshine streaming through the open door; and looking up, Erminie saw, to her great surprise, the tall, lank figure, and pallid freckles of Mr. O. C. Toosypegs.

“Why, Mr. Toosypegs, I thought you had gone,” she said, in wonder.

“No, Miss Minnie, I ain’t gone, I’m very much obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs, mournfully, seating himself. “I didn’t like to go home; for when Miss Prisciller ain’t well, she ain’t always as pleasant as she might be, you know. She means real well, I’m sure; but then it’s distressing sometimes to be always scolded. I ain’t got long to live, either, you know,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with increasing mournfulness; “and there is no use in me suffering more than is necessaryis there, Miss Minnie? I always thought I was to have troubles, but I never knew before they were to be so dreadful. I intend going to Judestown right after dinner, and having my will made out in case anything mightwell, might happen, you know. I’m going to leave half to Aunt Prisciller, and t’other half to your grandmother. She’s been real good to me, and I’m very much obliged to her, I’m sure,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with emotion.

“Why, Mr. Toosypegs, you ain’t weeping about what that old woman told youare you?” said Minnie, looking up with her soft, tender, pitying eyes, as Mr. Toosypegs wiped his eyes and blew his nose, with a look of deepest affliction. “Why, it was only Ranty dressed up.”

“Ranty!” said Mr. Toosypegs, springing to his feet.

“Yes: Ranty Lawless, you know, dressed up in old clothes. He is always doing things like that, to make people laugh. It wasn’t any old woman at allonly him.”

Mr. Toosypegs took off his hat, which, all this time, had been on his head; looking helplessly into it, and, finding no solution of the mystery there, clapped it on again, sat down, and placing both hands on his knees, faced round, and looked Erminie straight in the face.

“Miss Minnie, if it isn’t too much trouble, would you say that over again?” inquired Mr. Toosypegs, blandly.

“Why, it isn’t anything to say, Mr. Toosypegs,” said Minnie, laughing merrily; “only Ranty, you know, wanted to make us think him an old witch, and dressed himself up that way, and made believe to tell your fortune. You needn’t be scared about it, at all.”
“Well, I’m sure!” ejaculated Mr. Toosypegs. “You really can’t think what a relief it is to my feelings to hear147 that. Somehow, my feelings are always relieved when I’m with you, Miss Minnie. Young Mr. Lawless means real well, I’m sure, but then it kind of frightens a fellow a little. I felt, Miss Minnie,” said Mr. Toosypegs, placing his hand on his left vest-pocket, “a sort of feeling that kept going in and out here, likelikeanything. I felt as if I was headed up in a hogshead, all full of spikes, with the points inward, and then being rolled downhill. You’ve often felt that way, I dare say, Miss Minnie?”
Minnie, a little alarmed at this terrible description, said she didn’t know.
“Well, I feel better now. I’m very much obliged to you,” said Mr. Toosypegs, drawing a deep breath of intense relief; “and I guess I won’t mind my will this afternoon; though I sha’n’t forget Mrs. Ketura when I’m going, if she should happen to survive me. How does she feel to-day, Miss Minnie? Excuse me for not asking before; but, really, I’ve been in such a state of mind all the morning, that I actually couldn’t tell which end I was standing on, if I may be allowed so strong a figure of speech.”
“Grandmother’s as well as she always is,” replied Minnie. “She is able to sit up, but she can’t walk, or come downstairs. She won’t let me sit with her either, and always says she wants to be alone.”
“I expect her son preys on her mind a good deal,” said Mr. Toosypegs, reflectively.
“He was drowned,” said Erminie, in a low tone.
“Yes, I know; she was real vexed with Lord De Courcy about it, too. I dare say you have heard her talk of him.”
“Yes,” said Erminie, with a slight shudder; “I have heard her tell Ray how he must hate him and all his family, and do them all the harm he could. I don’t like to hear such things. They don’t seem right. I heard Father Murray saying, last Sunday, in church, we must forgive our enemies, or we won’t be forgiven ourselves. I always used to come away, at first, when grandmother would begin to talk about hating them and being revenged; but her eyes used to blaze up like, and she would seem so angry about it, that afterward I stayed. I don’t like to hear it though, and I always try not to listen, but to think of something else all the time.”
“I suppose young Germaine don’t mind,” observed Mr. Toosypegs.
“No. Ray gets fierce, and looks so dark and dreadful that I feel afraid of him then,” said Erminie, sadly. “He always says, when he is a man he will go to England and do dreadful things to them all, because they killed his father. I don’t think they killed him; do you, Mr. Toosypegs? They couldn’t help his being drowned, I think.”
“Well, you know, Miss Minnie,” said Mr. Toosypegs, with the air of a man entering upon an abstruse subject, “if they hadn’t made him go on board that ship, and he hadn’t took anything else, and died, he would have been living yet. He didn’t care about going, but they insisted, so he went, and the ship struck ano, it wasn’t a mermaidthe ship struck a

coral reefyes, that was it. The ship struck that and all hands were lost. Now, where the fault was, I can't say, but it was somewhere, Miss Minnie! That's a clear case."
And Mr. Toosypegs leaned back in his chair with the complacent smile of a man who has explained the whole matter, to the satisfaction of the very dullest intellect.
Little Minnie looked puzzled and wistful for a moment, as if, notwithstanding all he had said, the affair was not much clearer; but she said nothing.
"You're his daughterain't you, Miss Minnie?" said Mr. Toosypegs, briskly, after a short pause.
"Whose, Mr. Toosypegs?" asked Minnie.
"Why, him, you know: him that was drowned."
"No, I guess not," said Erminie, thoughtfully; "Ray called me his little sister, one day, before grandmother, and she told him to hush, that I wasn't his sister. I guess I'm his cousin, or something; but I don't think I'm his sister."
"Your father and mother are dead, I reckon," said Mr. Toosypegs.
"Yes, I suppose so; but I dare say you'll laugh, Mr. Toosypegs, but it never seems so. I dream sometimes of the strangest things." And Erminie's soft violet eyes grew misty and dreamy as she spoke, as though gazing on something afar off.
"Good gracious! what do you dream, Miss Minnie? I'm149 sure I haven't the least notion of laughing at all. I feel as serious as anything," said Mr. Toosypegs, in all sincerity.
But Erminie, child as she was, shrunk from telling any one of the sweet, beautiful face of the lady who came to her so often in her dreams; and so, blushing slightly, she bent over her work in silence.
"Doesn't young Germaine know who your father and mother were?" asked Mr. Toosypegs, after a while, seeing Erminie was not going to tell him about her dreams.
"No, Ray doesn't know, either. Grandmother won't tell, but he thinks I'm his cousin; I guess I am, too," said Erminie, adopting the belief with the careless confidence of childhood.
"Well, you were born in England, anyway," said Mr. Toosypegs, "for you were only a little baby, the size of that, when you left it," holding his hand about an inch and a half above the floor. "Most likely you're a gipsy, thoughshe's a gipsy, you know," added Mr. Toosypegs, in a mysterious whisper, pointing to the ceiling.
"Yes, I know," said Erminie, with an intelligent nod; "I heard her tell Ray so; she used to tell him a good many things, but she never tells me anything. I guess she thinks I don't love her, but I do. Did you ever see that Lord De Courcy?"
"No; but I saw his son, Lord Villiers, and his wife, Lady Maude. My gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Toosypegs, with an unexpected outburst of enthusiasm, "she was the handsomest woman in the world! I can't begin to tell you how good-looking she was! If all the handsome women ever you saw were melted into one, they wouldn't be near so good-looking as Lady Maude!"
"How I should like to see her!" said little Erminie, laying down her work with a wistful sigh. "Tell me about her, Mr. Toosypegs."

“Well, she had long black curls, not like Miss Pet’s, you know, but long and soft; and the most splendid black eyesgo right straight through a fellow, easy! She was pale and sweet; I always used to think of white cream-candy whenever I saw her, Miss Minnie; and then her smile, it was just like an angel’snot that I ever saw an angel, Miss150 Minnie,” said Mr. Toosypegs, qualifying his admission, reluctantly, “but they must have looked like her.”

Erminie had listened to this description with clasped hands, flushed cheeks, parted lips and dilating eyes. As Mr. Toosypegs paused, she impetuously exclaimed:

“Oh, Mr. Toosypegs, I’ve seen her! I’ve seen her often!”

“Good gracious!” said the astonished Mr. Toosypegs, “I can’t see where; I guess you only think so, Miss Minnie.”

“Oh, no, I don’t; indeed I don’t; I know I have seen her. That lovely lady with the beautiful smile, and soft black eyes. Oh, I know; I’ve seen her, Mr. Toosypegs.”

“Land of hope! where, Miss Minnie?”

But Minnie had recovered from her sudden joy and surprise at hearing of the resemblance between this beautiful lady and the lovely vision of her dreams, and pausing now, she blushed, and said:

“Please don’t ask me, Mr. Toosypegs; you would think me silly, I guess. I must go and help Lucy to get dinner now. You’ll stay for dinnerwon’t you, Mr. Toosypegs?”

“Thank you, Miss Minnie,” said the gratified Mr. Toosypegs, “I certainly will, with a great deal of pleasure; I’m very much obliged to you.”

CHAPTER XVIII

PET'S PERIL

"Who can express the horror of that night,
When darkness lent his robes to monster fear?
And heaven's black mantle, banishing the light,
Made everything in ugly form appear."

