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THE ATTACK ON THE MILL

BY EMILE ZOLA

"The Attack on the Mill" is Zola's contribution to a volume entitled "Les Soirées de Medan," made up of stories written by several friends at his country home. Maupassant's celebrated story, "Boule de Suif," made its first appearance in this volume. An ardent admirer and disciple of Balzac, Zola early conceived the idea of writing a connected history of a family and its branches, somewhat as Balzac had done in the "Comédie Humaine." He possessed remarkable power to analyze human nature and wrote in a style so realistic that he was often called upon to defend it. "The Attack on the Mill" is frequently cited as one of the best of his short stories.

THE ATTACK ON THE MILL

By EMILE ZOLA

I

It was high holiday at Father Merlier's mill on that pleasant summer afternoon. Three tables had been brought out into the garden and placed end to end in the shade of the great elm, and now they were awaiting the arrival of the guests. It was known throughout the length and breadth of the land that that day was to witness the betrothal of old Merlier's daughter, Françoise, to Dominique, a young man who was said to be not overfond of work, but whom never a woman for three leagues of the country around could look at without sparkling eyes, such a well-favored young fellow was he.

That mill of Father Merlier's was truly a very pleasant spot. It was situated right in the heart of Rocreuse, at the place where the main road makes a sharp bend. The village has but a single street, bordered on either side by a row of low, whitened cottages, but just there, where the road curves, there are broad stretches of meadow-land, and huge trees, which follow the course of the Morelle, cover the low grounds of the valley with a most delicious shade. All Lorraine has no more charming bit of nature to show. To right and left dense forests, great monarchs of the wood, centuries old, rise from the gentle slopes and fill the horizon with a sea of waving, trembling verdure, while away toward the south extends the plain, of wondrous fertility and checkered almost to infinity with its small enclosures, divided off from one another by their live hedges. But what makes the crowning glory of Rocreuse is the coolness of this verdurous nook, even in the hottest days of July and August. The Morelle comes down from the woods of Gagny, and it would seem as if it gathered to itself on the way all the delicious freshness of the foliage beneath which it glides for many a league; it brings down with it the murmuring sounds, the glacial, solemn shadows of the forest. And that is not the only source of coolness; there are running waters of all sorts singing among the copses; one can not take a step without coming on a gushing spring, and, as he makes his way along the narrow paths, seems to be treading above subterrene lakes that seek the air and sunshine through the moss above and profit by every smallest crevice, at the roots of trees or among the chinks and crannies of the rocks, to burst forth in fountains of crystalline clearness. So numerous and so loud are the whispering voices of these streams that they silence the song of the bullfinches. It is as if one were in an enchanted park, with cascades falling and flashing on every side.

The meadows below are never athirst. The shadows beneath the gigantic chestnut trees are of inky blackness, and along the edges of the fields long rows of poplars stand like walls of rustling foliage. There is a double avenue of huge plane trees ascending across the fields toward the ancient castle of Gagny, now gone to rack and ruin. In this region, where drought is never known, vegetation of all kinds is wonderfully rank; it is like a flower garden down there in the low ground between those two wooded hills, a natural garden, where the lawns are broad meadows and the giant trees represent colossal beds. When the noonday sun pours down his scorching rays the shadows lie blue upon the ground, vegetation slumbers in the genial warmth, while every now and then a breath of almost icy coldness rustles the foliage.

Such was the spot where Father Merlier's mill enlivened nature run riot with its cheerful clack. The building itself, constructed of wood and plaster, looked as if it might be coeval with our planet. Its foundations were in part laved by the Morelle, which here expands into a clear pool. A dam, a few feet in height, afforded sufficient head of water to drive the old wheel, which creaked and groaned as it revolved, with the asthmatic wheezing of a faithful servant who has grown old in her place. Whenever Father Merlier was advised to change it, he would shake his head and say that like as not a young wheel would be lazier and not so well acquainted with its duties, and then he would set to work and patch up the old one with anything that came to hand, old hogshead-staves, bits of rusty iron, zinc, or lead. The old wheel only seemed the gayer for it, with its odd, round countenance, all plumed and feathered with tufts of moss and grass, and when the water poured over it in a silvery tide its gaunt black skeleton was decked out with a gorgeous display of pearls and diamonds.

That portion of the mill which was bathed by the Morelle had something of the look of a Moorish arch that had been dropped down there by chance. A good half of the structure was built on piles; the water came in under the floor, and there were deep holes, famous throughout the whole country for the eels and the huge crawfish that were to be caught there. Below the fall the pool was as clear as a looking-glass, and when it was not clouded by foam from the wheel one could see great fish swimming about in it with the slow, majestic movements of a fleet. There was a broken stairway leading down to the stream, near a stake to which a boat was fastened, and over the wheel was a gallery of wood. Such windows as there were were arranged without any attempt at order. The whole was a quaint conglomeration of nooks and corners, bits of wall, additions made here and there as afterthoughts, beams and roofs, that gave the mill the aspect of an old dismantled citadel; but ivy and all sorts of creeping plants had grown luxuriantly and kindly covered up such crevices as were too unsightly, casting a mantle of green over the old dwelling. Young ladies who passed that way used to stop and sketch Father Merlier's mill in their albums.

The side of the house that faced the road was less irregular. A gateway in stone afforded access to the principal courtyard, on the right and left hand of which were sheds and stables. Beside a well stood an immense elm that threw its shade over half the court. At the further end, opposite the gate, stood the house, surmounted by a dovecote, the four windows of its first floor symmetrically alined. The only manifestation of pride that Father Merlier ever allowed himself was to paint this façade every ten years. It had just been freshly whitened at the time of our story, and dazzled the eyes of all the village when the sun lighted it up in the middle of the day.

For twenty years had Father Merlier been mayor of Rocreuse. He was held in great consideration on account of his fortune; he was supposed to be worth something like eighty thousand francs, the result of patient saving. When he married Madeleine Guilliard, who brought him the mill as her dowry, his entire capital lay in his two strong arms; but Madeleine had never repented of her choice, so manfully had he conducted their joint affairs. Now his wife was dead, and he was left a widower with his daughter Françoise. Doubtless he might have sat himself down to take his rest and suffered the old mill-wheel to sleep among its moss, but he would have found the occupation too irksome and the house would have seemed dead to him, so he kept on working still, for the pleasure of it. In those days Father Merlier was a tall old man, with a long, unspeaking face, on which a laugh was never seen, but beneath which there lay, none the less, a large fund of good-humor. He had been elected mayor on account of his money, and also for the impressive air that he knew how to assume when it devolved on him to marry a couple.

Françoise Merlier had just completed her eighteenth year. She was small, and for that reason was not accounted one of the beauties of the country. Until she reached the age of fifteen she was even homely; the good folks of Rocreuse could not see how it was that the daughter of Father and Mother Merlier, such a hale, vigorous couple, had such a hard time of it in getting her growth. When she was fifteen, however, though still remaining delicate, a change came over her and she took on the prettiest little face imaginable. She had black eyes, black hair, and was red as a rose withal; her little mouth was always graced with a charming smile, there were delicious dimples in her cheeks, and a crown of sunshine seemed to be ever resting on her fair, candid forehead. Although small as girls went in that region, she was far from being slender; she might not have been able to raise a sack of wheat to her shoulder, but she became quite plump with age and gave promise of becoming eventually as well-rounded and appetizing as a partridge. Her father's habits of taciturnity had made her reflective while yet a young girl; if she always had a smile on her lips it was in order to give pleasure to others. Her natural disposition was serious.

As was no more than to be expected, she had every young man in the countryside at her heels as a suitor, more even for her money than for her attractiveness, and she had made a choice at last, a choice that had been the talk and scandal of the entire neighborhood. On the other side of the Morelle lived a strapping young fellow who went by the name of Dominique Penquer. He was not to the manor born; ten years previously he had come to Rocreuse from Belgium to receive the inheritance of an uncle who had owned a small property on the very borders of the forest of Gagny, just facing the mill and distant from it only a few musket-shots. His object in coming was to sell the property, so he said, and return to his own home

again; but he must have found the land to his liking for he made no move to go away. He was seen cultivating his bit of a field and gathering the few vegetables that afforded him an existence. He hunted, he fished; more than once he was near coming in contact with the law through the intervention of the keepers. This independent way of living, of which the peasants could not very clearly see the resources, had in the end given him a bad name. He was vaguely looked on as nothing better than a poacher. At all events he was lazy, for he was frequently found sleeping in the grass at hours when he should have been at work. Then, too, the hut in which he lived, in the shade of the last trees of the forest, did not seem like the abode of an honest young man; the old women would not have been surprised at any time to hear that he was on friendly terms with the wolves in the ruins of Gagny. Still, the young girls would now and then venture to stand up for him, for he was altogether a splendid specimen of manhood, was this individual of doubtful antecedents, tall and straight as a young poplar, with a milk-white skin and ruddy hair and beard that seemed to be of gold when the sun shone on them. Now one fine morning it came to pass that Françoise told Father Merlier that she loved Dominique and that never, never would she consent to marry any other young man.

It may be imagined what a knockdown blow it was that Father Merlier received that day! As was his wont, he said never a word; his countenance wore its usual reflective look, only the fun that used to bubble up from within no longer shone in his eyes. Françoise, too, was very serious, and for a week father and daughter scarcely spoke to each other. What troubled Father Merlier was to know how that rascal of a poacher had succeeded in bewitching his daughter. Dominique had never shown himself at the mill. The miller played the spy a little, and was rewarded by catching sight of the gallant, on the other side of the Morelle, lying among the grass and pretending to be asleep. Françoise could see him from her chamber window. The thing was clear enough; they had been making sheep's eyes at each other over the old mill-wheel, and so had fallen in love.

A week slipped by; Françoise became more and more serious. Father Merlier still continued to say nothing. Then, one evening, of his own accord, he brought Dominique to the house, without a word. Françoise was just setting the table. She made no demonstration of surprise; all she did was to add another plate, but her laugh had come back to her and the little dimples appeared again upon her cheeks. Father Merlier had gone that morning to look for Dominique at his hut on the edge of the forest, and there the two men had had a conference, with closed doors and windows, that lasted three hours. No one ever knew what they said to each other; the only thing certain is that when Father Merlier left the hut he already treated Dominique as a son. Doubtless the old man had discovered that he whom he had gone to visit was a worthy young man, even though he did lie in the grass to gain the love of young girls.

All Rocreuse was up in arms. The women gathered at their doors and could not find words strong enough to characterize Father Merlier's folly in thus receiving a ne'er-do-well into his family. He let them talk. Perhaps he thought of his own marriage. Neither had he possessed a penny to his name at the time when he married Madeleine and her mill, and yet that had not prevented him from being a good husband to her. Moreover Dominique put an end to their tittle-tattle by setting to work in such strenuous fashion that all the countryside was amazed. It so happened just then that the boy of the mill drew an unlucky number and had to go for a soldier, and Dominique would not hear to their engaging another. He lifted sacks, drove the cart, wrestled with the old wheel when it took an obstinate fit and refused to turn, and all so pluckily and cheerfully that people came from far and near merely for the pleasure of seeing him. Father Merlier laughed his silent laugh. He was highly elated that he had read the youngster aright. There is nothing like love to hearten up young men.

In the midst of all that laborious toil Françoise and Dominique fairly worshiped each other. They had not much to say, but their tender smiles conveyed a world of meaning. Father Merlier had not said a word thus far on the subject of their marriage, and they had both respected his silence, waiting until the old man should see fit to give expression to his will. At last, one day along toward the middle of July, he had had three tables laid in the courtyard, in the shade of the big elm, and had invited his friends of Rocreuse to come that afternoon and drink a glass of wine with him. When the courtyard was filled with people and every one there had a full glass in his hand, Father Merlier raised his own high above his head and said:

"I have the pleasure of announcing to you that Françoise and this stripling will be married in a month from now, on Saint Louis's fête-day."

Then there was a universal touching of glasses, attended by a tremendous uproar; every one was laughing. But Father Merlier, raising his voice above the din, again spoke:

"Dominique, kiss your wife that is to be. It is no more than customary."

And they kissed, very red in the face, both of them, while the company laughed louder still. It was a regular fête; they emptied a small cask. Then, when only the intimate friends of the house remained, conversation went on in a calmer strain. Night had fallen, a starlit night and very clear. Dominique and Françoise sat on a bench, side by side, and said nothing. An old peasant spoke of the war that the emperor had declared against Prussia. All the lads of the village were already gone off to the army. Troops had passed through the place only the night before. There were going to be hard knocks.

"Bah!" said Father Merlier, with the selfishness of a man who is quite happy, "Dominique is a foreigner, he won't have to go—and if the Prussians come this way, he will be here to defend his wife."

The idea of the Prussians coming there seemed to the company an exceedingly good joke. The army would give them one good, conscientious thrashing and the affair would be quickly ended.

"I have seen them, I have seen them," the old peasant repeated in a low voice.

There was silence for a little, then they all touched glasses once again. Françoise and Dominique had heard nothing; they had managed to clasp hands behind the bench in such a way as not to be seen by the others, and this condition of affairs seemed so beatific to them that they sat there, mute, their gaze lost in the darkness of the night.

What a magnificent, balmy night! The village lay slumbering on either side of the white road as peacefully as a little child. The deep silence was undisturbed save by the occasional crow of a cock in some distant barnyard, acting on a mistaken impression that dawn was at hand. Perfumed breaths of air, like long-drawn sighs, almost, came down from the great woods that lay around and above, sweeping softly over the roofs, as if caressing them. The meadows, with their black intensity of shadow, took on a dim, mysterious majesty of their own, while all the springs, all the brooks and watercourses that gargled and trickled in the darkness, might have been taken for the cool and rhythmical breathing of the sleeping country. Every now and then the old dozing mill-wheel, like a watchdog that barks uneasily in his slumber, seemed to be dreaming as if it were endowed with some strange form of life; it creaked, it groaned, it talked to itself, rocked by the fall of the Morelle, whose current gave forth the deep, sustained music of an organ pipe. Never was there a more charming or happier nook, never did more entire or deeper peace come down to cover it.