Miss Petronilla Lawless having, as Ranty would have expressed it, got the steam up to a high pressure, thundered over the heath, entered the forest road, and looked with eyes sparkling with defiance at the dark, gloomy pine woods on either hand. The bright morning sunshine, falling in a radiant shower through the waving boughs of the pines, gilded the crimson glow on her thin cheeks and lips, and brought fiery circlets of flame through all her short, crisp, jetty curls. Darkly beautiful looked the little wilful elf, as she slackened her pace through the narrow, sylvan forest path, as if to give any hidden enemy, if such lurked there, a full opportunity of making his appearance. None came, however; and twenty minutes brought her in sight of the gloomy gorge in the cleft mountain, so appropriately named Dismal Hollow.

Pet slackened the mad pace at which she had started still more, and loosening her bridle-reins, allowed her sure-footed pony, Starlight, to choose his own way down the narrow, unsafe bridle-path.

As she approached the house, she ran her eye, with a critical look, over it, and muttering, "Miss Priscilla's been making improvements," prepared to alight.

A great change for the better, too, had taken place in the appearance of Dismal Hollow, since the advent of Miss Priscilla. The great pools of green slimy water were no longer to be seen before the door; the receptacles for mud and filth had vanished, as if by magic. A clean, dry platform spread out where these had once been; the windows were no longer stuffed full of rags and old hats, but with glass panes, that fairly glittered with cleanliness; broken fences were put up, outhouses were repaired, and the whole house had evidently undergone a severe course of regeneration. Inside, the improvements were still more remarkable. Every room had undergone a vigorous course of scrubbing, washing, papering, and plastering, and the doors and windows had been closed, and hermetically sealed, and no sacrilegious foot was ever permitted to enter and "muss up," as Miss Priscilla expressed it, those cherished apartments wherein her soul delighted. The only rooms in the old house which she permitted to be profaned by use were a couple of sleeping apartments, a little sitting-room, and the kitchen. The servants, for so long a time accustomed to do as they liked, and lazy about as they pleased, were struck with dismay at Miss Priscilla's appalling vigor and neatness. That worthy lady declared it was not only a shame, but a sin, to be eaten out of house and home by a parcel of "shiftless niggers;" and one of her very first acts was to hire half152 of them out to any one who would employ them. The remainder were then informed, in very short terms,

that if they did not mind their P's and Q's, they'd be "sold to Georgy"a threat sufficient to terrify them into neatness and order sufficient even to satisfy "Miss 'Silly," as they called her.

On this particular morning, Miss Priscilla sat up in her sitting-rooma little, stiff, square, prim, upright and downright sort of an apartment, with no foolery in the shape of little feminine nicknacks or ornaments about it, but everything as distressingly clean as it was possible to be. Miss Priscilla herself, radiant in a scanty, fady calico gown, reaching to her ankles, a skimpy black silk apron, and a stiff, solemn, grim-looking mob-cap, was ensconced in a rocking-chair, that kept up an awful "screechy-scrawchy," as she rocked backward and forward, knitting away as if her life depended on it. Very hard, and grim, and sour looked Miss Priscilla, as she sat there with her sharp, cankerous lips so tightly shut that they reminded one of a vise, and her long, bony nose running out everlastingly into the thin regions of space.

The sharp clatter of horse's hoofs arrested her attention, and she turned and looked sharply out of the window. The sour scowl deepened on her vinegar phiz, as she perceived Pet in the act of alighting.

"That sharp little wiper of a Lawless girl," muttered Miss Priscilla, "coming here, with a happetite that's hawful to contemplate, when she's not wanted; turning heverything topsy-turvy, not to speak of that there pigeon-pie what's for dinner being honly henough for one. Wah! wah!"

And with a look that seemed the very essence of distilled vengeance, and everything else sour, sharp and cankerous, Miss Priscilla went to the head of the stairs and called:

"Kupy! Kupy!" (her abbreviation of Cupid), "go and hopen the door for that Lawless girl, which is come, and bring her pony hinto the barn, and show her hup 'ere; hand don't mind a-givin' hof her hany hoats. Be quick there!"

As Miss Priscilla, who looked with contempt upon bells as a useless superfluity, had a remarkably shrill, ear-splitting voice of her own, the order to be quick seemed quite unnecessary; for Cupid, clapping his hand over his bruised and wounded ear-drums, hastened to the door as rapidly as153 possible, in order to get rid of the noise. Then Miss Priscilla walked back to her chair, and deposited her bony form thereindetermining, with a sort of sour grimness, to make the best of a bad bargain. Not that Miss Priscilla thought anything of the courtesies of hospitality. She was above such weakness. But Pet Lawless was the daughter of one of the richest and most influential men in the Statewould be a great heiress and fine lady some day; and Miss Priscilla, being only flesh and blood, like the rest of us, could not help feeling a deep veneration for wealth. Personally, she disliked our mad little whirligig more than anybody else she knew. But money, like charity, covereth a multitude of sins; and as Miss Pet would inherit half a million some day, Miss Priscilla Toosypegs, looking into the womb of futurity, was disposed to forgive her now the awful crime of "mussing up" her immaculate rooms, in the hope of a substantial return when the little madcap entered upon her fortune.

Pet, having by this time alighted, ran up the steps, and, with the end of her riding-whip, knocked so vociferously that she awoke every slumbering echo in the quiet old house.
Cupid, half-deafened between the piercing voice of Miss Priscilla within, and the vigorous clamor without, threw open the door; and Pet, with her riding-habit gathered up in one hand, and flourishing her whip in the other, stood there, bright, and sparkling, and fresh as a mountain-daisy before him.
"Well, Cupe how are you these times? Eh? Miss Priscilla at home?"
"Yes, Miss Pet. Miss Silly tole me to tell you you was to walk right up," said Cupid.
"Very well. Take Starlight, and give him a good rubbing, and then plenty of oats and water. He's had a hard gallop of it this morningpoor fellow!" said Pet, as she passed Cupid, and ran up-stairs. "Now to face the old dragon!" she muttered, as, puckering up her rosy mouth in a fruitless attempt to whistle, she swaggered into the presence of the dread spinster, with her usual springing, jaunty air.
"She hates me, and she hates kisses," said Pet, mentally; "so I'll kiss her, if I die in the attempt! But, ugh! venge154ance! verdigris! vitriol, and vinegar! I'd as lief swallow a dose of sourkrout, and have done with it. It's going to be awful, I know; but I'll do it!"
"Morning, Miss Pet," said Miss Priscilla, looking grimly up.
"Oh, Miss Priscilla, how do you do! Oh, Miss Priscilla! I'm so glad to see you again!"
And before Miss Priscilla dreamed of her diabolical intention, the elf had sprung forward, clutched her by the throat, and clung to her like a clawfish, while half a dozen short, sharp kisses went off like so many pop guns on the withered cheek of the luckless old maid.
With no gentle hand, Miss Priscilla caught the monkey by the shoulder, and hurled her from her with a violence that sent her spinning like a top across the room.
"It's all very well for people to be glad to see people, which is honly 'uman nature," began Miss Priscilla, in a high, shrill falsetto, while she adjusted her dislocated mob-cap; "but that hain't no reason why people must 'ave the clothes tore hoff their back by people, just because they're glad to see themwhich is something I never was used to, Miss Pet; and though hit may be the fashion hin this 'ere country, hit's something I don't happrove of hat all, Miss Pet. Now, you'll hexcuse me for saying I would rather you wouldn't do so no morewhich is disagreeable to the feelings, not to speak of mussing up people's caps, as is some bother to hiron; though you mayn't think so, Miss Pet."
And having delivered herself of this brilliant and highly-grammatical oration, and thereby relieved her mind, Miss Priscilla picked up a stitch in her knitting, which, in the excitement of the moment, she had dropped.
"Why, Miss Priscilla, I'm sorry; I'm sure I didn't mean to make you mad," said Pet, in a penitent tone. "But I was so glad to see you, you know, I couldn't help it. Where's Orlando?"
"Hat them there Barrens, which is the desolatest place I hever seen," said Miss Priscilla; "hall weeds; and there you'll find him, with nothing growing but nasty grass, hall halong hof that there hold gipsy woman and little gal, 'stead hof staying at 'ome, hand 'tending

to his 'fairs, as a respectable member hof s'ciety hought for to do; heaving away his155 money, with me slavin' hand toilin' from week's hend to week's hend, smoking hof nasty cigars, as spiles the teeth hand hundermines the hintellecks; which was something his blessed father (now a hangel hup there in the graveyard) never did; and shows 'ow youth is a degeneratin'. Wah! wah!" said Miss Priscilla, concluding with her usual grimace of sour disgust.

"Just so, Miss Priscilla, I've often had to talk to our Ranty about it, too," said Pet, gravely; "but these boys are all a nasty set, you know, and don't mind us girls at all. I've come to stay all day, Miss Priscilla." And Pet took off her hat and gloves as she spoke. "I thought you might be lonesome, and knew you'd be glad to have me here; and I don't really know of any place I like to be so well as I do to be here!"

All the time Pet had been uttering this awful fib, she was taking off her things, and pitching them about in a way that made Miss Priscilla gasp with horror. Her hat was thrown into one corner, her gloves into another, her whip into a third, and her pocket-handkerchief, collar and brooch anywhere they chose to fall.

"You needn't go putting yourself out about dinner, Miss Priscilla," said Pet, who well knew the spinster's parsimoniousness in this respect, and thought she would just give her a hint. "Anything will do for mea broiled chicken, with a mince pie and some grapes; or some nice mutton chops, fried in butter, with a rice-pudding, or a custardanything, you know. But don't put yourself out!"

"I don't hintend to," said Miss Priscilla, knitting away, grimly. "I never do put myself hout for hanybody; wouldn't for the President hof the United States or the King hof Hinglandno, not hif he was to come hall the way from Lunnon hon his two blessed bare knees to hask hit hof me has a favor. Hand hif you'd pick up them there clothes of your'n, Miss Pet, which his hall pitched habout, hand gives the room a' huntidy look, and put them hon the table, hand call to Haunt Bob to carry them hup-stairs, I'd feel heasier hin my mind."