II

One month later to a day, on the eve of the fête of Saint Louis, Rocreuse was in a state of alarm and dismay. The Prussians had beaten the emperor and were advancing on the village by forced marches. For a week past people passing along the road had brought tidings of the enemy: "They are at Lormières, they are at Novelles;" and by dint of hearing so many stories of the rapidity of their advance, Rocreuse woke up every morning in the full expectation of seeing them swarming down out of Gagny wood. They did not come, however, and that only served to make the affright the greater. They would certainly fall upon the village in the night-time, and put every soul to the sword.

There had been an alarm the night before, a little before daybreak. The inhabitants had been aroused by a great noise of men tramping upon the road. The women were already throwing themselves upon their knees and making the sign of the cross when some one, to

whom it happily occurred to peep through a half-opened window, caught sight of red trousers. It was a French detachment. The captain had forthwith asked for the mayor, and, after a long conversation with Father Merlier, had remained at the mill.

The sun rose bright and clear that morning, giving promise of a warm day. There was a golden light floating over the woodland, while in the low grounds white mists were rising from the meadows. The pretty village, so neat and trim, awoke in the cool dawning, and the country, with its stream and its fountains, was as gracious as a freshly plucked bouquet. But the beauty of the day brought gladness to the face of no one; the villagers had watched the captain and seen him circle round and round the old mill, examine the adjacent houses, then pass to the other bank of the Morelle and from thence scan the country with a field-glass; Father Merlier, who accompanied him, appeared to be giving explanations. After that the captain had posted some of his men behind walls, behind trees, or in hollows. The main body of the detachment had encamped in the courtyard of the mill. So there was going to be a fight, then? And when Father Merlier returned, they questioned him. He spoke no word, but slowly and sorrowfully nodded his head. Yes, there was going to be a fight.

Françoise and Dominique were there in the courtyard, watching him. He finally took his pipe from his lips and gave utterance to these few words:

"Ah! my poor children, I shall not be able to marry you to-day!"

Dominique, with lips tight set and an angry frown upon his forehead, raised himself on tiptoe from time to time and stood with eyes bent on Gagny wood, as if he would have been glad to see the Prussians appear and end the suspense they were in. Françoise, whose face was grave and very pale, was constantly passing back and forth, supplying the needs of the soldiers. They were preparing their soup in a corner of the courtyard, joking and chaffing one another while awaiting their meal.

The captain appeared to be highly pleased. He had visited the chambers and the great hall of the mill that looked out on the stream. Now, seated beside the well, he was conversing with Father Merlier.

"You have a regular fortress here," he was saying. "We shall have no trouble in holding it until evening. The bandits are late; they ought to be here by this time."

The miller looked very grave. He saw his beloved mill going up in flame and smoke, but uttered no word of remonstrance or complaint, considering that it would be useless. He only opened his mouth to say:

"You ought to take steps to hide the boat; there is a hole behind the wheel fitted to hold it. Perhaps you may find it of use to you."

The captain gave an order to one of his men. This captain was a tall, fine-looking man of about forty, with an agreeable expression of countenance. The sight of Dominique and Françoise seemed to afford him much pleasure; he watched them as if he had forgotten all about the approaching conflict. He followed Françoise with his eyes as she moved about the courtyard, and his manner showed clearly enough that he thought her charming. Then, turning to Dominique:

"You are not with the army, I see, my boy?" he abruptly asked.

"I am a foreigner," the young man replied.

The captain did not seem particularly pleased with the answer; he winked his eyes and smiled. Françoise was doubtless a more agreeable companion than a musket would have been. Dominique, noticing his smile, made haste to add:

"I am a foreigner, but I can lodge a rifle-bullet in an apple at five hundred yards. See, there's my rifle, behind you."

"You may find use for it," the captain dryly answered.

Françoise had drawn near; she was trembling a little, and Dominique, regardless of the bystanders, took and held firmly clasped in his own the two hands that she held forth to him, as if committing herself to his protection. The captain smiled again, but said nothing more. He remained seated, his sword between his legs, his eyes fixed on space, apparently lost in dreamy reverie.

It was ten o'clock. The heat was already oppressive. A deep silence prevailed. The soldiers had sat down in the shade of the sheds in the courtyard and begun to eat their soup. Not a sound came from the village, where the inhabitants had all barricaded their houses, doors, and windows. A dog, abandoned by his master, howled mournfully upon the road. From the woods and the near-by meadows, that lay fainting in the heat, came a long-drawn whispering, soughing sound, produced by the union of what wandering breaths of air there were. A cuckoo sang. Then the silence became deeper still.

And all at once, upon that lazy, sleepy air, a shot rang out. The captain rose quickly to his feet, the soldiers left their half-emptied plates. In a few seconds all were at their posts; the mill was occupied from top to bottom. And yet the captain, who had gone out through the gate, saw nothing; to right and left the road stretched away, desolate and blindingly white in the fierce sunshine. A second report was heard, and still nothing to be seen, not even so much as a shadow; but just as he was turning to reenter he chanced to look over toward Gagny and there beheld a little puff of smoke, floating away on the tranquil air, like thistle-down. The deep peace of the forest was apparently unbroken.

"The rascals have occupied the wood," the officer murmured. "They know we are here."

Then the firing went on, and became more and more continuous, between the French soldiers posted about the mill and the Prussians concealed among the trees. The bullets whistled over the Morelle without doing any mischief on either side. The firing was irregular; every bush seemed to have its marksman, and nothing was to be seen save those bluish smoke wreaths that hung for a moment on the wind before they vanished. It lasted thus for nearly two hours. The officer hummed a tune with a careless air. Françoise and Dominique, who had remained in the courtyard, raised themselves to look out over a low wall. They were more particularly interested in a little soldier who had his post on the bank of the Morelle, behind the hull of an old boat; he would lie face downward on the ground, watch his chance, deliver his fire, then slip back into a ditch a few steps in his rear to reload, and his movements were so comical, he displayed such cunning and activity, that it was difficult for any one watching him to refrain from smiling. He must have caught sight of a Prussian, for he rose quickly and brought his piece to the shoulder, but before he could discharge it he uttered a loud cry, whirled completely around in his tracks and fell backward into the ditch, where for an instant his legs moved convulsively, just as the claws of a fowl do when it is beheaded. The little soldier had received a bullet directly through his heart. It was the first casualty of the day. Françoise instinctively seized Dominique's hand and held it tight in a convulsive grasp.

"Come away from there," said the captain. "The bullets reach us here."

As if to confirm his words, a slight, sharp sound was heard up in the old elm, and the end of a branch came to the ground, turning over and over as it fell, but the two young people never stirred, riveted to the spot as they were by the interest of the spectacle. On the edge of the wood a Prussian had suddenly emerged from behind a tree, as an actor comes upon the stage from the wings, beating the air with his arms and falling over upon his back. And beyond that there was no movement; the two dead men appeared to be sleeping in the bright sunshine; there was not a soul to be seen in the fields on which the heat lay heavy. Even the sharp rattle of the musketry had ceased. Only the Morelle kept on whispering to itself with its low, musical murmur.

Father Merlier looked at the captain with an astonished air, as if to inquire whether that were the end of it.

"Here comes their attack," the officer murmured. "Look out for yourself! Don't stand there!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a terrible discharge of musketry ensued. The great elm was riddled, its leaves came eddying down as thick as snowflakes. Fortunately the Prussians had aimed too high. Dominique dragged, almost carried Françoise from the spot, while Father Merlier followed them, shouting:

"Get into the small cellar, the walls are thicker there."

But they paid no attention to him; they made their way to the main hall, where ten or a dozen soldiers were silently waiting, watching events outside through the chinks of the closed shutters. The captain was left alone in the courtyard, where he sheltered himself behind the low wall, while the furious fire was maintained uninterruptedly. The soldiers whom he had posted outside only yielded their ground inch by inch; they came crawling in, however, one after another, as the enemy dislodged them from their positions. Their instructions were to gain all the time they could, taking care not to show themselves, in order that the Prussians might remain in ignorance of the force they had opposed to them. Another hour passed, and at> a sergeant came in, reporting that there were now only two or three men left outside, the officer took his watch from his pocket, murmuring:

"Half-past two. Come, we must hold out for four hours yet."

He caused the great gate of the courtyard to be tightly secured and everything was made ready for an energetic defense. The Prussians were on the other side of the Morelle, consequently there was no reason to fear an assault at the moment. There was a bridge, indeed, a mile and a quarter away, but they were probably unaware of Its existence, and it was hardly to be supposed that they would attempt to cross the stream by fording. The officer therefore simply caused the road to be watched; the attack, when it came, was to be looked for from the direction of the fields.

The firing had ceased again. The mill appeared to lie there in the sunlight, void of all life. Not a shutter was open, not a sound came from within. Gradually, however, the Prussians began to show themselves at the edge of Gagny wood. Heads were protruded here and there; they seemed to be mustering up their courage. Several of the soldiers within the mill brought up their pieces to an aim, but the captain shouted:

"No, no; not yet; wait. Let them come nearer."

They displayed a great deal of prudence in their advance, looking at the mill with a distrustful air; they seemed hardly to know what to make of the old structure, so lifeless and gloomy, with its curtains of ivy. Still, they kept on advancing. When there were fifty of them or so in the open, directly opposite, the officer uttered one word:

"Now!"

A crashing, tearing discharge burst from the position, succeeded by an irregular, dropping fire. François, trembling violently, involuntarily raised her hands to her ears. Dominique, from his position behind the soldiers, pressed out upon the field, and when the smoke drifted away a little, counted three Prussians extended on their backs in the middle of the meadow. The others had sought shelter among the willows and the poplars. And then commenced the siege.

For more than an hour the mill was riddled with bullets; they beat and rattled on its old walls like hail. The noise they made was plainly audible as they struck the stone-work, were flattened, and fell back into the water; they buried themselves in the woodwork with a dull thud. Occasionally a creaking sound would announce that the wheel had been hit. Within the building the soldiers husbanded their ammunition, firing only when they could see something to aim at. The captain kept consulting his watch every few minutes, and as a ball split one of the shutters in halves and then lodged in the ceiling:

"Four o'clock," he murmured. "We shall never be able to hold the position."

The old mill, in truth, was gradually going to pieces beneath that terrific fire. A shutter that had been perforated again and again until it looked like a piece of lace, fell off its hinges

into the water and had to be replaced by a mattress. Every moment, almost, Father Merlier exposed himself to the fire in order to take account of the damage sustained by his poor wheel, every wound of which was like a bullet in his own heart. Its period of usefulness was ended this time, for certain; he would never be able to patch it up again. Dominique had besought Françoise to retire to a place of safety, but she was determined to remain with him; she had taken a seat behind a great oaken clothes-press, which afforded her protection. A ball struck the press, however, the sides of which gave out a dull, hollow sound, whereupon Dominique stationed himself in front of Françoise. He had as yet taken no part in the firing, although he had his rifle in his hand; the soldiers occupied the whole breadth of the windows, so that he could not get near them. At every discharge the floor trembled.

"Look out! look out!" the captain suddenly shouted.

He had just descried a dark mass emerging from the wood. As soon as they gained the open they set up a telling platoon fire. It struck the mill like a tornado. Another shutter parted company and the bullets came whistling in through the yawning aperture. Two soldiers rolled upon the floor; one lay where he fell and never moved a limb; his comrades pushed him up against the wall because he was in their way. The other writhed and twisted, beseeching some one to end his agony, but no one had ears for the poor wretch; the bullets were still pouring in and every one was looking out for himself and searching for a loop-hole whence he might answer the enemy's fire. A third soldier was wounded; that one said not a word, but with staring, haggard eyes sank down beneath a table. François, horror-stricken by the dreadful spectacle of the dead and dying men, mechanically pushed away her chair and seated herself on the floor, against the wall; it seemed to her that she would be smaller there and less exposed. In the meantime men had gone and secured all the mattresses in the house; the opening of the window was partially closed again. The hall was filled with débris of every description, broken weapons, dislocated furniture.

"Five o'clock," said the captain. "Stand fast, boys. They are going to make an attempt to pass the stream."

Just then Françoise gave a shriek. A bullet had struck the floor and, rebounding, grazed her forehead on the ricochet. A few drops of blood appeared. Dominique looked at her, then went to the window and fired his first shot, and from that time kept on firing uninterruptedly. He kept on loading and discharging his piece mechanically, paying no attention to what was passing at his side, only pausing from time to time to cast a look at Françoise. He did not fire hurriedly or at random, moreover, but took deliberate aim. As the captain had predicted, the Prussians were skirting the belt of poplars and attempting the passage of the Morelle, but each time that one of them showed himself he fell with one of Dominique's bullets in his brain. The captain, who was watching the performance, was amazed; he complimented the young man, telling him that he would like to have many more marksmen of his skill. Dominique did not hear a word he said. A ball struck him in the shoulder, another raised a contusion on his arm. And still he kept on firing.

There were two more deaths. The mattresses were torn to shreds and no longer availed to stop the windows. The last volley that was poured in seemed as if it would carry away the mill bodily, so fierce it was. The position was no longer tenable. Still, the officer kept repeating:

"Stand fast. Another half-hour yet."

He was counting the minutes, one by one, now. He had promised his commanders that he would hold the enemy there until nightfall, and he would not budge a hair's-breadth before the moment that he had fixed on for his withdrawal. He maintained his pleasant air of good-humor, smiling at Françoise by way of reassuring her. He had picked up the musket of one of the dead soldiers and was firing away with the rest.

There were but four soldiers left in the room. The Prussians were showing themselves *en masse* on the other bank of the Morelle, and it was evident that they might now pass the stream at any moment. A few moments more elapsed; the captain was as determined as ever and would not give the order to retreat, when a sergeant came running into the room, saying:

"They are on the road; they are going to take us in rear."

The Prussians must have discovered the bridge. The captain drew out his watch again.

"Five minutes more," he said. "They won't be here within five minutes."

Then exactly at six o'clock, he at last withdrew his men through a little postern that opened on a narrow lane, whence they threw themselves into the ditch and in that way reached the forest of Sauval. The captain took leave of Father Merlier with much politeness, apologizing profusely for the trouble he had caused. He even added:

"Try to keep them occupied for a while. We shall return."

While this was occurring Dominique had remained alone in the hall. He was still firing away, hearing nothing, conscious of nothing; his sole thought was to defend Françoise. The soldiers were all gone and he had not the remotest idea of the fact; he aimed and brought down his man at every shot. All at once there was a great tumult. The Prussians had entered the courtyard from the rear. He fired his last shot, and they fell upon him with his weapon still smoking in his hand.

It required four men to hold him; the rest of them swarmed about him, vociferating like madmen in their horrible dialect. Françoise rushed forward to intercede with her prayers. They were on the point of killing him on the spot, but an officer came in and made them turn the prisoner over to him. After exchanging a few words in German with his men he turned to Dominique and said to him roughly, in very good French:

"You will be shot in two hours from now."

III

It was the standing regulation, laid down by the German staff, that every Frenchman, not belonging to the regular army, taken with arms in his hands, should be shot. Even the *compagnies franches* were not recognized as belligerents. It was the intention of the Germans, in making such terrible examples of the peasants who attempted to defend their firesides, to prevent a rising *en masse*, which they greatly dreaded.

The officer, a tall, spare man about fifty years old, subjected Dominique to a brief examination. Although he spoke French fluently, he was unmistakably Prussian in the stiffness of his manner.

"You are a native of this country?"

"No, I am a Belgian."

"Why did you take up arms? These are matters with which you have no concern."

Dominique made no reply. At this moment the officer caught sight of Françoise where she stood listening, very pale; her slight wound had marked her white forehead with a streak of red. He looked from one to the other of the young people and appeared to understand the situation; he merely added:

"You do not deny having fired on my men?"

"I fired as long as I was able to do so," Dominique quietly replied.

The admission was scarcely necessary, for he was black with powder, wet with sweat, and the blood from the wound in his shoulder had trickled down and stained his clothing.

"Very well," the officer repeated. "You will be shot two hours hence."

Françoise uttered no cry. She clasped her hands and raised them above her head in a gesture of mute despair. Her action was not lost upon the officer. Two soldiers had led Dominique away to an adjacent room where their orders were to guard him and not lose sight of him. The girl had sunk upon a chair; her strength had failed her; her legs refused to support her; she was denied the relief of tears; it seemed as if her emotion was strangling her. The officer continued to examine her attentively and finally addressed her:

"Is that young man your brother?" he inquired.

She shook her head in negation. He was as rigid and unbending as ever, without the suspicion of a smile on his face. Then, after an interval of silence, he spoke again:

"Has he been living in the neighborhood long?"

She answered yes, by another motion of the head.

"Then he must be well acquainted with the woods about here?"

This time she made a verbal answer. "Yes, sir," she said, looking at him with some astonishment.

He said nothing more, but turned on his heel, requesting that the mayor of the village should be brought before him. But Françoise had risen from her chair, a faint tinge of color on her cheeks, believing that she had caught the significance of his questions, and with renewed hope she ran off to look for her father.

As soon as the firing had ceased Father Merlier had hurriedly descended by the wooden gallery to have a look at his wheel. He adored his daughter and had a strong feeling of affection for Dominique, his son-in-law who was to be: but his wheel also occupied a large space in his heart. Now that the two little ones, as he called them, had come safe and sound out of the fray, he thought of his other love, which must have suffered sorely, poor thing, and bending over the great wooden skeleton he was scrutinizing its wounds with a heartbroken air. Five of the buckets were reduced to splinters, the central framework was honeycombed. He was thrusting his fingers into the cavities that the bullets had made to see how deep they were, and reflecting how he was ever to repair all that damage. When Françoise found him he was already plugging up the crevices with moss and such débris as he could lay hands on.

"They are asking for you, father," said she.

And at last she wept as she told him what she had just heard. Father Merlier shook his head. It was not customary to shoot people like that. He would have to look into the matter. And he reentered the mill with his usual placid, silent air. When the officer made his demand for supplies for his men, he answered that the people of Rocreuse were not accustomed to be ridden roughshod, and that nothing would be obtained from them through violence; he was willing to assume all the responsibility, but only on condition that he was allowed to act independently. The officer at first appeared to take umbrage at this easy way of viewing matters, but finally gave way before the old man's brief and distinct representations. As the latter was leaving the room the other recalled him to ask:

"Those woods there, opposite, what do you call them?"

"The woods of Sauval."

"And how far do they extend?"

The miller looked him straight in the face. "I do not know," he replied.

And he withdrew. An hour later the subvention in money and provisions that the officer had demanded was in the courtyard of the mill. Night was closing in; Françoise followed every movement of the soldiers with an anxious eye. She never once left the vicinity of the room in which Dominique was imprisoned. About seven o'clock she had a harrowing emotion; she saw the officer enter the prisoner's apartment and for a quarter of an hour heard

their voices raised in violent discussion. The officer came to the door for a moment and gave an order in German which she did not understand, but when twelve men came and formed in the courtyard with shouldered muskets, she was seized with a fit of trembling and felt as if she should die. It was all over, then; the execution was about to take place. The twelve men remained there ten minutes; Dominique's voice kept rising higher and higher in a tone of vehement denial. Finally the officer came out, closing the door behind him with a vicious bang and saying:

"Very well; think it over. I give you until to-morrow morning."

And he ordered the twelve men to break ranks by a motion of his hand. Françoise was stupefied. Father Merlier, who had continued to puff away at his pipe while watching the platoon with a simple, curious air, came and took her by the arm with fatherly gentleness. He led her to her chamber.

"Don't fret," he said to her; "try to get some sleep. To-morrow it will be light and we shall see more clearly."

He locked the door behind him as he left the room. It was a fixed principle with him that women are good for nothing and that they spoil everything whenever they meddle in important matters. Françoise did not retire to her couch, however; she remained a long time seated on her bed, listening to the various noises in the house. The German soldiers quartered in the courtyard were singing and laughing; they must have kept up their eating and drinking until eleven o'clock, for the riot never ceased for an instant. Heavy footsteps resounded from time to time through the mill itself, doubtless the tramp of the guards as they were relieved. What had most interest for her was the sounds that she could catch in the room that lay directly under her own; several times she threw herself prone upon the floor and applied her ear to the boards. That room was the one in which they had locked up Dominique. He must have been pacing the apartment, for she could hear for a long time his regular, cadenced tread passing from the wall to the window and back again; then there was a deep silence; doubtless he had seated himself. The other sounds ceased, too; everything was still. When it seemed to her that the house was sunk in slumber she raised her window as noiselessly as possible and leaned out.

Without, the night was serene and balmy. The slender crescent of the moon, which was just setting behind Sauval wood, cast a dim radiance over the landscape. The lengthening shadows of the great trees stretched far athwart the fields in bands of blackness, while in such spots as were unobscured the grass appeared of a tender green, soft as velvet. But Françoise did not stop to consider the mysterious charm of night. She was scrutinizing the country and looking to see where the Germans had posted their sentinels. She could clearly distinguish their dark forms outlined along the course of the Morelle. There was only one stationed opposite the mill, on the far bank of the stream, by a willow whose branches dipped in the water. Françoise had an excellent view of him; he was a tall young man, standing quite motionless with face upturned toward the sky, with the meditative air of a shepherd.

When she had completed her careful inspection of localities she returned and took her former seat upon the bed. She remained there an hour, absorbed in deep thought. Then she listened again; there was not a breath to be heard in the house. She went again to the window and took another look outside, but one of the moon's horns was still hanging above the edge of the forest, and this circumstance doubtless appeared to her unpropitious, for she resumed her waiting. At last the moment seemed to have arrived; the night was now quite dark; she could no longer discern the sentinel opposite her, the landscape lay before her black as a sea of ink. She listened intently for a moment, then formed her resolve. Close beside her window was an iron ladder made of bars set in the wall, which ascended from the mill-wheel to the granary at the top of the building and had formerly served the miller as a means of inspecting certain portions of the gearing, but a change having been made in the machinery the ladder had long since become lost to sight beneath the thick ivy that covered all that side of the mill. Françoise bravely climbed over the balustrade of the little balcony in front of her window, grasped one of the iron bars and found herself suspended in space. She commenced the descent; her skirts were a great hindrance to her. Suddenly a stone became loosened from the wall and fell into the Morelle with a loud splash. She stopped, benumbed with fear, but

reflection quickly told her that the waterfall, with its continuous roar, was sufficient to deaden any noise that she could make, and then she descended more boldly, putting aside the ivy with her foot, testing each round of her ladder. When she was on a level with the room that had been converted into a prison for her lover she stopped. An unforeseen difficulty came near depriving her of all her courage: the window of the room beneath was not situated directly under the window of her bedroom, there was a wide space between it and the ladder, and when she extended her hand it only encountered the naked wall.

Would she have to go back the way she came and leave her project unaccomplished? Her arms were growing very tired, the murmuring of the Morelle, far down below, was beginning to make her dizzy. Then she broke off bits of plaster from the wall and threw them against Dominique's window. He did not hear; perhaps he was asleep. Again she crumbled fragments from the wall, until the skin was peeled from her fingers. Her strength was exhausted, she felt that she was about to fall backward into the stream, when at last Dominique softly raised his sash.

"It is I," she murmured. "Take me quick; I am about to fall." Leaning from the window he grasped her and drew her into the room, where she had a paroxysm of weeping, stifling her sobs in order that she might not be heard. Then, by a supreme effort of the will, she overcame her emotion.

"Are you guarded?" she asked, in a low voice.

Dominique, not yet recovered from his stupefaction at seeing her there, made answer by simply pointing toward his door. There was a sound of snoring audible on the outside; it was evident that the sentinel had been overpowered by sleep and had thrown himself upon the floor close against the door in such a way that it could not be opened without arousing him.

"You must fly," she continued earnestly. "I came here to bid you fly and say farewell."

But he seemed not to hear her. He kept repeating:

"What, is it you, is it you? Oh, what a fright you gave me! You might have killed yourself." He took her hands, he kissed them again and again. "How I love you, Françoise! You are as courageous as you are good. The only thing I feared was that I might die without seeing you again, but you are here, and now they may shoot me when they will. Let me but have a quarter of an hour with you and I am ready."

He had gradually drawn her to him; her head was resting on his shoulder. The peril that was so near at hand brought them closer to each other, and they forgot everything in that long embrace.

"Ah, François!" Dominique went on in low, caressing tones, "to-day is the fête of Saint Louis, our wedding-day, that we have been waiting for so long. Nothing has been able to keep us apart, for we are both here, faithful to our appointment, are we not? It is now our wedding morning."

"Yes, yes," she repeated after him, "our wedding morning."

They shuddered as they exchanged a kiss. But suddenly she tore herself from his arms; the terrible reality arose before her eyes.

"You must fly, you must fly," she murmured breathlessly. "There is not a moment to lose." And as he stretched out his arms in the darkness to draw her to him again, she went on in tender, beseeching tones: "Oh! listen to me, I entreat you. If you die, I shall die. In an hour it will be daylight. Go, go at once; I command you to go."

Then she rapidly explained her plan to him. The iron ladder extended downward to the wheel; once he had got that far he could climb down by means of the buckets and get into the boat, which was hidden in a recess. Then it would be an easy matter for him to reach the other bank of the stream and make his escape.

"But are there no sentinels?" said he.

"Only one, directly opposite here, at the foot of the first willow."

"And if he sees me, if he gives the alarm?"

Françoise shuddered. She placed in his hand a knife that she had brought down with her. They were silent.

"And your father—and you?" Dominique continued. "But no, it is not to be thought of; I must not fly. When I am no longer here those soldiers are capable of murdering you. You do not know them. They offered to spare my life if I would guide them into Sauval forest. When they discover that I have escaped their fury will be such that they will be ready for every atrocity."

The girl did not stop to argue the question. To all the considerations that he adduced, her one simple answer was: "Fly. For love of me, fly. If you love me, Dominique, do not linger here a single moment longer."

She promised that she would return to her bedroom; no one should know that she had assisted him. She concluded by folding him in her arms and smothering him with kisses, in an extravagant outburst of passion. He was vanquished. He put only one more question to her:

"Will you swear to me that your father knows what you are doing and that he counsels my flight?"

"It was my father who sent me to you," Françoise unhesitatingly replied.

She told a falsehood. At that moment she had but one great, overmastering longing, to know that he was in safety, to escape from the horrible thought that the morning's sun was to be the signal for his death. When he should be far away, then calamity and evil might burst upon her head; whatever fate might be in store for her would seem endurable, so that only his life might be spared. Before and above all other considerations, the selfishness of her love demanded that he should be saved.

"It is well," said Dominique; "I will do as you desire."

No further word was spoken. Dominique went to the window to raise it again. But suddenly there was a noise that chilled them with affright. The door was shaken violently, they thought that some one was about to open it; it was evidently a party going the rounds who had heard their voices. They stood by the window, close locked in each other's arms, awaiting the event with anguish unspeakable. Again there came the rattling at the door, but it did not open. Each of them drew a deep sigh of relief; they saw how it was; the soldier lying across the threshold had turned over in his sleep. Silence was restored, indeed, and presently the snoring commenced again, sounding like sweetest music in their ears.

Dominique insisted that Françoise should return to her room first of all. He took her in his arms, he bade her a silent farewell, then assisted her to grasp the ladder, and himself climbed out on it in turn. He refused to descend a single step, however, until he knew that she was in her chamber. When she was safe in her room she let fall, in a voice scarce louder than the whispering breeze, the words:

"*Au revoir*, I love you!"