"Oh, let them lay!" said Pet, indifferently. "They're old things; and I ain't particular about them. I guess the floor won't dirty them much!"

"My floor's clean, Miss Pet, I'd have you for to know, hand wouldn't dirty hanybody's things!" answered Miss Priscilla, sharply, and with flashing eyes; "but them there things hof your'n musses hit hup, which his something I never likes my room to be, being neat myself, a-slavin', and toilin', and strivin' to keep things to rights from morning till night, with people a-pitchin' hof things round huntil hit looks like a 'og-stye. Wah! wah!"

And Miss Priscilla got up and picked up all Pet's garments, and carried them up to her own bedroom, out of the way.

And then Pet, with her diabolical spirit of mischief uppermost, went flying through the house, opening, shutting, slamming and banging the doors, in a way that drove the peace-loving spinster to the verge of madness, and made her sour temper ten degrees sourer, until her very look would have turned treacle to vinegar. In and out, up and down stairs, getting astride of the bannisters and sliding down, at the imminent danger

of breaking her neck, ransacking every room, and turning everything topsy-turvy and upside down, and "mussing things" generally, until Miss Priscilla Toosypegs "vowed a vow" in her secret heart that the next time she saw Miss Petronilla Lawless coming, she would lock every door in the house, and send Cupid out with his "blunderingbuss" to shoot her, rather than let her ever darken her doors again.

Dinner at length was announced, and Miss Priscilla began to breathe freely again, in the hope of at least a few moments, respite from her tormentor. As Pet entered the sitting-roomfor Miss Toosypegs dined in her sitting-roomher thin, dark, bright face all aglow with fun and frolic; her black eyes dancing and sparkling with insufferable light; her short, crisp, black curls all tangled and damp over her shoulders and round, polished, saucy, boyish forehead, she looked the very embodiment, the very incarnate spirit of mischief and mirth. She looked like a little grenade, all jets and sparklesa little barrel of gunpowder, at any moment ready to explodea wild, untamed little animal, very beautiful, but very dangerous.

And there, at the head of the table, the greatest contrast to her dark, bright, fiery little neighbor that could well be157 found, sat Miss Toosypegs, as prim, stiff and upright as if she had swallowed a ramrodas sour, sharp and acid as if she had been spoon-fed on verjuice from infancy upward.

Pet's eyes went dancing over the table to examine the bill of fare. Now, reader, our Pet was not a gourmand, nor yet an epicure, by any meanswhat she got to eat was very little trouble to her, indeed; but she knew Miss Priscilla was intensely miserly, and, having plenty, begrudged every mouthful eaten at her board. Therefore, the wicked little elf determined to give her a slight idea of what she could do in the eating-line when provoked to it.

But alas! little was there on that table to provoke the appetite. Two cups of pale, sickly-looking tea, a plate with four small, dropsical-looking potatoes, a consumptive red-herring, and, by way of dessert, a pigeon-pie. That was all.

Pet's face fell to a formidable length for an instant; the next, a bright idea struck her, and she inwardly exclaimed, as she saw Miss Priscilla's eyes rest lovingly on the pigeon-pie:

"Pet, child, you'll be starved, you know, if you don't look out, before you get home. It's your duty to show Miss Priscilla what she owes to her guests; so you walk right into that pigeon-pie, and eat every morsel of it, though you should burst!"

"Sit down, Miss Pet," said Miss Priscilla, solemnly, pointing to her chair, and holding her knife and fork threateningly over the ghostly-looking red-herring, "for what we are about to receive. Which do you like best, the 'ead or the tail, Miss Pet?take your choice."

"Thank you, Miss Priscilla; for I don't care for eitherI ain't fond of fish. I guess I'll take this."

And Pet coolly leaned over, took the pie, and commenced vigorously cutting it up.

"I always make myself at home here, Miss Priscilla," said Pet, speaking with her mouth full. "I know you ain't fond of dainties; and nobody has such nice pigeon-pies as you have. You made it on purpose for mediдn't you? I told you not to put yourself to any

trouble on my account; but you would, you know. It's real nice, Miss Priscilla; and I'd ask you to have some, only I know you don't care about it."

And all this time Pet had been crunching away, half choking herself in her haste.

And Miss Priscilla! What pen shall describe her feelings when she saw that cherished pigeon-piethe making of which she had been deliberating about for a week beforethat pigeon-pie, which had been uppermost in her mind all morning, vanishing before her eyes with such frightful rapidity? The English language is weak, is utterly powerless to describe how she felt. There she sat, as if turned to stone, her knife and fork still poised over the herring, speechless with horror and amazement, her eyes frozen to the face of Pet, while still her cherished pigeon-pie kept disappearing like mist before the morning sun.

"Do take your dinner, Miss Priscilla. Why, you ain't eating anything, hardly," said the wicked little wretch, as her fork went up and down from her plate to her mouth with the nearest approach to perpetual motion the horrified spinster had ever seen. "Just see how I'm getting along. This pie is really beautiful, Miss Priscilla. Oh, I love pigeon-pie; and only I know you'd rather see me eat it, I'd make you have a piece. There! I've finished!" said Pet, pushing aside the empty plate, and leaning back in her chair in a state almost "too full for utterance." "Oh, that pigeon-pie waswasactually divine! It just was, Miss Priscilla; and I'd come to see you every day if you'd only make me one like that."

Without a word, but with a look that might have turned scarlet any face less hard than that of the wicked little elf, Miss Priscilla began her dinner. Nothing daunted, Pet sat and talked away unceasingly; but never a word came from the penknife-lips of Miss Priscilla Toosypegs. Then, when the slender repast was over, Aunt Bob was called up from the lower regions to clear away the service; and Pet sat in her chair, feeling it inconvenient to do anything but talk, just then; and talk she did, with a right good will, for two mortal hours; and still Miss Priscilla sat knitting and knitting away, and speaking never a word.

"The cross, cantankerous, sharp-nosed old thing!" muttered Pet, at last, getting tired of this unprofitable occupa159tion. "The stingy old miser! to sit there sulking because I ate the only thing fit to eat on the table. I declare! if I haven't a good mind to come every day and do the same, just for her ugliness! Oh, yaw-w-w! how sleepy I am! I guess I've done all the mischief I can do, just now, so I'll go to sleep. I'd go home, only I said I wouldn't go till dark, and I won't, either! So, now, Pet, child, you drop into the 'arms of Murphy,' as Ranty says, as fast as you like."

And curling herself up in her chair, with her head pillowed on her arm, Pet, in five minutes, was sound asleep.

From her slumbers she was awoke by a vigorous shake, given by no gentle hand. Pet started up, rubbed her eyes, and beheld Miss Priscilla, by the light of a lamp she carried, bending over her.

“I’m a-going to bed, Miss Lawless,” said Miss Priscilla, grimly; “hand hunless you intends staying all nightwhich I shouldn’t be hany surprised at hif you washit’s time you was a-going ’ome.”
“Why, how late is it?” exclaimed Pet, jumping to her feet.
“Height o’clock, hand as dark as a wolf’s mouth, hat that.”
“My stars! And isn’t tea ready yet, Miss Priscilla?”
“I’ve ’ad my tea a’ hour ago,” said Miss Priscilla, with a grim sort of smile. “You was so sound hasleep I didn’t care about wakening hof you, not to speak hof aveing heat so much for your dinner, I didn’t think you’d care for hany tea. ’Ere’s your things, Miss Pet, and your ’oss is at the door; but you can stay hall night, hif you like.”
“I won’t stay all night! I’ll never come here againyes I will too! I’ll come every single daysee if I don’t,” exclaimed Pet, bouncing across the room, and giving her hat a slap on her head. “I know you don’t want me, and I’ll just come! If you was to our house, do you think I’d pack you off without any tea? No, I wouldn’t if I had to boil the tea-leaves we used the last time for it! It just shows the sort of folks Englishers are, and I wish there wasn’t one160 in the worldI just do; and I don’t care who hears me saying it. I’m a-going, Miss Priscilla, and I vow to Sam! I’ll be back to-morrow, and the next day, and the nextsee if I don’t!”
And while scolding furiously, and flinging things about in a manner perfectly awful to so neat a housekeeper as the ancient spinster, Miss Petronilla had managed to dress herself and descend the stairs, while Miss Priscilla, grim as a cast-iron statue, stood at the head, holding the light. Pet flounced out of the hall, giving the door a terrific bang behind her, and stepped out into the night.
By the light that streamed from the glass top of the door, Pet saw Cupid holding her pony. Springing lightly on his back, she gathered up the reins, and paused a moment before starting to look around.
The night was pitch dark, still, and sultry. Not a breath of air moved, not a leaf rustled; but from the inky pall of deepest gloom overhead, short, fitful flashes of lightning at intervals blazed. A storm was at hand, and would soon burst.
“For de Lor’s sake! hurry, Miss Petronilla,” said Cupid, in a frightened whisper. “Dar’s de awfulest storm a-comin’ to-night you ever see’d. Miss ’Silly oughtn’t ’lowed you to go froo de woods to-night.”
“Miss ’Silly, indeed! I guess she hopes I may only get my neck broke before I get home,” said Pet, shortly, as she turned her pony’s head in the direction of the bridle-path leading through the gorge.
The sure-footed steed, left to himself, securely trod the narrow path, and entered, at last, upon the forest road. Having nothing else to do, Pet began ruminating.
“If that ain’t what I call mean!” she indignantly muttered; “sending me off like an Arab, without anything to eat. The hateful, stingy old thing! I like that soft, green, good-natured Orlando, but I can’t bear her. ’Sh-h-h! softly, Starlight, my boy! there’s niggers in these woods, you know, who wouldn’t mind chawing you and me right up.”

Even while she spoke, a hand grasped her bridle-rein, and a deep, stern voice cried: "Stop!"

At the same moment there came a vivid flash of lightning, and Pet beheld, for a second, the face of a negro black as a demon. The next instant all was deepest darkness again.

CHAPTER XIX

PLAYING WITH EDGED TOOLS

"Thinkest thou there dwells no courage but in breasts
That set their mail against the ringing spears
When helmets are struck down? Thou little knowest
Of nature's marvels."
Mrs. Hemans.

Miss Petronilla Lawless was an exceedingly precocious, an exceedingly courageous, and an exceedingly self-possessed young lady, as our readers are aware, yet now her brave heart for one moment seemed to die within her, and a terrified shriek arose and was barely suppressed on her lips. The hour, the scene, the darkness, the danger, might have made an older and stronger person quail. Alone in the woods, where no scream for help could be heard, with the gloom of Hades all around, save when the blue blaze of the heat-lightning flashed for a moment through the darkness, helpless and alone, in the power of a fierce, blood-thirsty negro. For one instant, a deadly inclination to swoon came over her; but the next, "coward and boaster," as she heard the words from Ranty's lips, came borne to her ear, nerving her heart with new courage and her childish arms with new strength.

"Am I a coward and boaster, as he said?" she mentally exclaimed, while her eye lit fiercely up. "Yes, I am, if I scream and faint; so I won't do either. It wasn't for nothing I learned to shoot and carry pistols about, and Ranty won't call me a coward again, if I die for it!"

All these thoughts had passed through her mind in half an instant, and now the dauntless little amazon sat erect on her horse, and one little brown hand dropped to the pistol she carried in her belt.

The black, meanwhile, had held her rearing steed firmly by the bridle-rein.

"Come, get off with you!" said the negro, gruffly. "I'll162 look after you for a few days, Miss Pet. Come; I've got a place all ready for you in here."

Now, Pet was too young and guileless to fear any worse fate than robbery, imprisonment, or, perhaps, death; but as the negro attempted to pass one arm around her waist and lift her from her saddle, her face blanched with horror and loathing, and shrinking back she shrieked:

"Let me golet me go, I tell you! I'll kill you if you don't let me go!"

"Oh come, now, missynone o' this. Little kittens spit and snap, but we ain't afraid of 'em. You've got to come! so you may as well come at once."

"Lift her off, and carry her 'long. No use a-standin' foolin' here!" said another deep, guttural voice.

"Let me alone! I tell you let me alone! I'll murder you, if you don't!" screamed Pet, passionately, her finger closing hard on the trigger.

“Oh, I’m getting tired of this yer!” exclaimed the black, as he resigned the horse to his companion.
And, going over to Pet, he flung his arm around her and attempted to lift her from her saddle.
A flash of lightning at that instant revealed the black, shining visage plainly to Pet as his face was upraised to hers.
Her teeth were clenched hard, her pistol was raised, one swift short prayer for help, and the brave little amazon fired!
A loud cry, that arose even above the sharp report, burst from the lips of him who held the horse, as he let go the reins and sprung toward his wounded companion.
The frightened Arabian, the moment he felt himself released, bounded madly away, and in five minutes Pet was beyond danger.
The cottage on the Barrens was the nearest habitation; but all was dark there, and the family had evidently retired to rest.
While Pet paused to deliberate a moment whether she would rouse them up or ride home to Heath Hill, she chanced to turn her eyes in the direction of the White Squallas the old sailor, Admiral Havenful, had named his huge white palace of painted woodand perceived a long line of red163 light streaming from one of the windows far over the dry level moor.
“Uncle Harry’s up yet!” exclaimed Pet. “I’ll go there, and stay all night. Gee up, Starlight! You have carried me out of danger once to-night; just take me to ‘Old Harry’s,’ as Deb says, and then you may put your head under your wing and go to sleep as fast as you like.”
As if he had understood her, her fleet steed bounded furiously over the heath; and five minutes later, Pet was standing knocking away with the butt-end of her whip on the door, loud enough to waken the dead.
The terrific thumping brought three or four servants scampering to the door; and close at their heels, holding a bedroom candlestick high over her head, came the “grand seigneur” of the household, himself looking slightly bewildered at this attempt to board him by force.
“Law! if it ain’t Miss Pet!” ejaculated the man who admitted her. “Might ’a’ known ’twar she; nobody else would come thumpin’ like dat. Fit to t’ar de ruff off!”
“Don’t be afraid, Uncle Harry; it’s only me!” said Pet, as she came in dispersing the darkeys by a grand flourish of her whip.
“Port your helm!” exclaimed the admiral, still slightly bewildered, as he held the candlestick aloft and stared at Pet with all his eyes.
“Well, how can I port my helm out here, I want to know?” cried Pet, testily. “Look at these niggers gaping, as if I had two heads on me, and you, standing staring at me, with that old candlestick over your head, that’s got no candle in it. Here! go along with you! Be off with you!”

And again Pet flourished her whip among them, in a way that had the effect of speedily sending them flying to the kitchen regions, while she gave her passive uncle a push that sent him into the parlor from which he had just emerged.

This done, Pet followed him, shut the door with a bang, flung her whip across the room, and dropped, with a long, deep breath of relief and security, into an arm-chair.

The admiral sunk into another, still holding the candlestick in his hand, and never removing his eyes from her face. Thus they sat for some minutes, she gazing on the floor, he164 gazing in helpless bewilderment on her; and while they are thus engaged, we will take the liberty of glancing round the parlor of the White Squall.

Like the sitting-room of Miss Priscilla Toosypegs, there was a "plentiful scarcity" of the ornamental, and, unlike hers, a great preponderance of the useless. The floor was covered by a thick, dark carpet; the windows were shaded by blue-paper blinds; the walls were as white as the largest possible amount of whitewash could make them, and adorned by pencil draughts of ships, brigs, schooners, corvettes, and every other kind of vessel that ever delighted the heart of a sailor and puzzled an uninitiated female to describe.

Over the mantel-piece was a huge painting of a straw colored and pink man-of-war, on a blue-green sea, blazing away at a terrified-looking little cutter, on whose deck could be seen a gentleman and a lady, both considerably taller than the mainmast. This work of art was the pride and glory of the admiral, and was displayed to every stranger who visited the White Squall as something that might make even the great old masters look to their laurels.

Deer-antlers bristled in various corners, and five or six huge cages, filled with owls, parrots, hawks, and a dozen other strange birds, hung from the ceiling, while the model of a ship, some three feet long, with all her sails set, her cargo and crew most probably under the hatchesfor none were visible on deckand apparently all ready for sea, stood on the mantel-piece, right under the painting.

A huge, wide fireplace, in which, despite the warmth of the evening, a bright fire was burning, occupied one corner of the apartment, and close beside this sat Admiral Havenful, in his elbow-chair, still staring at his niece.

The admiral was a man of fifty or so, short, stout, plethoric, with a rubicund face, a jolly sailor's swagger, and a simple, good-natured look, naturally, that made every heart warm toward him. Very rich, very generous, and very easily "taken in," he was the guardian-angel of all the poor in the neighborhood. The admiral had never married, and had only quitted the service a few years before to settle down and end his days in the pride of his heart, his huge, white, eye-blinding "White Squall." A fondness for whisky-punch, children, and nautical phrases, were the most noticeable165 traits in the old man's character. His niece, Pet Lawless, had never ceased to astonish him, from the first moment he saw her, and now he sat hopelessly gazing at her, and trying to make out what could have brought her there at that hour of the night, looking so pale and excited.

Pet, with her dark eyes fixed on the floor, was uneasily wondering whether she had killed the man she had shot at, and shuddering to think what a dreadful thing it was to shed blood, even in self-defense.

"Oh, I hopeI do hope I haven't killed him!" she exclaimed at last, involuntarily, aloud.

"Killed who? Firefly?" inquired the astounded admiral.

"Uncle Harry," said Pet, looking abruptly up, "I've gone and killed a man!"

This startling announcement so completely overwhelmed the worthy admiral, that he could only give vent to his feelings by a stifled "Stand from under!"

"Yes, I just have; and I expect they'll hang me for it, now. Ranty said I was to be hung, but who would think he could really tell fortunes?"

"Killed a man! St. Judas Iscariot!" ejaculated the dismayed admiral. "When, Flibbertigibbet?"

"To-night; not fifteen minutes ago. I expect he's as dead as a herring by this time!" said Pet, planting her elbows on her knees, dropping her chin in her hands, and gazing moodily into the fire.

Admiral Havenful glanced appealingly at the candlestick; but as that offered no clue to the mystery, he took off his hat, scratched his head (or, rather, his wig; for he wore one), and then clapped it on again, and turned briskly to his niece.

"Now, little hurricane! just shake out another reef or sowill you? I'm out of my latitude altogether."

"Well, I guess you'd have been more out of it, if you had been caught as I was to-night," said Pet, with a sort of gloomy stoicism. "I was coming through the woods, you know, between Dismal Hollow and the Barrens, when, all of a sudden, two great, big, black niggers jumped from behind the trees, and caught hold of my horse."

With something like a snort of terror and dismay, the ad166miral sprung to his feet, and brandished the candlestick fiercely over his head, while waiting for what was to come.

"Body of Paul Jones! And what did you do, whirligig?"

"Why, I told them to let go, and they wouldn't; and then I took a pistol, and shot one of them!" exclaimed Pet, with flashing eyes.

"Hoorah!" shouted the admiral, waving the candlestick delightedly above his head. "I knew there was some of the Havenful blood in you! Three cheers for Flibbertigibbet!"