She knelt at the window, resting her elbows on the sill, straining her eyes to follow Dominique. The night was still very dark. She looked for the sentinel, but could see nothing of him; the willow alone was dimly visible, a pale spot upon the surrounding blackness. For a moment she heard the rustling of the ivy as Dominique descended, then the wheel creaked, and there was a faint plash which told that the young man had found the boat. This was confirmed when, a minute later, she descried the shadowy outline of the skiff on the gray bosom of the Morelle. Then a horrible feeling of dread seemed to clutch her by the throat and deprive her of power to breathe; she momently expected to hear the sentry give the alarm;

every faintest sound among the dusky shadows seemed to her overwrought imagination to be the hurrying tread of soldiers, the clash of steel, the click of musket-locks. The seconds slipped by, however; the landscape still preserved its solemn peace. Dominique must have landed safely on the other bank. Françoise no longer had eyes for anything. The silence was oppressive. And she heard the sound of trampling feet, a hoarse cry, the dull thud of a heavy body falling. This was followed by another silence, even deeper than that which had gone before. Then, as if conscious that Death had passed that way, she became very cold in presence of the impenetrable night.

IV

At early daybreak the repose of the mill was disturbed by the clamor of angry voices. Father Merlier had gone and unlocked Françoise's door. She descended to the courtyard, pale and very calm, but when there could not repress a shudder upon being brought face to face with the body of a Prussian soldier that lay on the ground beside the well, stretched out upon a cloak.

Soldiers were shouting and gesticulating angrily about the corpse. Several of them shook their fists threateningly in the direction of the village. The officer had just sent a summons to Father Merlier to appear before him in his capacity as mayor of the commune.

"Here is one of our men," he said, in a voice that was almost unintelligible from anger, "who was found murdered on the bank of the stream. The murderer must be found, so that we may make a salutary example of him, and I shall expect you to cooperate with us in finding him."

"Whatever you desire," the miller replied, with his customary impassiveness. "Only it will be no easy matter."

The officer stooped down and drew aside the skirt of the cloak which concealed the dead man's face, disclosing as he did so a frightful wound. The sentinel had been struck in the throat and the weapon had not been withdrawn from the wound. It was a common kitchen-knife, with a black handle.

"Look at that knife," the officer said to Father Merlier. "Perhaps it will assist us in our investigation."

The old man had started violently, but recovered himself at once; not a muscle of his face moved as he replied:

"Every one about here has knives like that. Like enough your man was tired of fighting and did the business himself. Such things have happened before now."

"Be silent!" the officer shouted in a fury. "I don't know what it is that keeps me from applying the torch to the four corners of your village."

His rage fortunately kept him from noticing the great change that had come over Françoise's countenance. Her feelings had compelled her to sit down upon the stone bench beside the well. Do what she would she could not remove her eyes from the body that lay stretched upon the ground, almost at her feet. He had been a tall, handsome young man in life, very like Dominique in appearance, with blue eyes and golden hair. The resemblance went to her heart. She thought that perhaps the dead man had left behind him in his German home some loved one who would weep for his loss. And she recognized her knife in the dead man's throat. She had killed him.

The officer, meantime, was talking of visiting Rocreuse with some terrible punishment, when two or three soldiers came running in. The guard had just that moment ascertained the fact of Dominique's escape. The agitation caused by the tidings was extreme. The officer went

to inspect the locality, looked out through the still open window, saw at once how the event had happened, and returned in a state of exasperation.

Father Merlier appeared greatly vexed by Dominique's flight. "The idiot!" he murmured; "he has upset everything."

Françoise heard him, and was in an agony of suffering. Her father, moreover, had no suspicion of her complicity. He shook his head, saying to her in an undertone:

"We are in a nice box, now!"

"It was that scoundrel! it was that scoundrel!" cried the officer. "He has got away to the woods; but he must be found, or by ——, the village shall stand the consequences." And addressing himself to the miller: "Come, you must know where he is hiding?"

Father Merlier laughed in his silent way and pointed to the wide stretch of wooded hills.

"How can you expect to find a man in that wilderness?" he asked.

"Oh! there are plenty of hiding-places that you are acquainted with. I am going to give you ten men; you shall act as guide to them."

"I am perfectly willing. But it will take a week to beat up all the woods of the neighborhood."

The old man's serenity enraged the officer; he saw, indeed, what a ridiculous proceeding such a hunt would be. It was at that moment that he caught sight of Françoise where she sat, pale and trembling, on her bench. His attention was aroused by the girl's anxious attitude. He was silent for a moment, glancing suspiciously from father to daughter and back again.

"Is not this man," he at last coarsely asked the old man, "your daughter's lover?"

Father Merlier's face became ashy pale, and he appeared for a moment as if about to throw himself on the officer and throttle him. He straightened himself up and made no reply. Françoise had hidden her face in her hands.

"Yes, that is how it is," the Prussian continued; "you or your daughter have assisted him to escape. You are his accomplices. For the last time, will you surrender him?"

The miller did not answer. He had turned away and was looking at the distant landscape with an air of supreme indifference, just as if the officer were talking to some other person. That put the finishing touch to the latter's wrath.

"Very well, then!" he declared, "you shall be shot in his stead."

And again he ordered out the firing-party. Father Merlier was as imperturbable as ever. He scarcely did so much as shrug his shoulders; the whole drama appeared to him to be in very doubtful taste. He probably believed that they would not take a man's life in that unceremonious manner. When the platoon was on the ground he gravely said:

"So, then, you are in earnest?—Very well, I am willing it should be so. If you feel you must have a victim, it may as well be I as another."

But Françoise arose, greatly troubled, stammering: "Have mercy, good sir; do not harm my father. Take my life instead of his. It was I who assisted Dominique to escape; I am the only guilty one."

"Hold your tongue, my girl," Father Merlier exclaimed. "Why do you tell such a falsehood? She passed the night locked in her room, monsieur; I assure you that she does not speak the truth."

"I am speaking the truth," the girl eagerly replied. "I left my room by the window; I incited Dominique to fly. It is the truth, the whole truth."

The old man's face was very white. He could read in her eyes that she was not lying and her story terrified him. Ah, those children, those children! how they spoiled everything, with their hearts and their feelings! Then he said angrily:

"She is crazy; do not listen to her. It is a lot of trash she is giving you. Come, let us get through with this business."

She persisted in her protestations; she kneeled, she raised her clasped hands in supplication. The officer stood tranquilly by and watched the harrowing scene.

"*Mon Dieu*," he said at last, "I take your father because the other has escaped me. Bring me back the other man and your father shall have his liberty."

She looked at him for a moment with eyes dilated by the horror which his proposal inspired in her.

"It is dreadful," she murmured. "Where can I look for Dominique now? He is gone; I know nothing beyond that."

"Well, make your choice between them; him or your father."

"Oh! my God! how can I choose? Even if I knew where to find Dominique I could not choose. You are breaking my heart. I would rather die at once. Yes, it would be more quickly ended thus. Kill me, I beseech you, kill me—"

The officer finally became weary of this scene of despair and tears. He cried:

"Enough of this! I wish to treat you kindly. I will give you two hours. If your lover is not here within two hours, your father shall pay the penalty that he has incurred."

And he ordered Father Merlier away to the room that had served as a prison for Dominique. The old man asked for tobacco and began to smoke. There was no trace of emotion to be descried on his impassive face. Only when he was alone he wept two big tears that coursed slowly down his cheeks as he smoked his solitary pipe. His poor, dear child, what a fearful trial she was enduring!

Françoise remained in the courtyard. Prussian soldiers passed back and forth, laughing. Some of them addressed her with coarse pleasantries which she did not understand. Her gaze was bent upon the door through which her father had disappeared, and with a slow movement she raised her hand to her forehead, as if to keep it from bursting. The officer turned sharply and said to her:

"You have two hours. Try to make good use of them."

She had two hours. The words kept buzzing, buzzing in her ears. Then she went forth mechanically from the courtyard; she walked straight ahead with no definite end. Where was she to go? what was she to do? She did not even endeavor to arrive at any decision, for she felt how utterly useless were her efforts. And yet she would have liked to see Dominique; they could have come to some understanding together. Perhaps they might have hit on some plan to extricate them from their difficulties. And so, amid the confusion of her whirling thoughts, she took her way downward to the bank of the Morelle, which she crossed below the dam by means of some stepping-stones which were there. Proceeding onward, still involuntarily, she came to the first willow, at the corner of the meadow, and stooping down, beheld a sight that made her grow deathly pale—a pool of blood. It was the spot. And she followed the trace that Dominique had left in the tall grass; it was evident that he had run, for the footsteps that crossed the meadow in a diagonal line were separated from one another by wide intervals. Then, beyond that point, she lost the trace, but thought she had discovered it again in an adjoining field. It led her onward to the border of the forest, where the trail came abruptly to an end.

Though conscious of the futility of the proceeding, Françoise penetrated into the wood. It was a comfort to her to be alone. She sat down for a moment, then, reflecting that time was

passing, rose again to her feet. How long was it since she left the mill? Five minutes? or a half-hour? She had lost all idea of time. Perhaps Dominique had sought concealment in a clearing that she knew of, where they had gone together one afternoon and eaten hazel-nuts. She directed her steps toward the clearing, she searched it thoroughly. A blackbird flew out, whistling his sweet and melancholy note; that was all. Then she thought that he might have taken refuge in a hollow among the rocks where he went sometimes with his gun to secure a bird or a rabbit, but the spot was untenanted. What use was there in looking for him? She would never find him, and little by little the desire to discover his hiding-place became a passionate longing. She proceeded at a more rapid pace. The idea suddenly took possession of her that he had climbed into a tree, and thenceforth she went along with eyes raised aloft and called him by name every fifteen or twenty steps, so that he might know she was near him. The cuckoos answered her; a breath of air that rustled the leaves made her think that he was there and was coming down to her. Once she even imagined that she saw him; she stopped, with a sense of suffocation, with a desire to run away. What was she to say to him? Had she come there to take him back with her and have him shot? Oh! no, she would not mention those things; she would tell him that he must fly, that he must not remain in the neighborhood. Then she thought of her father awaiting her return, and the reflection caused her most bitter anguish. She sank upon the turf, weeping hot tears, crying aloud:

"My God! My God! why am I here!"

It was a mad thing for her to have come. And as if seized with sudden panic, she ran hither and thither, she sought to make her way out of the forest. Three times she lost her way, and had begun to think she was never to see the mill again, when she came out into a meadow, directly opposite Rocreuse. As soon as she caught sight of the village she stopped. Was she going to return alone?

She was standing there when she heard a voice calling her by name, softly:

"Françoise! Françoise!"

And she beheld Dominique, raising his head above the edge of a ditch. Just God! she had found him!

Could it be, then, that heaven willed his death? She suppressed a cry that rose to her lips and slipped into the ditch beside him.

"You were looking for me?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied bewilderedly, scarce knowing what she was saying.

"Ah! what has happened?"

She stammered, with eyes downcast: "Why, nothing; I was anxious, I wanted to see you."

Thereupon, his fears alleviated, he went on to tell her how it was that he had remained in the vicinity. He was alarmed for them. Those rascally Prussians were not above wreaking their vengeance on women and old men. All had ended well, however, and he added, laughing:

"The wedding will be deferred for a week, that's all."

He became serious, however, upon noticing that her dejection did not pass away.

"But what is the matter? You are concealing something from me."

"No, I give you my word I am not. I am tired; I ran all the way here."

He kissed her, saying it was imprudent for them both to remain there longer, and was about to climb out of the ditch in order to return to the forest. She stopped him; she was trembling violently.

"Listen, Dominique; perhaps it will be as well for you to remain here, after all. There is no one looking for you, you have nothing to fear."

"Françoise, you are concealing something from me," he said again.

Again she protested that she was concealing nothing. She only liked to know that he was near her. And there were other reasons still that she gave in stammering accents. Her manner was so strange that no consideration could now have induced him to go away. He believed, moreover, that the French would return presently. Troops had been seen over toward Sauval.

"Ah! let them make haste; let them come as quickly as possible," she murmured fervently.

At that moment the clock of the church at Rocreuse struck eleven; the strokes reached them, clear and distinct. She arose in terror; it was two hours since she had left the mill.

"Listen," she said, with feverish rapidity, "should we need you I will go up to my room and wave my handkerchief from the window."

And she started off homeward on a run, while Dominique, greatly disturbed in mind, stretched himself at length beside the ditch to watch the mill. Just as she was about to enter the village Françoise encountered an old beggarman, Father Bontemps, who knew every one and everything in that part of the country. He saluted her; he had just seen the miller, he said, surrounded by a crowd of Prussians; then, making numerous signs of the cross and mumbling some inarticulate words, he went his way.

"The two hours are up," the officer said, when Françoise made her appearance.

Father Merlier was there, seated on the bench beside the well. He was smoking still. The young girl again proffered her supplication, kneeling before the officer and weeping. Her wish was to gain time. The hope that she might yet behold the return of the French had been gaining strength in her bosom, and amid her tears and sobs she thought she could distinguish in the distance the cadenced tramp of an advancing army. Oh! if they would but come and deliver them all from their fearful trouble!

"Hear me, sir; grant us an hour, just one little hour. Surely you will not refuse to grant us an hour!"

But the officer was inflexible. He even ordered two men to lay hold of her and take her away, in order that they might proceed undisturbed with the execution of the old man. Then a dreadful conflict took place in Françoise's heart. She could not allow her father to be murdered in that manner; no, no, she would die in company with Dominique rather, and she was just darting away in the direction of her room in order to signal her *fiance*, when Dominique himself entered the courtyard.

The officer and his soldiers gave a great shout of triumph, but he, as if there had been no soul there but Françoise, walked straight up to her; he was perfectly calm, and his face wore a slight expression of sternness.

"You did wrong," he said. "Why did you not bring me back with you? Had it not been for Father Bontemps I should have known nothing of all this. Well, I am here, at all events."

V

It was three o'clock. The heavens were piled high with great black clouds, the tail-end of a storm that had been raging somewhere in the vicinity. Beneath the coppery sky and ragged scud the valley of Rocreuse, so bright and smiling in the sunlight, became a grim chasm, full of sinister shadows. The Prussian officer had done nothing with Dominique beyond placing him in confinement, giving no indication of his ultimate purpose in regard to him. Françoise, since noon, had been suffering unendurable agony; notwithstanding her father's entreaties she

would not leave the courtyard. She was waiting for the French troops to appear, but the hours slipped by, night was approaching, and she suffered all the more since it appeared as if the time thus gained would have no effect on the final result.

About three o'clock, however, the Prussians began to make their preparations for departure. The officer had gone to Dominique's room and remained closeted with him for some minutes, as he had done the day before. Françoise knew that the young man's life was hanging in the balance; she clasped her hands and put up fervent prayers. Beside her sat Father Merlier, rigid and silent, declining, like the true peasant he was, to attempt any interference with accomplished facts.

"Oh! my God! my God!" Françoise exclaimed, "they are going to kill him!"

The miller drew her to him and took her on his lap as if she had been a little child. At this juncture the officer came from the room, followed by two men conducting Dominique between them.

"Never, never!" the latter exclaimed. "I am ready to die."

"You had better think the matter over," the officer replied. "I shall have no trouble in finding some one else to render us the service which you refuse. I am generous with you; I offer you your life. It is simply a matter of guiding us across the forest to Montredon; there must be paths."

Dominique made no answer.

"Then you persist in your obstinacy?"

"Shoot me, and have done with the matter," he replied.

François, in the distance, entreated her lover with clasped hands; she was forgetful of all considerations save one, she would have had him commit a treason. But Father Merlier seized her hands that the Prussians might not see the wild gestures of a woman whose mind was disordered by her distress.

"He is right," he murmured, "it is best for him to die."

The firing-party was in readiness. The officer still had hopes of bringing Dominique over, and was waiting to see him exhibit some signs of weakness. Deep silence prevailed. Heavy peals of thunder were heard in the distance, the fields and woods lay lifeless beneath the sweltering heat. And it was in the midst of this oppressive silence that suddenly the cry arose:

"The French; the French!"

It was a fact; they were coming. The line of red trousers could be seen advancing along the Sauval road, at the edge of the forest. In the mill the confusion was extreme; the Prussian soldiers ran to and fro, giving vent to guttural cries. Not a shot had been fired as yet.

"The French! the French!" cried Françoise, clapping her hands for joy. She was like a woman possessed. She had escaped from her father's embrace and was laughing boisterously, her arms raised high in air. They had come at last, then, and had come in time, since Dominique was still there, alive!

A crash of musketry that rang in her ears like a thunder-clap caused her to suddenly turn her head. The officer had muttered: "We will finish this business first," and with his own hands pushing Dominique up against the wall of a shed, had given the command to the squad to fire. When Françoise turned Dominique was lying on the ground, pierced by a dozen bullets.

She did not shed a tear, she stood there like one suddenly rendered senseless. Her eyes were fixed and staring, and she went and seated herself beneath the shed, a few steps from the

lifeless body. She looked at it wistfully; now and then she would make a movement with her hand in an aimless, childish way. The Prussians had seized Father Merlier as a hostage.

It was a pretty fight. The officer, perceiving that he could not retreat without being cut to pieces, rapidly made the best disposition possible of his men; it was as well to sell their lives dearly. The Prussians were now the defenders of the mill and the French were the attacking party. The musketry fire began with unparalleled fury; for half an hour there was no lull in the storm. Then a deep report was heard and a ball carried away a large branch of the old elm. The French had artillery; a battery, in position just beyond the ditch where Dominique had concealed himself, commanded the main street of Rocreuse. The conflict could not last long after that.

Ah! the poor old mill! The cannon-balls raked it from wall to wall. Half the roof was carried away; two of the walls fell in. But it was on the side toward the Morelle that the damage was greatest. The ivy, torn from the tottering walls, hung in tatters, débris of every description floated away upon the bosom of the stream, and through a great breach Françoise's chamber was visible with its little bed, the snow-white curtains of which were carefully drawn. Two balls struck the old wheel in quick succession and it gave one parting groan; the buckets were carried away down stream, the frame was crushed into a shapeless mass. It was the soul of the stout old mill parting from the body.

Then the French came forward to carry the place by storm. There was a mad hand-to-hand conflict with the bayonet. Under the dull sky the pretty valley became a huge slaughter-pen; the broad meadows looked on affrightedly, with their great isolated trees and their rows of poplars, dotting them with shade, while to right and left the forest was like the walls of a tilting-ground enclosing the combatants, and in nature's universal panic the gentle murmur of the springs and watercourses sounded like sobs and wails.

Françoise had not stirred from the shed, where she remained hanging over Dominique's body. Father Merlier had met his death from a stray bullet. Then the French captain, the Prussians being exterminated and the mill on fire, entered the courtyard at the head of his men. It was the first success that he had gained since the breaking out of the war, so, all afire with enthusiasm, drawing himself up to the full height of his lofty stature, he laughed pleasantly, as a handsome cavalier like him might laugh, and, perceiving poor idiotic Françoise where she crouched between the corpses of her father and her betrothed, among the smoking ruins of the mill, he saluted her gallantly with his sword and shouted:

"Victory! victory!"

VENUS OF ILLE

BY PROSPER MERIMEE

Prosper Mérimée, novelist, historian, dramatist, critic, was born in Paris in 1803, the son of an artist of recognized talent. Rarely gifted and highly educated, he held various offices in the civil service, was an Academician, and a Senator of the Empire in 1853. A great traveler, and admitted through his adaptableness and engaging personality to all classes of society, from that of Napoleon III to that of the humblest peasants, observing wherever he went, he gathered material for his stories, in which a great variety of types are noticeable. His literary style—clear, simple, artistic, and marked by sobriety—is considered a model of restraint and conciseness. "Carmen," on which Bizet's opera is founded, and "Colomba," his most successful novel, are probably the best known of his works.

THE VENUS OF ILLE

Γλεὼς ἦν δέγὼ, ἔστω ὁ ἀνδρίας καὶ ἥπιος, οὕτως ἀνδρεῖος ὤν.
Λουκιανου Φιλοψευδης.

I was descending the last slope of the Canigou, and though the sun was already set I could distinguish on the plain the houses of the small town of Ille, toward which I directed my steps.

"Of course," I said to the Catalan who since the day before served as my guide, "you know where M. de Peyrehorade lives?"

"Just don't I," cried he; "I know his house like my own, and if it were not so dark I would show it to you. It is the finest in Ille. He is rich, M. de Peyrehorade is, and he marries his son to one richer even than he."

"Does the marriage come off soon?" I asked him.

"Soon? It may be that the violins are already ordered for the wedding. To-night perhaps, to-morrow or the next day, how do I know? It will take place at Puygarrig, for it is Mademoiselle de Puygarrig that the son is to marry. It will be a sight, I can tell you."

I was recommended to M. de Peyrehorade by my friend M. de P. He was, I had been told, an antiquarian of much learning and a man of charming affability. He would take delight in showing me the ruins for ten leagues around. Therefore I counted on him to visit the outskirts of Ille, which I knew to be rich in memorials of the Middle Ages. This marriage, of which I now heard for the first time, upset all my plans.

"I shall be a troublesome guest," I told myself. "But I am expected; my arrival has been announced by M. de P.: I must present myself."

When we reached the plain the guide said, "Wager a cigar, sir, that I can guess what you are going to do at M. de Peyrehorade's."

Offering him one, I answered, "It is not very hard to guess. At this hour, when one has made six leagues in the Canigou, supper is the great thing after all."

"Yes, but to-morrow? Here I wager that you have come to Ille to see the idol. I guessed that when I saw you draw the portraits of the saints at Serrabona."

"The idol! what idol?" This word had aroused my curiosity.

"What! were you not told at Perpignan how M. de Peyrehorade had found an idol in the earth?"

"You mean to say an earthen statue?"

"Not at all. A statue in copper, and there is enough of it to make a lot of big pennies. She weighs as much as a church-bell. It was deep in the ground at the foot of an olive-tree that we got her."

"You were present at the discovery?"

"Yes, sir. Two weeks ago M. de Peyrehorade told Jean Coll and me to uproot an old olive-tree which was frozen last year when the weather, as you know, was very severe. So in working, Jean Coll, who went at it with all his might, gave a blow with his pickax, and I heard *bimm*—as if he had struck a bell—and I said, 'What is that?' We dug on and on, and there was a black hand, which looked like the hand of a corpse, sticking out of the earth. I

was scared to death. I ran to M. de Peyrehorade and I said to him: 'There are dead people, master, under the olive-tree! The priest must be called.'

"'What dead people?' said he to me. He came, and he had no sooner seen the hand than he cried out, 'An antique! an antique!' You would have thought he had found a treasure. And there he was with the pickax in his own hands, struggling and doing almost as much work as we two."

"And at last what did you find?"

"A huge black woman more than half naked, with due respect to you, sir. She was all in copper, and M. de Peyrehorade told us it was an idol of pagan times—the time of Charlemagne."

"I see what it is—some virgin or other in bronze from a destroyed convent."

"A virgin! Had it been one I should have recognized it. It is an idol, I tell you; you can see it in her look. She fixes you with her great white eyes—one might say she stares at you. One lowers one's eyes, yes, indeed, one does, on looking at her."

"White eyes? Doubtless they are set in the bronze. Perhaps it is some Roman statue."

"Roman! That's it. M. de Peyrehorade says it is Roman. Oh! I see you are an erudite like himself."

"Is she complete, well preserved?"

"Yes, sir, she lacks nothing. It is a handsomer statue and better finished than the bust of Louis Philippe in colored plaster which is in the town-hall. But with all that the face of the idol does not please me. She has a wicked expression —and, what is more, she is wicked."

"Wicked! what has she done to you?"

"Nothing to me exactly; but wait a minute. We had gotten down on all fours to stand her upright, and M. de Peyrehorade was also pulling on the rope, though he has not much more strength than a chicken. With much trouble we got her up straight. I reached for a broken tile to support her, when if she doesn't tumble over backward all in a heap. I said, 'Take care,' but not quick enough, for Jean did not have time to draw away his leg—"

"And it was hurt?"

"Broken as clean as a vine-prop. When I saw that I was furious; I wanted to take my pickax and smash the statue to pieces, but M. de Peyrehorade stopped me. He gave Jean Coll some money, but all the same, he is in bed still, though it is two weeks since it happened, and the physician says that he will never walk as well with that leg as with the other. It is a pity, for he was our best runner, and, after M. de Peyrehorade's son, the cleverest racquet player. M. Alphonse de Peyrehorade was sorry, I can tell you, for Coll always played on his side. It was beautiful to see how they returned each other the balls. They never touched the ground."

Chatting in this way we entered Ille, and I soon found myself in the presence of M. de Peyrehorade. He was a little old man, still hale and active, with powdered hair, a red nose, and a jovial, bantering manner. Before opening M. de P.'s letter he had seated me at a well-spread table, and had presented me to his wife and son as a celebrated archeologist who was to draw Roussillon from the neglect in which the indifference of erudites had left it.

While eating heartily, for nothing makes one hungrier than the keen air of the mountains, I scrutinized my hosts. I have said a word about M. de Peyrehorade. I must add that he was activity personified. He talked, got up, ran to his library, brought me books, showed me engravings, and filled my glass, all at the same time. He was never two minutes in repose. His wife was a trifle stout, as are most Catalans when they are over forty years of age. She appeared to me a thorough provincial, solely occupied with her housekeeping. Though the supper was sufficient for at least six persons, she hurried to the kitchen and had pigeons killed

and a number broiled, and she opened I do not know how many jars of preserves. In no time the table was laden with dishes and bottles, and if I had but tasted of everything offered me I should certainly have died of indigestion. Nevertheless, at each dish I refused they made fresh excuses. They feared I found myself very badly off at Ille. In the provinces there were so few resources, and of course Parisians were fastidious!

In the midst of his parent's comings and goings M. Alphonse de Peyrehorade was as immovable as rent-day. He was a tall young man of twenty-six, with a regular and handsome countenance, but lacking in expression. His height and his athletic figure well justified the reputation of an indefatigable racquet player given him in the neighborhood.

On that evening he was dressed in an elegant manner; that is to say, he was an exact copy of a fashion plate in the last number of the "Journal des Modes." But he seemed to me ill at ease in his clothes; he was as stiff as a post in his velvet collar, and could only turn all of a piece. In striking contrast to his costume were his large sunburnt hands and blunt nails. They were a laborer's hands issuing from the sleeves of an exquisite. Moreover, though he examined me in my quality of Parisian most curiously from head to foot, he only spoke to me once during the whole evening, and that was to ask me where I had bought my watch-chain.

As the supper was drawing to an end M. de Peyrehorade said to me: "Ah! my dear guest, you belong to me now you are here. I shall not let go of you until you have seen everything of interest in our mountains. You must learn to know our Roussillon, and to do it justice. You do not suspect all that we have to show you, Phenician, Celtic, Roman, Arabian, and Byzantine monuments; you shall see them all from the cedar to the hyssop. I shall drag you everywhere, and will not spare you a single stone."

A fit of coughing obliged him to pause. I took advantage of it to tell him that I should be sorry to disturb him on an occasion of so much interest to his family. If he would but give me his excellent advice about the excursions to be made, I could go without his taking the trouble to accompany me.