"Then my horse started, and ran off, and I came right straight here," concluded Pet, her cheeks and eyes lighting up at the exciting recollection.

"Hoorah for little Bombshell!" roared the admiral, as he sprung forward, and catching Pet's hand, gave it a squeeze that nearly crushed the little digits. "You ought to have been a boy, Firefly! By Saint Christopher Columbus! you are a female hero, Pet!"

"Well, but it isn't nice to kill a man, or even a nigger! I hope he ain't dead," said Pet, uneasily.

"Never you mind the monkey! Served him right if he is! I do hope he's gone to 'Davy's locker,' where he'll get a warmer welcome. Why, he would have killed you, Pet!"

“I expect he would; though I don’t see where would be the good of killing a little thing like me,” said Pet, thoughtfully humane. “I say, uncle, I’d like to go and see if he’s dead!”
“And may I be swung to the yard-arm if I let you go a step! Does the girl want to get killed again?” said the admiral, puffing up and down the room, with his hands stuck in his pockets, like a stranded porpoise.
“No; the girl doesn’t want to get killed,” said Pet, crossly. “I’m not going to be killed so easily, thank you! But it seems to me you might mount two or three of the servants, and let them come with me; and I will call for Ray Germaine; and we’ll all go together to the woods, and, maybe, catch those runaway niggers that are frightening the lives out of people. I shot one of ’em, I know; and we can track him by his bleeding. There’s a reward offered, too, for whoever takes them up; and who knows but I may get it?”
“Set fire to the reward! That’s a good notion, though, about going in search of them when they’re wounded, Pet. Oh, you’re a jewel, Flibbertigibbet, and no mistake about it! There ought to be a song made about you. I’ll go, too; and there’s no time to lose. Pipe all hands, Firefly, while I go and look for my boots.”
“Now, why couldn’t he say ‘Call the servants,’ as well as ‘Pipe all hands’? which hasn’t a sensible sound at all,” said Pet, as she arose to obey. “Here, you! Jake, Tom, Bob!” she added, opening the door, and shouting at the top of her lungs, “come here as fast as you can. There’s murder in the camp!”
“Tumble up!” roared the admiral, from within.
“Tumble up!” repeated Pet, imitating the old sailor’s gruff roar as well as she could. “Uncle says so.”
Jake, and Tom, and Bob, most probably thinking, from the uproar, the house was on fire, “tumbled up” accordingly, precipitating themselves over one another, in their eagerness to be first on the field of battle.
“Clear out, and saddle four horses, and arm yourselves with boarding-pikes and cutlasses!” commanded the admiral, fastening a rusty sword to his side, and sticking a couple of pistols in his belt. “And then mount, and ride round to the front door, and stand by for further orders. Oh, the blamed black villain! He deserves to walk the plank, if ever any one did!”
All this time, the admiral had been going panting and puffing round, like a whale, arming himself with every conceivable weapon he could lay hands on, and vociferating, alternately, to himself, to “heave to!” and “stand from under!”
Pet had run out, and sprung upon Starlight, while the three alarmed servants rode behind her. And in a few moments the admiral made his appearance, and got astride a solemn, misanthropic-looking old roan, with many grimaces and contortions; for the admiral did not believe in riding himself, and would sooner have faced a tornado, any day, on the broad Atlantic, than ride three yards on horseback.
The night was still intensely dark, but perfectly calm, and by the command of Petronilla, the men had provided dark lanterns. All were now ready; but the admiral, like most168 generals leading his troops to battle, considered it his duty to make a speech. Short,

concise speeches on the eve of a battle are, I believe, most efficacious, and, acting on this conviction, Admiral Havenful's was brief, pithy and to the point, beginning with an adjuration to his horse:

"Sho, Ringbone, sho! Steady's the word, and steady it is! You are now going to fight the battles of your country, my boys, under the glorious Stars and Stripes. We ain't got 'em here, but that's no matter. The enemy's before you; give 'em a raking broadside first, and then board 'em, sword in hand. The eyes of all the world are upon you nowor would be only they are sleeping about this time! Clap on all sail; and scud before the wind! Hoorah! Gee up, Ringbone!"

The effect of this spirited address could not be seen in the dark, and resolved at all hazards to practice what he preached, the admiral gave both heels a simultaneous dig into the ribs of his gloomy-looking steed, which had the effect of setting that ominously-named animal off at a shuffling dog-trot, or, rather, something between a trot and a canter, partaking of the nature of both, but being, in reality, neither. Up and down our fat admiral was churned, while groan after groan was jerked from his jolted bosom by the uneasy motion of his steed.

"Shepitcheslikeanoldhulkonaswell!" came churned, word by word, like short grunts, from the lips of the admiral. "Straightupanddown, andI'llbecapsizeddirectlybytheconfoundedoldbrute!"

"Can't you hurry, uncle?" exclaimed Pet, impatiently, reining in her fiery horse with difficulty, to the dead march of the admiral. "Here we're going along like a funeral or a mourning procession, or a pilgrimage, or anything else that's slow and stupid. Can't you put some life into that spavined, knock-kneed, ring-boned, wheezy old nag of yours with your whip and spurs?"

"II'mjoltedtodeathalreadyPet. Everytimberinthisoldhulkissprung. Couldn'tgo-astepfurtherifoldNeptunewastorisefrom theoceanandaskitofmeasaparticularfavor!" grunted the jolted admiral.

"Well, then, I can't wait. Starlight won't be held in," said Pet. "I'll ride on to old Barrens Cottage, and wake up Ray. He'll have time to be up, and dressed, and mounted, before you reach there, at this solemn shuffle."

And off went Pet. A very few minutes brought her to the cottage. Alighting from her horse, she rapped more decorously than was her wont, fearing to alarm Erminie.

Softly a window was raised above, and a night-capped head and a sooty face was popped out and a frightened voice demanded:

"Who's dar?"

"It's me, LucyPet Lawless. Come down and open the door."

"Golly!What on yeth brings dat little debbil here, this onsarcumcised hour ob de night?" muttered Lucy, as she popped her black head in again, and shut down the window.

A moment after, and the door was opened by Lucy and Pet admitted. Lucy held a lamp in her hand, which displayed her in her robe de nuit, and showing more black ankles than grace.

“Now, then! Is Ray in bed?” abruptly demanded Petronilla.
But Lucy, who expected this nocturnal visit was to announce some one was dead, or dying, on hearing this indecorous question, set down her lamp in silence, and looked scandalized and indignant.
“Welldon’t you hear me? Is Ray in bed?” repeated our impatient Nimrod, in a higher key.
“Miss Pet Lawsliss,” said Lucy, drawing herself up stiffly, and forgetting that her costume was more light than dignified, “you may t’ink dis yer is mighty fine, to come at de dead hours ob de night, to ax if young mars’r’s in bed, but it’s somefin I wouldn’t do, ef I is brack. Bress my soul! I’s allers tooken care not to be cotched in sich wices; but young ladies, now-a-days, as have no ’spect for demselves, can’t be ’spected”
“Why, you hateful old thing!” exclaimed Pet, angrily. “I’dd like to know what business you have lecturing me? Vices, indeed! I declare! I have a good mind to lay my whip over your shoulders! Is Master Ray in bed? Tell me, or I’llleave you to guess what I’ll do to you.”
The noise of voices in violent altercation now brought Erminie to the scene of action, looking like an angel in her flowing snowy night-dress.
“Why, Pet, what is the matter?” she asked in alarm.
“Nothing, only I want Ray. Is he in bed? If he is, wake him up.”
“He is not home. He and Ranty went away somewhere, after tea, and haven’t come back. We thought they had gone to Heath Hill. Oh, Pet! has anything happened to them?” said Erminie, clasping her hands.
“Not as I know of. Like as not they’re at Heath Hill. I haven’t been there, myself, since early this morning. Now, don’t get frightened and be a goose, Minnie! I wanted Ray to help me in a splendid piece ofofmischief; but as he’s not in, it’s no matter. Good-night, and pleasant dreams. I’m off.”
And off she was, like a shot, slamming the door behind her, after her usual fashion, and just succeeded in springing into her saddle as the slow cavalcade came tramping up.
Slowly as they rode, a short time brought them now to the forest-road. Just as they entered it, a figure came rushing out, shouting:
“Help! help! whoever you are, or he’ll bleed to death!”
“Why, it’s Ranty!” exclaimed Pet, in amazement, as she recognized the voice.
At the same moment, one of the men, lifting his lantern, let its rays stream upon the new-comer, and all started to behold a black, shining, ebony face.
“It’s a nigger!” howled the admiral. “Blow him out of the water, boys!”
“It’s not a nigger!” shouted the voice of Ranty. “If this soot was off, I’d be as white as you, if not considerably whiter. Come along; he’ll die soon, if he’s not dead alreadypoor fellow!”
“Who’ll die? Who are you talking about? Oh, Ranty! who is it?” exclaimed Pet, growing faint and sick with sudden apprehension.

“Why, Ray Germaine, to be sure! You’ll have something to brag of, Pet Lawless, after going and shooting Ray Germainewon’t you, now? I always knew your lugging171 pistols round, like a female Blackbeard, would come to no good, and now, when you’re sentenced to State Prison for life, we’ll see how you like it. I wish to gracious there wasn’t a girl in the world!” vociferated Ranty, with a subdued howl of mingled grief and indignation.

For one dreadful moment, Pet reeled and nearly fell from her saddle. Then, with a long, wild, passionate cry, she leaped from her horse, and sped like an arrow from a bow into the woods.

She had not far to go. By one of the fitful flashes of sheet-lightning that at intervals illumined the dark, she saw a dark, slender boyish form lying motionless on the dew-drenched grass. The next instant, she was kneeling beside him, holding his head on her breast, and clasping his cold, stiff form in a wild, passionate embrace, as she cried out:

“Oh, Ray! I never meant it! I never, never thought it was you! Oh, Ray! I shall die if you do!”