"Ah! you mean the marriage of that boy there," he exclaimed, interrupting me; "stuff and nonsense, it will be over the day after to-morrow. You will go to the wedding with us, which is to be informal, as the bride is in mourning for an aunt whose heiress she is. Therefore, there will be no festivities, no ball. It is a pity, though; you might have seen our Catalans dance. They are pretty, and might have given you the desire to imitate Alphonse. One marriage, they say, leads to another. The young people once married I shall be free, and we will bestir ourselves. I beg your pardon for boring you with a provincial wedding. For a Parisian tired of entertainments—and a wedding without a ball at that! Still, you will see a bride—a bride—well, you shall tell me what you think of her. But you are a thinker and no longer notice women. I have better than that to show you. You shall see something; in fact, I have a fine surprise in store for you to-morrow."

"Good heavens!" said I; "it is difficult to have a treasure in the house without the public being aware of it. I think I know the surprise in reserve for me. But if it is your statue which is in question, the description my guide gave me of it only served to excite my curiosity and prepared me to admire."

"Ah! So he spoke to you about the idol, as he calls my beautiful Venus Tur: but I will tell you nothing. To-morrow you shall see her by daylight and tell me if I am right in thinking the statue a masterpiece. You could not have arrived more opportunely. There are inscriptions on it which I, poor ignoramus that I am, explain after my own fashion; but you a Parisian erudite, will probably laugh at my interpretation: for I have actually written a paper about it—I, an old provincial antiquary, have launched myself in literature. I wish to make the press groan. If you would kindly read and correct it I might have some hope. For example, I am very anxious to know how you translate this inscription from the base of the statue: 'CAVE.' But I do not wish to ask you yet! Wait until to-morrow. Not a word more about the Venus to-day!"

"You are right, Peyrehorade," said his wife: "drop your idol. Can you not see that you prevent our guest from eating? You may be sure that he has seen in Paris much finer statues than yours. In the Tuileries there are dozens, and they also are in bronze."

"There you have the saintly ignorance of the provinces!" interrupted M. de Peyrehorade. "The idea of comparing an admirable antique to the insipid figures of Coustou!

"'How irreverent my housekeeper
Speaks of the gods!"

Do you know that my wife wanted me to melt my statue into a bell for our church? She would have been the godmother. Just think of it, to melt a masterpiece by Myron, sir!"

"Masterpiece! Masterpiece! A charming masterpiece she is! to break a man's leg."

"Madam, do you see that?" said M. de Peyrehorade, in a resolute tone, extending toward her his right leg in its changeable silk stocking; "if my Venus had broken that leg there for me I should not regret it."

"Good gracious! Peyrehorade, how can you say such a thing? Fortunately, the man is better. And yet I can not bring myself to look at a statue which has caused so great a disaster. Poor Jean Coll!"

"Wounded by Venus, sir," said M. de Peyrehorade, with a loud laugh; "wounded by Venus, and the churl complains!

"'Veneris nee præmia noris.'

Who has not been wounded by Venus?"

M. Alphonse, who understood French better than Latin, winked one eye with an air of intelligence, and looked at me as if to ask, "And you, Parisian, do you understand?"

The supper came to an end. I had ceased eating an hour before. I was weary, and I could not manage to hide the frequent yawns which escaped me. Madame de Peyrehorade was the first to notice them, and remarked that it was time to go to bed. Then followed fresh apologies for the poor accommodations I would have. I would not be as well off as in Paris. It was so uncomfortable in the provinces! Indulgence was needed for the Roussillonnais. Notwithstanding my protests that after a tramp in the mountains a bundle of straw would seem to me a delicious couch, they continued begging me to pardon poor country people if they did not treat me as well as they could have wished.

Accompanied by M. de Peyrehorade I ascended at last to the room arranged for me. The staircase, the upper half of which was in wood, ended in the centre of a hall, out of which opened several rooms.

"To the right," said my host, "is the apartment which I propose to give the future Madame Alphonse. Your room is at the opposite end of the corridor. You understand," he added in a manner which he meant to be sly—"you understand that newly married people must be alone. You are at one end of the house, they at the other."

We entered a well-furnished room where the first object on which my gaze rested was a bed seven feet long, six wide, and so high that one needed a chair to climb up into it. Having shown me where the bell was, and assured himself that the sugar-bowl was full and the cologne bottles duly placed on the toilet-stand, my host asked me a number of times if anything was lacking, wished me good-night, and left me alone.

The windows were closed. Before undressing I opened one to breathe the fresh night air so delightful after a long supper. Facing me was the Canigou. Always magnificent, it appeared to me on that particular evening, lighted as it was by a resplendent moon, as the most beautiful mountain in the world. I remained a few minutes contemplating its marvelous silhouette, and was about to close the window when, lowering my eyes, I perceived, a dozen yards from the house, the statue on its pedestal. It was placed at the corner of a hedge that separated a small garden from a vast, perfectly level quadrangle, which I learned later was the racquet court of the town. This ground was the property of M. de Peyrehorade, and had been given by him to the parish at the solicitation of his son.

Owing to the distance it was difficult for me to distinguish the attitude of the statue; I could only judge of its height, which seemed to be about six feet. At that moment two scamps of the town, whistling the pretty Roussillon tune, "Montagnes régalades," were crossing the racquet court quite near the hedge. They paused to look at the statue, and one of them even apostrophized it aloud. He spoke Catalonian, but I had been long enough in Roussillon to understand pretty well what he said.

"There you are, you wench!" (The Catalonian word was much more forcible.) "There you are!" he said. "It was you, then, who broke Jean Coll's leg! If you belonged to me I'd break your neck."

"Bah! what with?" said the other youth. "It is of the copper of pagan times, and harder than I don't know what."

"If I had my chisel" (it seems he was a locksmith's apprentice), "I would soon force out its big white eyes, as I would pop an almond from its shell. There are more than a hundred pennies' worth of silver in them."

They went on a few steps.

"I must wish the idol good-night," said the taller of the apprentices, stopping suddenly.

He stooped and probably picked up a stone. I saw him unbend his arm and throw something. A blow resounded on the bronze, and immediately the apprentice raised his hand to his head with a cry of pain.

"She threw it back at me!" he exclaimed. And my two rascals ran off as fast as they could. It was evident that the stone had rebounded from the metal and had punished the wag for the outrage he had done the goddess. Laughing heartily, I shut the window.

Another Vandal punished by Venus! May all the desecrators of our old monuments thus get their due!

With this charitable wish I fell asleep.

When I awoke it was broad day. On one side of my bed stood M. de Peyrehorade in a dressing-gown; a servant sent by his wife was on the other side with a cup of chocolate in his hand.

"Come, come, you Parisian, get up! This is quite the laziness of the capital!" said my host, while I dressed in haste. "It is eight o'clock, and you are still in bed! I have been up since six. This is the third time I have been to your door. I approached on tiptoe: no one, not a sign of life. It is bad for you to sleep too much at your age. And my Venus, which you have not yet seen! Come, hurry up and take this cup of Barcelona chocolate. It is real contraband chocolate, such as can not be found in Paris. Prepare yourself, for when you are once before my Venus no one will be able to tear you away from her."

I was ready in five minutes, that is to say, I was half shaved, half dressed, and burned by the boiling chocolate I had swallowed. I descended to the garden and saw an admirable statue before me. It was truly a Venus, and of marvelous beauty. The upper part of the body was nude, as great divinities were usually represented by the ancients. The right hand was raised as high as the breast, the palm turned inward, the thumb and two first fingers extended, and the others slightly bent. The other hand, drawn close to the hip, held the drapery which covered the lower half of the body. The attitude of this statue reminded one of that of the *mourre* player which is called, I hardly know why, by the name of Germanicus. Perhaps it had been intended to represent the goddess as playing at *mourre*. However that may be, it is impossible to find anything more perfect than the form of this Venus, anything softer and more voluptuous than her outlines, or more graceful and dignified than her drapery. I had expected a work of the decadence; I saw a masterpiece of statuary's best days.

What struck me most was the exquisite reality of the figure; one might have thought it molded from life, that is, if Nature ever produced such perfect models.

The hair, drawn back from the brow, seemed once to have been gilded. The head was small, like nearly all those Greek statues, and bent slightly forward. As to the face, I shall never succeed in describing its strange character; it was of a type belonging to no other Greek statue which I can remember. It had not the calm, severe beauty of the Greek sculptors, who systematically gave a majestic immobility to all the features. On the contrary, I noticed here, with surprise, a marked intention on the artist's part to reproduce malice verging on viciousness. All the features were slightly contracted. The eyes were rather oblique, the mouth raised at the corners, the nostrils a trifle dilated. Disdain, irony, and cruelty were to be read in the nevertheless beautiful face.

Truly, the more one gazed at the statue the more one experienced a feeling of pain that such wonderful beauty could be allied to such an absence of all sensibility.

"If the model ever existed," I said to M. de Peyrehorade, "and I doubt if heaven ever produced such a woman, how I pity her lovers! She must have taken pleasure in making them die of despair. There is something ferocious in her expression, and yet I have never seen anything more beautiful."

"'C'est Venus tout entière à sa proie attachée!'" cried M. de Peyrehorade, delighted with my enthusiasm.

But the expression of demoniac irony was perhaps increased by the contrast of the bright silver eyes with the dusky green hue which time had given to the statue. The shining eyes produced a sort of illusion which simulated reality and life. I remembered what my guide had said, that those who looked at her were forced to lower their eyes. It was almost true, and I could not prevent a movement of anger at myself when I felt ill at ease before this bronze figure.

"Now that you have seen everything in detail, my dear colleague in antiquities, let us, if you please, open a scientific conference. What do you say to this inscription which you have not yet noticed?" He pointed to the base of the statue, and I read these words:

CAVE AMANTEM.

"Quid dicis doctissime?" he asked, rubbing his hands. "Let us see if we agree as to the meaning of *cave amantem*!"

"But," I replied, "it has two meanings. You can translate it: 'Guard against him who loves thee,' that is, 'distrust lovers.' But in this sense I do not know if *cave amantem* would be good Latin. After seeing the diabolical expression of the lady I should sooner believe that the artist meant to warn the spectator against this terrible beauty. I should then translate it: 'Take care of thyself if *she* loves thee.'"

"Humph!" said M. de Peyrehorade; "yes, it is an admissible meaning: but, if you do not mind, I prefer the first translation, which I would, however, develop. You know Venus's lover?"

"There are several."

"Yes; but the first is Vulcan. Why should it not mean: 'Notwithstanding all thy beauty, thine air of disdain, thou wilt have a blacksmith, a wretched cripple, for a lover'? A profound lesson, sir, for coquettes!"

The explication seemed so far-fetched that I could not help smiling.

To avoid formally contradicting my antiquarian friend, I observed, "Latin is a terrible language in its conciseness," and I drew back several steps to better contemplate the statue.

"Wait a moment, colleague!" said M. de Peyrehorade, catching hold of my arm; "you have not seen all. There is another inscription. Climb up on the pedestal and look at the right arm."

So saying, he helped me up, and without much ceremony I clung to the neck of the Venus, with whom I was becoming more familiar. For a second I even looked her straight in the eyes, and on close inspection she appeared more wicked, and, if possible, more beautiful than before. Then I noticed that on the arm were engraved, as it seemed to me, characters in ancient script. With the aid of my spectacles I spelled out what follows, and M. de Peyrehorade, approving with voice and gesture, repeated each word as I uttered it. Thus I read:

VENERI TVRBVL ...
EVTVCHES MYRO.
IMPERIO FECIT.

After the word 'Tvrbvl' in the first line it looked to me as if there were several letters effaced; but 'Tvrbvl' was perfectly legible.

"Which means to say?" my host asked radiantly, with a mischievous smile, for he thought the 'Tvrbvl' would puzzle me.

"There is one word which I do not yet understand," I answered; "all the rest is simple. Eutyches Myron has made this offering to Venus by her command."

"Quite right. But 'Tvrbvl,' what do you make of it? What does it mean?"

"'Tvrbvl' perplexes me very much. I am trying to think of one of Venus's familiar characteristics which may enlighten me. But what do you say to 'Tvrbvlenta'? The Venus who troubles, agitates. You see I am still preoccupied by her wicked expression. 'Tvrbvlenta' is not too bad a quality for Venus," I added modestly, for I was not too well satisfied with my explanation.

"A turbulent Venus! A noisy Venus! Ah! then you think my Venus is a public-house Venus? Nothing of the kind, sir; she is a Venus of good society. I will explain 'Tvrbvl' to you —that is, if you promise me not to divulge my discovery before my article appears in print. Because, you see, I pride myself on such a find, and, after all, you Parisian erudites are rich enough to leave a few ears for us poor devils of provincials to glean!"

From the top of the pedestal, where I was still perched, I promised him solemnly that I would never be so base as to filch from him his discovery.

"'Tvrbvl'—sir," said he, coming nearer and lowering his voice for fear some one besides myself might hear him, "read 'Tvrbvlneræ.'"

"I understand no better."

"Listen to me attentively. Three miles from here, at the foot of the mountain, is a village called Boulternère. The name is a corruption of the Latin word 'Tvrbvlnera.' Nothing is more common than these transpositions. Boulternère was a Roman town. I always suspected it, but I could get no proof till now, and here it is. This Venus was the local goddess of the city of Boulternére; and the word Boulternére, which I have shown is of ancient origin, proves something very curious, namely, that Boulternére was a Phenician town before it was Roman!"

He paused a moment to take breath and enjoy my surprise. I succeeded in overcoming a strong inclination to laugh.

"'Tvrbvlnera' is, in fact, pure Phenician," he continued. "'Tvr,' pronounce 'tour'—'Tour' and 'Sour' are the same word, are they not? 'Sour' is the Phenician name of Tyr; I do not need to recall the meaning to you. 'Bvl' is Baal; Bal, Bel, Bui are slight differences of pronunciation. As to 'Nera,' that troubles me a little. I am tempted to believe, for want of a Phenician word, that it comes from the Greek νηρός, moist, marshy. In that case, it is a mongrel word. To justify νηρός I will show you at Boulternère how the mountain streams form stagnant pools. Then, again, the ending 'Nera' may have been added much later in honor

of Nera Pivesuvia, wife of Tetricus, who may have benefited the city of Turbul. But on account of the marshes, I prefer the etymology of νηρός."

He took a pinch of snuff in a complacent way, and continued:

"But let us leave the Phenicians and return to the inscription. I translate it then: 'To Venus of Boulternère Myron dedicates by her order this statue, his work.'"

I took good care not to criticize his etymology, but I wished in my turn to give a proof of penetration, so I said:

"Stop a moment, M. de Peyrehorade. Myron has dedicated something, but I by no means see that it is this statue."

"What!" he cried, "was not Myron a famous Greek sculptor? The talent was perpetuated in his family, and it must have been one of his descendants who executed this statue. Nothing can be more certain."

"But," I replied, "on this arm I see a small hole. I think it served to fasten something, a bracelet for example, which this Myron, being an unhappy lover, gave to Venus as an expiatory offering. Venus was irritated against him; he appeased her by consecrating to her a gold bracelet. Notice that 'fecit' is often used for 'consecravit.' The terms are synonymous. I could show you more than one example if I had at hand Gruter or Orellius. It is natural that a lover should see Venus in a dream and imagine that she commands him to give a gold bracelet to her statue. Myron consecrated the bracelet to her. Then the barbarians or some other sacrilegious thieves—"

"Ah! it is easy to see you have written romances!" cried my host, helping me down from the pedestal. "No, sir; it is a work of Myron's school. You have only to look at the workmanship to be convinced of that."

Having made it a rule never to contradict self-opinionated antiquarians, I bowed with an air of conviction, saying:

"It is an admirable piece of work."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed M. de Peyrehorade, "another act of vandalism! Some one must have thrown a stone at my statue!"

He had just perceived a white mark a little above the bosom of the Venus. I noticed a similar mark on the fingers of the right hand. I supposed it had been touched by the stone as it passed, or that a bit of the stone had been broken off as it struck the statue, and had rebounded on the hand. I told my host of the insult I had witnessed, and the prompt punishment which had followed it.

He laughed heartily, and, comparing the apprentice to Diomede, wished he might, like the Greek hero, see all his comrades turned into white birds.

The breakfast bell interrupted this classical conversation, and, as on the preceding evening, I was obliged to eat enough for four. Then came M. de Peyrehorade's farmers, and, while he was giving them an audience, his son led me to inspect an open carriage, which he had bought at Toulouse for his betrothed, and which it is needless to say I duly admired. After that I went into the stable with him, where he kept me a half-hour, boasting about his horses, giving me their genealogy, and telling me of the prizes they had won at the county races. At last he began to talk to me about his betrothed in connection with a gray mare which he intended for her.

"We will see her to-day," he said. "I do not know if you will find her pretty. In Paris people are hard to please. But every one here and in Perpignan thinks her lovely. The best of it is that she is very rich. Her aunt from Prades left her a fortune. Oh! I shall be very happy."

I was profoundly shocked to see a young man appear more affected by the dower than by the beauty of his bride.

"You are a judge of jewels," continued M. Alphonse; "what do you think of this? Here is the ring I shall give her to-morrow."

He drew from his little finger a heavy ring, enriched with diamonds, and fashioned into two clasped hands, an allusion which seemed to me infinitely poetic. The workmanship was antique, but I fancied it had been retouched to insert the diamonds. Inside the ring these words in Gothic characters could be discerned: 'Sempr' ab ti,' which means, 'Thine forever.'

"It is a pretty ring," I said, "but the diamonds which have been added have made it lose a little of its style."

"Oh! it is much handsomer now," he answered, smiling. "There are twelve hundred francs' worth of diamonds in it. My mother gave it to me. It is a very old family ring—it dates from the days of chivalry. It was my grandmother's, who had it from her grandmother. Heaven knows when it was made."

"The custom in Paris," I said, "is to give a perfectly plain ring, usually composed of two different metals, such as gold and platina. The other ring which you have on would be very suitable. This one with its diamonds and its clasped hands is so thick that it would be impossible to wear a glove over it."

"Madame Alphonse must arrange that as she pleases. I think she will be very glad to have it, all the same. Twelve hundred francs on the finger is pleasant. That other little ring," he added, looking in a contented way at the plain ring he wore, "that one a woman in Paris gave me on Shrove Tuesday. How I did enjoy myself when I was in Paris two years ago! That is the place to have a good time!" and he sighed regretfully.

We were to dine that day at Puygarrig, with the relations of the bride; so we got in the carriage, and drove to the château, which was four or five miles from Ille. I was presented and received as the friend of the family. I will not speak of the dinner, or the conversation which followed. I took but little part in it. M. Alphonse was seated beside his betrothed, and whispered a word or two in her ear now and then. As for her, she hardly raised her eyes; and every time her lover spoke to her she blushed modestly, but answered without embarrassment.

Mademoiselle de Puygarrig was eighteen years of age. Her slender, graceful figure formed a striking contrast to the stalwart frame of her future husband. She was not only beautiful, she was alluring. I admired the perfect naturalness of all her replies. Her kind look, which yet was not free from a touch of malice, reminded me, in spite of myself, of my host's Venus. While making this inward comparison, I asked myself if the incontestably superior beauty of the statue did not in great measure come from its tigress-like expression; for strength, even in evil passions, always arouses in us astonishment, and a sort of involuntary admiration.

"What a pity," I thought, on leaving Puygarrig, "that such an attractive girl should be rich, and that her dowry makes her sought by a man quite unworthy of her."

While returning to Ille, I spoke to Mme. de Peyrehorade, to whom I thought it only proper to address myself now and then, though I did not very well know what to say to her: "You must be strong-minded people in Roussillon," I said. "How is it, madam, that you have a wedding on a Friday? We would be more superstitious in Paris; no one would dare be married on that day."

"Do not speak of it," she replied; "if it had depended on me, certainly another day would have been chosen. But Peyrehorade wished it, and I had to give in. All the same, it troubles me very much. Supposing an accident should happen? There must be some reason in it, or else why is every one afraid of Friday?"

"Friday!" cried her husband, "is Venus's day! Just the day for a wedding! You see, my dear colleague, I think only of my Venus. I chose Friday on her account. To-morrow, if you like,

before the wedding, we will make a little sacrifice to her—a sacrifice of two doves—and if I only knew where to get some incense—"

"For shame, Peyrehorade!" interrupted his wife, scandalized to the last degree. "Incense to an idol! It would be an abomination! What would they say of us in the neighborhood?"

"At least," answered M. de Peyrehorade, "you will allow me to place a wreath of roses and lilies on her head: *Manibus date lilia plenis*. You see, sir, freedom is an empty word. We have not liberty of worship!"

The next day's arrangements were ordered in the following manner: Every one was to be dressed and ready at ten o'clock punctually. After the chocolate had been served we were to be driven to Puygarrig. The civil marriage was to take place in the town hall of the village, and the religious ceremony in the chapel of the château. Afterward there would be a breakfast. After the breakfast people would pass the time as they liked until seven o'clock. At that hour every one would return to M. de Peyrehorade's at Ille, where the two families were to assemble and have supper. It was natural that being unable to dance they should wish to eat as much as possible.

By eight o'clock I was seated in front of the Venus, pencil in hand, recommencing the head of the statue for the twentieth time without being able to catch the expression. M. de Peyrehorade came and went about me, giving me advice, repeating his Phenician etymology, and laying Bengal roses on the pedestal of the statue while he addressed vows to it in a tragi-comic tone for the young couple who were to live under his roof. Toward nine o'clock he went in to put on his best, and at the same moment M. Alphonse appeared looking very stiff in a new coat, white gloves, chased sleeve-buttons, and varnished shoes. A rose decorated his buttonhole.

"Will you make my wife's portrait?" he asked, leaning over my drawing. "She also is pretty."

On the racquet-court of which I have spoken there now began a game which immediately attracted M. Alphonse's attention. And I, tired, and despairing of ever being able to copy the diabolical face, soon left my drawing to look at the players. There were among them some Spanish muleteers who had arrived the night before. They were from Aragon and Navarre, and were nearly all marvelously skilful at the game. Therefore the Illois, though encouraged by the presence and advice of M. Alphonse, were promptly beaten by the foreign champions. The native spectators were disheartened. M. Alphonse looked at his watch. It was only half-past nine. His mother's hair he knew was not dressed. He hesitated no longer, but taking off his coat asked for a jacket, and defied the Spaniards. I looked on smiling and a little surprised. "The honor of the country must be sustained," he said.

Then I thought him really handsome. He seemed full of life, and his costume, which but now occupied him so entirely, no longer concerned him. A few minutes before he would have dreaded to turn his head for fear of disarranging his cravat. Now he did not give a thought to his curled hair or his fine shirt-front. And his betrothed? If it had been necessary I think he would have postponed the wedding. I saw him hurriedly put on a pair of sandals, roll up his sleeves, and, with an assured air, take his stand at the head of the vanquished party like Cæsar rallying his soldiers at Dyrrachium. I leaped the hedge and placed myself comfortably in the shade of a tree so as to command a good view of both sides.

Contrary to general expectation, M. Alphonse missed the first ball. It came skimming along the ground, it is true, and was thrown with astonishing force by an Aragonese who appeared to be the leader of the Spaniards.

He was a man of about forty, nervous and agile, and at least six feet tall. His olive skin was almost as dark as the bronze of the Venus.

M. Alphonse threw his racquet angrily on the ground.

"It is this cursed ring," he cried, "which squeezes my finger, and makes me miss a sure ball."

He drew off his diamond ring with some difficulty; I approached to take it, but he forestalled me by running to the Venus and shoving it on her fourth finger. He then resumed his post at the head of the Illois.

He was pale, but calm and resolute. From that moment he did not miss a single ball, and the Spaniards were completely beaten. The enthusiasm of the spectators was a fine sight: some threw their caps in the air and shouted for joy, while others wrung M. Alphonse's hands, calling him the honor of the country. If he had repulsed an invasion I doubt if he would have received warmer or sincerer congratulations. The vexation of the vanquished added to the splendor of the victory.

"We will play other games, my good fellow," he said to the Aragonese in a tone of superiority, "but I will give you points."

I should have wished M. Alphonse to be more modest, and I was almost pained by his rival's humiliation.

The Spanish giant felt the insult deeply. I saw him pale beneath his tan. He looked sullenly at his racquet and clinched his teeth, then, in a smothered voice he muttered:

"Me lo pagarás."

M. de Peyrehorade's voice interrupted his son's triumph. Astonished at not finding him presiding over the preparation of the new carriage, my host was even more surprised on seeing him racquet in hand and bathed in perspiration. M. Alphonse hurried to the house, washed his hands and face, put on again his new coat and patent-leather shoes, and in five minutes we were galloping on the road to Puygarrig. All the racquet players of the town and a crowd of spectators followed us with shouts of joy. The strong horses which drew us could hardly keep ahead of the intrepid Catalans.

We were at Puygarrig, and the procession was about to set out for the town-hall, when M. Alphonse, striking his forehead, whispered to me:

"What a mess! I have forgotten the ring! It is on the finger of the Venus; may the devil carry her off! Do not tell my mother at any rate. Perhaps she will not notice it."

"You can send some one for it," I replied.

"My servant remained at Ille. I do not trust these here. Twelve hundred francs' worth of diamonds might well tempt almost any one. Moreover, what would they think of my forgetfulness? They would laugh at me. They would call me the husband of the statue. If it only is not stolen! Fortunately, the rascals are afraid of the idol. They do not dare approach it by an arm's length. After all, it does not matter; I have another ring."

The two ceremonies, civil and religious, were accomplished with suitable pomp, and Mademoiselle de Puygarrig received the ring of a Parisian milliner without suspecting that her betrothed was making her the sacrifice of a love-token. Then we seated ourselves at table, where we ate, drank, and even sang, all at great length. I suffered for the bride at the coarse merriment which exploded around her; still, she faced it better than I would have expected, and her embarrassment was neither awkward nor affected.

Perhaps courage comes with difficult situations.

The breakfast ended when Heaven pleased. It was four o'clock. The men went to walk in the park, which was magnificent, or watched the peasants, in their holiday attire, dance on the lawn of the château. In this way we passed several hours. Meanwhile, the women were eagerly attentive to the bride, who showed them her presents. Then she changed her dress, and I noticed that she had covered her beautiful hair with a befeathered bonnet; for women are in no greater hurry than to assume, as soon as possible, the attire which custom forbids their wearing while they are still young girls.

It was nearly eight o'clock when preparations were made to start for Ille. But first a pathetic scene took place. Mlle. de Puygarrig's aunt, a very old and pious woman, who stood to her in a mother's place, was not to go with us. Before the departure she gave her niece a touching sermon on her wifely duties, from which sermon resulted a flood of tears and endless embraces.

M. de Peyrehorade compared this separation to the Rape of the Sabines.

At last, however, we got off, and, on the way, every one exerted himself to amuse the bride and make her laugh; but all in vain.

At Ille supper awaited us, and what a supper! If the coarse jokes of the morning had shocked me, I was now much more so by the equivocations and pleasantries of which the bride and groom were the principal objects. The bridegroom, who had disappeared for a moment before seating himself at the table, was pale, cold, and grave.

He drank incessantly some old Collioure wine almost as strong as brandy. I sat next to him, and thought myself obliged to warn him. "Be careful! they say that wine—" I hardly know what stupid nonsense I said to be in harmony with the other guests.

He touched my knee, and whispered:

"When we have left the table ... let me have two words with you."

His solemn tone surprised me. I looked more closely at him, and noticed a strange alteration in his features.

"Do you feel ill?" I asked.

"No."

And he began to drink again.