“Yes, it’s all very well to take on and make a fuss now,” said Ranty, savagely, giving her a pull away; “but if you kneel hugging him there, and keep ‘never, nevering’#; till doom’s day, it won’t bring him to. Get out of this, and if you want to do any good, jump on Starlight and ride off as if Satan was after you (as he always is, I do believe), to Judestown, for a surgeon.”

“Oh, Ranty! do you think he will die?” exclaimed Pet, in a tone of such piercing anguish, that it thrilled through every heart but the angry one of Ranty, who considered she deserved to be punished for what she had done.

“Of course, he’ll die,” said Ranty, jerking her away, “if he’s not dead alreadyas I expect he is! Go for the surgeonwill you? They’ll want him for the coroner’s inquest, which must sit on the body to-morrow morning. And after you’ve sent the doctor to the cottage, the best thing you can do is to go and give yourself up to the sheriff and save him the trouble of coming to the house after you. Be off, now, and ride fast, if you ever want to atone for the mischief you have done. If you break your neck on the way it will be the greatest blessing bestowed on America since the Declaration of Independence was signed. Here, you fellows! off and get some branches, and spread your coats on them, and make a litter to carry poor Ray home.”

“Go for the doctor, Pet,” whispered the admiral. “I’ve got out of my reckoning again, somehow. Don’t see where the wind sits, for my part.”

Without a word, Pet leaped into her saddle and darted off, according to Ranty’s directions, as if “Satan was after her.” And then, superintended by Ranty, a rude litter was made and the cold, rigid form of Ray placed upon it. The negroes carefully raised it on their shoulders, and headed by Ranty and the admiral, the melancholy cavalcade set out for the cottage.

“How, in the name of Beelzebub, did this all happen?” was the worthy admiral’s first question, as he rode along beside his afflicted nephew.

“It’s my opinion Beelzebub, or some other of them old fellows, has had a hand in it, all through,” said Ranty, with another suppressed howl of grief. “The way of it, you see, Uncle Harry, was this: Pet would go to Dismal Hollow this morning in spite of all we could say or do. We told her there were savage negroes in the woods who would send her to kingdom come as fast as they would look at her; but it was only a heaving away of breath and eloquence to talk to her. Go she would and go she did. Well, I persuaded Ray to play a practical joke on her by blacking our faces and waylaying her on her road home, to see whether or not she was as courageous as she pretended to be, Ray consented, and we stopped her here, and by George! before we knew what we were about she fired at Ray, and then dashed off before you could say ‘Jack Robinson.’ Ray fell like a stone, and I, with a yell like an Indian war-whoop, rushed up to him, and raised him up, and asked him if he was killed. He said ‘no’ but that he thought he was pretty badly wounded in the shoulder, and I could feel his coat all wet with blood. If I had been a grown-up man, the way I would have sworn at Pet, just then, would have been a caution; but as I wasn’t, I contented myself with wishing I had a hold of her for about five minutesthat was all! A little later, Ray went and fainted as dead as a mackerel, and there we were, left like the two ‘Babes in the Wood,’ and I expect, like those unfortunate infants, the robins might have made us a grave, if you hadn’t come along in the nick of time to my relief. I didn’t like to leave poor173 Ray wounded, and helpless, and alone there, and I couldn’t carry him home; so I was in just the tallest sort of a fix I ever want to be in again. So there’s the whole story, preface, marginal notes, dedication and all.”

“Keep her round a point or so,” said the admiral, thoughtfully; “I see breakers ahead!”

“Where?” asked Ranty, looking involuntatrily in the direction of the sea.

“If old Mother Ketura finds out Firefly has shot her boy, there’ll be mutiny among the crew,” said the admiral, in a mysterious whisper; “don’t tell her.”

“What will I say, then?” said Ranty; “suppose I tell her he and I were fighting a duel in a peaceable, friendly sort of way, just to keep our hand in, eh?”

“No, no, Ranty, boy! Stick to the truth; every lie you tell is recorded in the great log-book up above” here the admiral removed his glazed hat reverentially. “Say he was shot accidentally”

“On purpose,” interrupted Ranty.

“Or say he was shot by mistakeso he was, you know.”

“All right! I’ll fix it up; trust me to get up a work of fiction founded on fact, at a moment’s notice! Here we are at the cottage. Now for it!”

Ranty knocked, and again the window up above was raised; and the same sable head, a second time aroused from its slumbers, was protruded, and in sharp, irritated tones demanded:

“Who’s dar now, I’d like ter know?”

“A mighty polite beginning,” muttered Rantythen raising his voice“it’s me, LucyRanty Lawless.”

“Ugh! might have known it was a Lawless! Never seed such a rampageous setcomin’ and rousin’ people out der beds dis hour de night. Fust de sister, den de brudder; fust de ’un, den de udder,” scolded Lucy, quite unconscious she was making poetry; “what in de name of Marster does yer want?”
“To get in, you sooty goblin!” shouted Master Ranty, in a rage. “Come down and open the door, and let us in; don’t stand there asking questions.”
“Belay your jawing tackle!” roared the admiral, in a voice like distant thunder.
“Deed, I won’t den! Does yer tink I’s no sort o’ ’steem for myself to go lettin’ in men dis hour de night? I hasn’t lived forty odd years to come to dis in my old ages o’ life.” And down the window went with a bang.
Before Ranty could burst out with a speech more vigorous than proper, the door was softly opened, and Erminie, like a stray seraph in her white floating dress, stood before them, with a face pale with undefined apprehension, and exclaiming, with clasped hands:
“Oh, Ranty, something has happened! what is it? I could not go asleep after Pet left, and I felt sure something was going to happen. Where’s Ray?”
“Hush, Erminie; don’t be frightened. Go in and get a light, and don’t wake your grandmothergo.”
“But tell me first what has happened. I won’t scream. I’ll be very good,” pleaded Erminie, her face growing whiter and whiter.
“Well, thenRay’s got hurt pretty badly, and Pet’s gone for the doctor. Now don’t go crying, or making a time, but light a candle, and kindle a fire, and get some linen bandages and things; they’re always wanted when wounds are dressed. That’s a good girlworth your weight in gold not to speak of diamonds. Hurry up!”
Pale and trembling, but soon wonderfully quiet, Erminie obeyed, but started back with a faint cry of terror, when the light fell on the black faces of the boys.
“Hush, Erminie! give me some soap and water ’till I wash all this black off before the doctor comes,” said Ranty. “I dare say, I ain’t very pretty to look at just now; but never mind; a good scrubbing will set it all right. And now get some more, and wash the black off Ray’s face, too; I fancy you’ll find him white enough underneath by this time.”
Still trembling, and with a face perfectly colorless, Erminie obeyed; and while Ranty was giving his frontispiece a vigorous scrubbing, Erminie was more gently bathing that of Ray. When the dusky paint was off, the deadly pallor of his face seemed in such striking contrast, that she barely repressed a cry of passionate grief. Cold, and still, and white he lay, like one already dead. Then Ranty, with a face shining from the combined influences of sincere grief, and a severe application of soap and water, went to the175 door to see, like Sister Annie in “Bluebeard,” if there was “anybody coming.” Very soon he returned with the welcome intelligence that he heard the tramp of approaching horses; and the next moment Pet burst wildly into the room, followed by a grave, old, baldheaded gentlemanthe physician of Judestown.

“Oh, doctor, will he die?” passionately exclaimed Pet, looking up, with a face as white as Raymond’s own.
“Hope not; can’t tell just yet,” said the doctor, as he proceeded to rip up Ray’s coat-sleeve, and remove the saturated coat.
The wound was in the shoulder; and the doctor, with very little difficulty, extracted the bullet, dressed the wound, and proceeded to administer restoratives. Then seeing Pet’s white, terrified face, and with black eyes looking at him so beseechingly, he chucked her good-naturedly under the chin, and said:
“Don’t be afraid, little blackbird! Master Ray’s good as half-a-dozen dead people yet. All you have got to do is, to nurse him carefully for a couple of weeks, and you’ll see him alive and kicking as briskly as ever by the end of that time.”
“Oh, I’m so glad,” said Pet, drawing a long, deep breath and dropping into a chair, she covered her face with her hands.
The doctor now gave a few directions to Erminie, and then took his leave. The admiral followed him to the door, and whispered:
“Doctor, will you just stand off and on around here, till the lad in there gets seaworthy again? I’ll stand the damages, and don’t you say anything about it.”
The doctor nodded, and rode off; and then the admiral, seeing he could be of no use in the cottage, mounted, with many groans and grunts, Ringbone, and wended his way, followed by his three valorous henchmen, to the White Squall.
“Ranty, go home,” said Pet; “we don’t want you. You can tell papa, if he asks you, how it all happened, and say I ain’t coming home until to-morrow. As I’ve shot Ray, I’m going to stay here and nurse him; so be off!”

CHAPTER XX

FIREFLY GOES TO SCHOOL

"Puck found it handier to commence

With a certain share of impudence;

Which passes one off as learned and clever,

Beyond all other degrees whatever."

Song of Old Puck.

Judge Lawless was in a rage! If you have ever seen an angry lion, an enraged bear, or a young lady with "her mantle pinned awry," you may conceive in some measure the state of mind in which that gentlemen trod up and down his library floor, while he listened to Ranty's account of Pet's exploit of the previous night.

Judge Lawless was a man of forty or so, and had been a widower for five years. His face was not particularly prepossessing though extremely handsome; his haughty, supercilious expression; his cold and somewhat sinister eyes, and slightly sensual mouth, were, on the whole, rather repelling. He prided himself, as a general thing, on his gentlemanly urbanity; but on the present occasion he quite forgot all his customary politeness, and paced up and down in a towering passion.

His son and heir, Master Ranty, had ensconced himself in a velvet-cushioned easy-chair; and with his feet on a stool, and both hands stuck in his coat-pockets, took things very coolly indeed.

"To think that my daughter should act in such an outrageous manner!" exclaimed the judge, passionately; "making herself a town's talk, with her mad actions. What other young lady in her station of life would associate familiarly with those people at Dismal Hollow, who are a low set as far as I understand; or ride through those infested woods after night? I shall put an immediate stop to it, if I have to lock her up in the attic on bread and water. I have a good mind to keep her on bread and water for a month or so, and see if that will not cool the fever in her blood! And177 you, sir," he added, stopping in his excited walk, and turning furiously upon Ranty, "deserve a sound thrashing for playing such a trick upon your sister. It would have served that young puppy Germaine right if she had put an end to his worthless life. I never liked that boy, and I command you instantly to cease your intimacy with him. If your uncle chooses to make a fool of

himself, adopting every beggar's brat for a protégé, that's no reason why I should follow his lead. Now, sir, let me hear no more of this. As the son of Judge Lawless, you should look for better companionship than the grandson of an old gipsy."

"I don't know where I'd find one, then," said Ranty, sturdily. "There isn't a boy from Maine to Louisiana a better fellow than Ray Germaine. He can beat me at everything he lays his hands to, from mathematics down to pulling a stroke-oar; and there wasn't another boy at school he couldn't knock into a cocked hat."

And with this spirited declaration, Master Ranty thrust his hands deeper into his pockets, and planted his feet more firmly than ever on the stool.

"How often must I tell you, sir," vociferated his father, in a voice of thunder, "to drop this vulgar habit you have got of talking slang? I presume your accomplished friend, Germaine, has taught you that, as well as your manifold other acquirements," he added, with a sneer.

"No, he didn't," said Ranty, stoutly; "and he could knock them into a cocked hat, if not further, too! Ray Germaine's a tiptop fellow, and I shouldn't wonder if he'd be a President some day. It will be the country's loss if he ain'tthat's all."

"Silence, sir!" thundered the judge. "How dare you have the brazen effrontery to speak in this manner to me? You have improved under your sister's tuition rapidly, since you came home! Go immediately to old Barrens Cottage, and bring Petronilla here. I shall see that she does not go there again in a hurry."

Ranty rose, with anything but a sweet expression, and went out, shaking his fist grimly at the door, I am sorry to say, once it was safely shut between them.

On reaching the cottage, he found Ray flushed and feverish with Pet and Erminie sitting on either side of him.

"Pet, go home; father says so," was his first brusque salute.

"I won't thennot a step!" said the obstinate Pet.

"He'll be after you with a horsewhip mighty sudden, if you don't," said Ranty. "I wish you could see how he's been blazing away all the morning. I reckon he's stamping up and down the library yet, nursing his wrath to keep it warm till he gets hold of you."

"Well," said the disrespectful vixen, "if he's a mind to get mad for nothing, I can't help it. I shan't go."

“Oh, Pet! you’d better,” said Erminie, anxiously. “He’ll be so very angry. I can take care of Ray, you know; and your father will scold you dreadfully.”

“La! I know that! I’m in for a scolding, anyway, so I may as well earn it. Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, you know.”

“Oh, Pet! don’t stand bothering here all day,” broke in Ranty, impatiently. “I’ve got to bring you home, anyway, and I suppose you think a fellow has nothing to do but stay here and wait ’till you’re ready. Father will half-murder you, if you don’t come right straight along.”

“Yes; go, Petplease do,” pleaded Erminie. “I had rather you would.”

“Oh, well, if I’m to be turned out I suppose I must,” said Pet, taking her hat. “I’m ready, Ranty. Good-by, Minnie; I’ll be back after dinner.”

“I don’t know about that,” muttered Ranty, springing into the saddle. “People ain’t got out of attics so easily as you think.”

A rapid gallop of half an hour brought them to Heath Hill, a gently-sloping eminence, on which stood an imposing mansion of gray sandstone, the aristocratic home of Judge Lawless, the one great potentate of Judestown and environs.

The judge, from the window of the library, saw his son and daughter approach, and flinging himself into the lounging chair Ranty had vacated, he rung the bell, and ordered the servant who answered his summons to send Miss Petronilla up-stairs directly.

“Now, you’ll catch it, Pet,” said Ranty, with a malicious chuckle.

“Will I? Wait ’till you see,” retorted Pet, as, gathering179 up her riding-habit in her hand, she prepared to follow the servant up-stairs.

With his face contracted into an awful frown, destined to strike terror into the flinty heart of his self-willed little heiress, the judge sat, awaiting her coming. In she came, her hat cocked jauntily on one side of her saucy little head; her round, polished, boyish forehead laughing out from between clusters of short, crispy, jetty curls; her black eyes all ablaze with anticipated defiance; her rosy mouth puckered up, ready to vindicate what she considered her legitimate rights. Not the least daunted was Pet by her father’s look, as swinging her riding-whip in one hand, she stood erect and fearless before him.

“Well, Miss Petronilla Lawless,” began the judge, in a measured, sarcastic tone; “no doubt you are very proud of last night’s achievement. You think you have done something excessively clever nowdon’t you?”

“Yes, I do,” said Pet; “and so would you and everybody elseif I had only shot a real nigger, instead of Ray Germaine. It wasn’t my fault. I’d just as lief shoot one as t’other.”

“No doubt. The race of Joan D’Arc is not quite extinct, I see. How will you like to have your name bandied from lip to lip ’till it becomes a common by-word in every low tavern and hovel in Judestown?”

“Well, I shouldn’t mind. I like to be talked about; and it isn’t the first time I have given them something to talk about, either.”

“No; but it shall be the last,” said the judge, rising sternly. “I command you, now, to go no more to that cottage. If you dare to disobey me, it will be at your peril.”

“Why, where’s the harm of going, I want to know?” demanded Pet, indignantly.

“I am not in the habit of giving reasons for my conduct, Miss Lawless,” said the judge, severely; “but in this instance I will say, it is exceedingly unbecoming in a young lady to nurse a youth who is a stranger to her. No other young lady would think for a moment of such a thing.”

“Well, I ain’t a young lady,” said Pet, “no more than Ray is a stranger. And if I was a young lady, and went180 and shot a young man, I ought to help to nurse him well again, I should think.”

“What you think, Miss Lawless, is of very little consequence, allow me to tell you. Your duty is to do as I say, without presuming to ask questions. I have hitherto excused your wild, rude conduct, and made every allowance for your want of proper female training; but really, your conduct is getting so outrageous there is no telling where it will end. My intention is, therefore, to put a stop to it at once.”

Pet’s eyes flashed open defiance, and her face assumed a look of resolute determination; but she prudently said nothing.

“I have resolved, therefore, Miss Lawless,” said the judge, re-seating himself, with a look of haughty inflexibility quite overpowering; “to send you immediately to school. I wrote some time ago to a lady who keeps a private boarding-school for young girls, and she has promised to take charge of you at any time. It is an exceedingly strict establishment, and the severe discipline there maintained will have the good effect, I hope, of taming down your glaring improprieties. As I feel that keeping you here any longer is like holding a keg of gunpowder over a blazing furnace, I intend setting out with you this very afternoon. You need dresses and various other things, I know, which I am not altogether qualified to procure; I will, therefore, leave a sum of money in the hands of Mrs. Moodie, sufficient to purchase you a complete outfit, and such other things as you

may want. It is useless for you to remonstrate, Miss Lawless," said the judge, with a wave of his jeweled hand; "for nothing you can say will move me from my purpose. I anticipated violent opposition on your part, and I am quite prepared for it. Go, I have said, this afternoon, and go you shall. If you attempt to oppose my will, you shall receive the severe punishment you have already merited."

The judge stroked his dark, glossy mustache, and looked threateningly at Pet; but to his surprise that eccentric young lady offered not the slightest opposition. When she first heard his intention of sending her away to school, she had started violently, and her color came and went rapidly; but as he went on, her eyes dropped, and an inexplicable smile flickered around her red lips. Now she stood before him, with demurely cast down eyesthe very personification of meekness and docility; had he only seen the insufferable light of mischief blazing under their long, drooping, black lashes, resting on the thin crimson cheeks, what a different tale he would have read!

"Very well, sir," said Pet, meekly; "I suppose I can't help it, and have got to put up with it. I don't know as I should mind going to school, either, for a change. Mayn't I call and see Erminie before I go, papa?"

"Hem-m-m! ahI'll see about it," said the judge, rather perplexed by this unusual submissiveness, and intensely relieved, too, if the truth must be told; for in his secret heart he dreaded a "scene" with his stormy little daughter. "You may call in, for a moment, as we go past, and say good-by; but once in school, you will form new acquaintances among your own standing in society, and drop all the low connections you have formed around here. The daughter of Judge Lawless," said that gentleman, drawing himself up, "is qualified, by birth and social position, to take her place among the highest and most exclusive in the land, and must forget that she ever associated withpaupers!"

A streak of fiery red flamed across the dark face of Pet, and her black eyes flew up, blazing indignantly at this insult to her friends. But the next moment she remembered her rôle, and down fell the long lashes again; and Pet stood as meek and demure as a kitten on the eve of scratching.

"This is all, I believe, Miss Lawless," said the judge, resuming his customary, suave blandness, and feeling intensely proud of his own achievement in having awed into submission the hitherto dauntless Pet; "you may go now, and if you have any trifling preparations to make before starting, you will have sufficient time before dinner to accomplish them. I shall expect when we reach Mrs. Moodie's, you will try to behave yourself like a young lady, as my daughter will be expected to behave. You must drop your rude, brusque ways, your slang talk, amazonian bearing, and become quiet, and gentle, and ladylike, and accomplished. You understand?"

“Yes, sir!” murmured Pet, putting her forefinger in her mouth.

“Very well, I hope you do. Go now.”

With her long lashes still drooping over her wickedly-scintillating eyes, her finger still stuck in her mouth, Pet meekly walked out of the august “presence,” and closed the library-door, but no sooner was she safely outside, than a change most wonderful to behold came over the spirit of her dream. Up flew the long eyelashes, revealing the dancing eyes, all ablaze with the anticipation of fun and frolic; erect towered the little form, as she turned; and facing the door, applied her thumb to her nose, flourished her four fingers in a gesture more expressive than elegant, and exclaimed:

“Oh! won’t I be good, though! won’t I be lady-like! won’t I forget my friends! won’t I be so quiet, and gentle, and good, that they’ll make a saint out of me pretty soon! won’t I be a pocket-edition of ‘St. Rose of Lima!’ Maybe I won’t; that’s all!”

Pet was as busy as a nailer until dinner was announced, packing up such things as she wished to take with her to school.

Great was the amazement of Ranty, when at the dinner-table his father, in pompous tones, announced his immediate departure with Pet. Ranty glanced at her, as she sat quietly looking in her plate, and being somewhat wider awake in respect to her than his father, inwardly muttered:

“Pet’s up to something; I can tell that whenever she looks particularly quiet and saintly, like she does now; there’s always ‘breakers ahead,’ as uncle would say. Mrs. Moodie will find her hands full when she gets our Pet. She’ll discover she’s caught a tartar, I’ll be bound?”

Immediately after dinner, black Debby was ordered to dress Miss Pet for her journey, while the judge went to his own apartment to make himself as irresistible as possible. In half an hour both were ready. Pet was handed into the carriage by her father, and waved a smiling adieu to Ranty. The judge took his seat beside her, and the two superb carriage-horses, flashing with silver-mounted harness, started off at a rapid pace.

As they came within sight of the cottage, Pet who had been lying back silently among the cushions, started up, exclaiming:

“Stop at the cottage, John; I’m going in there for a moment:”

The coachman drew up, and Pet sprung out.

“I will give you just five minutes to make your adieux,” said the judge, drawing out his watch; “if you are not back in that time, I shall go after you.”

Pet's eyes again defiantly flashed, but without deigning to reply, she ran into the cottage.

Erminie met her at the door, and looked her surprise at seeing the stately equipage of Judge Lawless stop at the cottage, and Miss Lawless herself all arrayed for a journey.

"How is Ray?" was Pet's first question.

"Just as he was this morning. Where are you going, Pet?"

"He is no worse?"

"No. Are you going away?"

"Has the doctor been here since?"

"Yes, he has just gone. Where are you going, Pet?"

"Ohto school!"

"To school! going away!" echoed Erminie in dismay.

"Yes; going to a dismal old boarding-school, where I am to walk, talk, eat, pray, and sneeze by rule. Ain't it nice?"

"Oh, Pet, I am so sorry!"

"Well, I'm not! I expect to have a real nice time. Everybody mightn't see the fun of it; but I do! I intend to finish my education, and be back in a week!"

"Oh, Pet! I don't know what I shall do when you are gone; I will be so lonesome," said Erminie, her sweet blue eyes filling with tears.

"Why, didn't I tell you I'd be back in a week? I will, too. There's an old dragon there, Mrs. MoodieI've heard of her beforeand she's to hammer learning into me. Oh, I'll dose her!"

"Won't you write me a letter, Pet?" said Erminie, who was sobbing now, and clinging to her friend's neck.

"To be sure I will, and I'll bring it myself, to save postage. Don't you be afraid, Minnie. I can take care of Pet Lawless, and won't let her be put down by no one. Good-by, now; I've only got five minutes, and I guess they're up by this time. Now don't cry and take on, Minnie; you'll see I'll learn so fast that I'll be sent home finished in a week!"

And with these mysterious words, Pet gave Erminie a parting kiss, and ran from the cottage just as the judge put his head out from the carriage to call her.

The journey now proceeded uninterruptedly. They remained that night at a hotel, and continued their journey next morning.

A little after noon, they reached the four-story building where Mrs. Moodie kept her costly and exclusive boarding establishment for the young female aristocracy of the land, and "trained up" (as her circulars had it) the rising female generation in all the branches of an English, French, musical, and religious education.

Judge Lawless and his daughter were shown into a magnificently-furnished drawing-room, where a "cullud pusson" took the gentleman's card and went off in search of the proprietress (if the word is admissible) of the establishment.

Fifteen minutes later, the rustle of silk resounded in the hall. Pet drew herself up straight as a ramrod, compressed her lips, cast down her eyes, folded her hands, and looked the very picture of a timid, bashful, shy little country-girl. Then the door opened, and magnificent in a four-flounced plaid silk, with a miraculous combination of lace and ribbons floating from her head, a tall, yellow, sharp-looking lady of middle-age floated in, and with a profound courtesy to the judge that made her four flounces balloon out around her, after the fashion of children when making "cheeses," dropped into a sofa, half-buried in a maze of floating drapery.

"This is Miss Lawless, I presume?" said Mrs. Moodie, with a bland smile and a wave of her hand toward Pet.

"Yes, madam, this is my daughter; and I consider it my duty to tell you beforehand that I am afraid she will occasion you a great deal of trouble."

"Oh! I hope not! You are a good little girlare you not, my dear?"with a sweet smile to Pet. "In what way, may I ask, my dear sir?"

"In many ways, madam. She is, in the first place, unbearably wild, and rude, and self-willed, andI regret to saydisobedient."

"Is it possible? I really would never have imagined185 it!" cried the lady, glancing in surprise and incredulity toward the shy, quiet looking little girl, sitting demurely in her chair, and not venturing to lift her eyes. "I think I have tamed far more desperate characters than this; in fact, I may say I know I have. Oh! I will have no trouble with your little girl! Why, she is one of the quietest looking little creatures I think I ever saw."

The Judge glanced toward Pet, and was half inclined to fly into a rage at discovering her so unlike herself, giving the direct lie, as it were, to his assertions.

“Come over here, my love,” said the lady, holding out her hand with a bland smile to Pet. “I want to see you.”

Pet, after the manner of little girls when they are frightened or embarrassed, instead of complying, rubbed her knuckles into her eyes, and pretended to cry.

“Get up, and do as you are told! How dare you act so?” said the judge, forgetting his “company manners” in his rage at what he could easily see was clever acting on Pet’s part.

“Now, pray, my dear sir, don’t frighten the poor little thing,” cried the dulcet tones of the lady. “Little girls are always nervous and frightened when first sent to school. Come here, my love; don’t be afraid of me!”

“Go!” thundered the judge, with a brow like a thunder-cloud.

Pet, still sniffling, got up and went over to Mrs. Moodie.

“What is your name, my dear?” smiled the lady, taking Pet’s little brown hand in her own snowy fingers.

“Pet-Pet-ronilla,” sobbed the elf.

“Now, you must not cry, dear; we will take the best of care of you here. Of course, you will miss your papa for a few days; but after that we will get along very nicely. Were you ever at school before?”

“Ye-es, ma-am.”

“What did you learn, love?”

“I don’t know.”

“Petronilla?” sternly began the judge.

“Now, pray, my dear sir,” remonstrated the silken tones of the lady, “leave it to me. Just see how you are frightening the poor little thing. You can read, my dear, of course!”

“Yes, ma-am.”

“What books have you read, love? have you read many?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“What was their names?”

“‘Jack and the Bean-stalk;’ ‘The Goose with the Golden Egg;’ ‘Little Red’”

“Oh! my dear, I don’t mean those! Have you read nothing else?”

“No, ma’am; only a spelling-book.”

“Can you write?”

“Yes, ma’am, when somebody holds my hand.”

“Have you studied grammar and geography? I suppose not, though.”

“She has, madam; at least she commenced,” said the judge.

“Ah, indeed! What is English Grammar, love?”

“A little book with a gray cover,” said Pet.

“No, no! What does English Grammar teach?”

“I don’t knowit never teached me anything; it was Mr. Hammer.”

“Oh, dear me! You are rather obtuse, I fear. Perhaps you know more of geography, though. Can you tell me how the earth is divided?”

“It ain’t divided!” said Pet, stoutly. “It’s all one piece!”

“Ah! I fear your teacher was none of the best,” said the lady, shaking her head. “We shall have to remedy all these defects in your education, however, as well as we can. I hope to send you a very different little girl home, judge.”

“I sincerely hope so,” said the judge, rising. “Farewell, madam. Good-by, Petronilla; be a good girlremember.”

“Oh, I’ll remember!” said Pet, significantly, accepting her father’s farewell salute, with a great deal of sang froid.

Mrs. Moodie politely bowed her stately guest out, and then turning to Petronilla, said:

“The young ladies are all in the class-room studying, my dear. Would you prefer going there, or shall I have you shown to your room?”

“I’ll go where the girlsI mean the young ladies are,” said Pet, following the rustling lady up-stairs.

“Very well, this way, then,” said madam, turning into a long hall with large white folding-doors at the end, through which came drowsily the subdued hum of recitation.

“Well; I think I have done the bashful up beautifully!” mentally exclaimed Petronilla. “I reckon I’ve amazed papa. Maybe I won’t surprise them some if not more, before this night’s over. Oh! won’t I dose them, though?”

And, chuckling inwardly, our wicked elf followed the stately Mrs. Moodie, who marched on ahead, in blissful ignorance of the diabolical plot brewing in Pet’s mischief-loving head.