Meanwhile, amid much shouting and clapping of hands, a child of twelve, who had slipped under the table, held up to the company a pretty pink and white ribbon which he had untied from the bride's ankle. It was called her garter, and was at once cut into pieces and distributed among the young men, who, following an old custom still preserved in some patriarchal families, ornamented their buttonholes with it. This was the time for the bride to flush up to the whites of her eyes. But her confusion was at its height when M. de Peyrehorade, having called for silence, sang several verses in Catalan, which he said were impromptu. Here is the meaning, if I understood it correctly:

"What is this, my friends? Has the wine I have drunk made me see double? There are two Venuses here..."

The bridegroom turned his head suddenly with a frightened look, which made every one laugh.

"Yes," continued M. de Peyrehorade, "there are two Venuses under my roof. The one I found in the ground like a truffle; the other, descended from heaven, has just divided among us her belt."

He meant her garter.

"My son, choose between the Roman Venus and the Catalan the one you prefer. The rascal takes the Catalan, and his choice is the best. The Roman is black, the Catalan is white. The Roman is cold, the Catalan inflames all who approach her."

This equivocal allusion excited such a shout, such noisy applause, and sonorous laughter, that I thought the ceiling would fall on our heads. Around the table there were but three serious faces, those of the newly married couple and mine. I had a terrible headache; and besides, I do not know why, a wedding always saddens me. This one, moreover, even disgusted me a little.

The final verses having been sung, and very lively they were, I must say, every one adjourned to the drawing-room to enjoy the withdrawal of the bride, who, as it was nearly midnight, was soon to be conducted to her room.

M. Alphonse drew me into the embrasure of a window, and, turning away his eyes, said:

"You will laugh at me—but I don't know what is the matter with me ... I am bewitched!"

My first thought was that he fancied himself threatened with one of those misfortunes of which Montaigne and Madame de Sevigne speak:

"All the world of love is full of tragic histories," etc.

"I thought only clever people were subject to this sort of accident," I said to myself.

To him I said: "You drank too much Collioure wine, my dear Monsieur Alphonse; I warned you against it."

"Yes, perhaps. But something much more terrible than that has happened."

His voice was broken. I thought him completely inebriated.

"You know about my ring?" he continued, after a pause.

"Well, has it been stolen?"

"No."

"Then you have it?"

"No—I—I can not get it off the finger of that infernal Venus."

"You did not pull hard enough."

"Yes, indeed I did. But the Venus—she has bent her finger."

He stared at me wildly, and leaned against the window-sash to prevent himself from falling.

"What nonsense!" I said. "You pushed the ring on too far. You can get it off to-morrow with pincers. But be careful not to damage the statue."

"No, I tell you. The Venus's finger is crooked, bent under; she clinches her hand, do you hear me? ... She is my wife apparently, since I have given her my ring.... She will not return it."

I shivered, and, for a moment, I was all goose-flesh. Then a great sigh from him brought me a whiff of wine, and all my emotion disappeared.

The wretch, I thought, is dead drunk.

"You are an antiquarian, sir," added the bridegroom in a mournful tone; "you understand those statues; there is, perhaps, some hidden spring, some deviltry which I do not know about. Will you go and see?"

"Certainly," I replied. "Come with me."

"No, I would prefer to have you go alone."

I left the drawing-room.

The weather had changed during supper, and a heavy rain had begun to fall. I was about to ask for an umbrella when a sudden thought stopped me. I should be a great fool, I reflected, to

go and verify what had been told me by a drunken man! Besides, he may have wished to play some silly trick on me to give cause for laughter to the honest country people; and the least that can happen to me from it is to be drenched to the bone and catch a bad cold.

From the door I cast a glance at the statue running with water, and I went up to my room without returning to the drawing-room. I went to bed; but sleep was long in coming. All the scenes of the day passed through my mind. I thought of the young girl, so pure and lovely, abandoned to a drunken brute. What an odious thing a marriage of convenience is! A mayor dons a tricolored scarf, a priest a stole, and then the most virtuous girl in the world is delivered over to the Minotaur! What can two people who do not love each other find to say at a moment which two lovers would buy at the price of their lives? Can a woman ever love a man whom she has once seen coarse? First impressions are never effaced, and I am sure M. Alphonse will deserve to be hated.

During my monologue, which I abridge very much, I had heard a great deal of coming and going in the house. Doors opened and shut, and carriages drove away. Then I seemed to hear on the stairs the light steps of a number of women going toward the end of the hall opposite my room. It was probably the bride's train of attendants leading her to bed. After that they went downstairs again. Madame de Peyrehorade's door closed. "How troubled and ill at ease that poor girl must be," I thought. I tossed about in my bed with bad temper. A bachelor plays a stupid part in a house where a marriage is accomplished.

Silence had reigned for some time when it was disturbed by a heavy tread mounting the stairs. The wooden steps creaked loudly.

"What a clown!" I cried to myself. "I wager that he will fall on the stairs." All was quiet again. I took up a book to change the current of my thoughts. It was the county statistics, supplemented with an address by M. de Peyrehorade on the Druidical remains of the district of Prades. I grew drowsy at the third page. I slept badly, and awoke repeatedly. It might have been five o'clock in the morning, and I had been awake more than twenty minutes, when the cock crew. Day was about to dawn. Then I heard distinctly the same heavy footsteps, the same creaking of the stairs which I had heard before I fell asleep. I thought it strange. Yawning, I tried to guess why M. Alphonse got up so early. I could imagine no likely reason. I was about to close my eyes again when my attention was freshly excited by a singular trampling of feet, which was soon intermingled with the ringing of bells and the sound of doors opened noisily; then I distinguished confused cries.

"My drunkard has set something on fire," I thought, jumping out of bed. I dressed quickly and went into the hall. From the opposite end came cries and lamentations, and a heartrending voice dominated all the others: "My son! my son!" It was evident that an accident had happened to M. Alphonse. I ran to the bridal apartment: it was full of people. The first sight which struck my gaze was the young man partly dressed and stretched across the bed, the woodwork of which was broken. He was livid and motionless. His mother sobbed and wept beside him. M. de Peyrehorade moved about frantically; he rubbed his son's temples with cologne water, or held salts to his nose. Alas! his son had long been dead. On a sofa at the other side of the room lay the bride, a prey to dreadful convulsions. She was making inarticulate cries, and two robust maid-servants had all the trouble in the world to hold her down. "Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "what has happened?"

I approached the bed and raised the body of the unfortunate young man: it was already stiff and cold. His clenched teeth and black face expressed the most fearful anguish. It was evident enough that his death had been violent and his agony terrible.

Nevertheless, no sign of blood was on his clothes. I opened his shirt, and on his chest I found a livid mark which extended around the ribs to the back. One would have said he had been squeezed in an iron ring. My foot touched something hard on the carpet; I stooped and saw it was the diamond ring. I dragged M. de Peyrehorade and his wife into their room, and had the bride carried there.

"You still have a daughter," I said to them. "You owe her your care." Then I left them alone.

To me it did not seem to admit of a doubt that M. Alphonse had been the victim of a murder whose authors had discovered a way to introduce themselves into the bride's room during the night. The bruises on the chest and their circular direction, however, perplexed me, for they could not have been made either by a club or an iron bar. Suddenly I remembered having heard that at Valencia *bravi* used long leather bags filled with sand to stun people whom they had been paid to kill. Immediately I thought of the Aragonese muleteer and his threat. Yet I hardly dared suppose he would have taken such a terrible revenge for a trifling jest.

I went through the house seeking everywhere for traces of house-breaking, but could find none. I descended to the garden to see if the assassins could have made their entrance from there; but there were no conclusive signs of it. In any case, the evening's rain had so softened the ground that it could not have retained any very clear impress. Nevertheless, I noticed some deeply marked footprints; they ran in two contrary directions, but on the same path. They started from the corner of the hedge next the racquet-court and ended at the door of the house. They might have been made by M. Alphonse when he went to get his ring from the finger of the statue. Then again, the hedge at this spot was narrower than elsewhere, and it must have been here that the murderers got over it. Passing and repassing before the statue, I stopped a moment to consider it. This time, I must confess, I could not contemplate its expression of vicious irony without fear; and, my mind being filled with the horrible scene I had just witnessed, I seemed to see in it a demoniacal goddess applauding the sorrow fallen on the house.

I returned to my room and stayed there till noon. Then I left it to ask news of my hosts. They were a little calmer. Mlle. de Puygarrig, or I should say the widow of M. Alphonse, had regained consciousness. She had even spoken to the procureur du roi from Perpignan, then in circuit at Ille, and this magistrate had received her deposition. He asked for mine. I told him what I knew, and did not hide from him my suspicions about the Aragonese muleteer. He ordered him to be arrested on the spot.

"Have you learned anything from Mme. Alphonse?" I asked the procureur du roi when my deposition was written and signed.

"That unfortunate young woman has gone crazy," he said, smiling sadly. "Crazy, quite crazy. This is what she says:

"She had been in bed for several minutes with the curtains drawn, when the door of her room opened and some one entered. Mme. Alphonse was on the inside of the bed with her face turned to the wall. Assured that it was her husband, she did not move. Presently the bed creaked as if laden with a tremendous weight. She was terribly frightened, but dared not turn her head. Five minutes, or ten minutes perhaps—she has no idea of the time—passed in this way. Then she made an involuntary movement, or else it was the other person who made one, and she felt the contact of something as cold as ice, that is her expression. She buried herself against the wall trembling in all her limbs.

"Shortly afterward, the door opened a second time, and some one came in who said: 'Good-evening, my little wife.' Then the curtains were drawn back. She heard a stifled cry. The person who was in the bed beside her sat up apparently with extended arms. Then she turned her head and saw her husband, kneeling by the bed with his head on a level with the pillow, held close in the arms of a sort of greenish-colored giant. She says, and she repeated it to me twenty times, poor woman!—she says that she recognized—do you guess whom?—the bronze Venus, M. de Peyrehorade's statue. Since it has been here every one dreams about it. But to continue the poor lunatic's story. At this sight she lost consciousness, and probably she had already lost her mind. She can not tell how long she remained in this condition. Returned to her senses, she saw the phantom, or the statue as she insists on calling it, lying immovable, the legs and lower part of the body on the bed, the bust and arms extended forward, and between the arms her husband, quite motionless. A cock crew. Then the statue left the bed, let fall the body, and went out. Mme. Alphonse rushed to the bell, and you know the rest."

The Spaniard was brought in; he was calm, and defended himself with much coolness and presence of mind. He did not deny the remark which I had overheard, but he explained it,

pretending that he did not mean anything except that the next day, when rested, he would beat his victor at a game of racquets. I remember that he added:

"An Aragonese when insulted does not wait till the next day to revenge himself. If I had believed that M. Alphonse wished to insult me I would have ripped him up with my knife on the spot."

His shoes were compared with the footprints in the garden; the shoes were much the larger.

Finally, the innkeeper with whom the man lodged asserted that he had spent the entire night rubbing and dosing one of his mules which was sick. And, moreover, the Aragonese was a man of good reputation, well known in the neighborhood, where he came every year on business.

So he was released with many apologies.

I have forgotten to mention the statement of a servant who was the last person to see M. Alphonse alive. It was just as he was about to join his wife, and calling to this man he asked him in an anxious way if he knew where I was. The servant answered that he had not seen me. M. Alphonse sighed, and stood a minute without speaking, then he said: "Well! the devil must have carried him off also!"

I asked the man if M. Alphonse had on his diamond ring. The servant hesitated; at last he said he thought not; but for that matter he had not noticed.

"If the ring had been on M. Alphonse's finger," he added, recovering himself, "I should probably have noticed it, for I thought he had given it to Mme. Alphonse."

When questioning the man I felt a little of the superstitious terror which Mme. Alphonse's statement had spread through the house. The procureur du roi smiled at me, and I was careful not to insist further.

A few hours after the funeral of M. Alphonse I prepared to leave Ille. M. de Peyrehorade's carriage was to take me to Perpignan. Notwithstanding his feeble condition, the poor old man wished to accompany me as far as the garden gate. We crossed the garden in silence, he creeping along supported by my arm. As we were about to part I threw a last glance at the Venus. I foresaw that my host, though he did not share the fear and hatred which it inspired in his family, would wish to rid himself of an object which must ceaselessly recall to him a dreadful misfortune. My intention was to induce him to place it in a museum. As I hesitated to open the subject, M. de Peyrehorade turned his head mechanically in the direction he saw I was looking so fixedly. He perceived the statue, and immediately melted into tears. I embraced him, and got into the carriage without daring to say a word.

Since my departure I have not learned that any new light has been thrown on this mysterious catastrophe.

M. de Peyrehorade died several months after his son. In his will he left me his manuscripts, which I may publish some day. I did not find among them the article relative to the inscriptions on the Venus.

P.S.—My friend M. de P. has just written to me from Perpignan that the statue no longer exists. After her husband's death Madame de Peyrehorade's first care was to have it cast into a bell, and in this new shape it does duty in the church at Ille. "But," adds M. de P., "it seems as if bad luck pursues those who own the bronze. Since the bell rings at Ille the vines have twice been frozen."

THE PAVILION ON THE LINKS

BY ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

This splendid tale of adventure is selected from the author's "New Arabian Nights." Though a part of his earliest work, it is a good example of his exquisite and finished style. Stevenson as a writer was as purely romantic as Scott, but in structure, method of description and narrative, and brilliancy of style, is considered to have marked the technical advance which had been made since the time of the "Waverley Novels." His charming personality—a certain undaunted cheerfulness in face of all human difficulty—shines through his work and endears him to his readers.

THE PAVILION ON THE LINKS

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

I

Tells How I Camped in Graden Sea-Wood, and Beheld a Light in the Pavilion

I was a great solitary when I was young. I made it my pride to keep aloof and suffice for my own entertainment; and I may say that I had neither friends nor acquaintances until I met that friend who became my wife and the mother of my children. With one man only was I on private terms; this was R. Northmour, Esquire, of Graden Easter, in Scotland. We had met at college; and though there was not much liking between us, nor even much intimacy, we were so nearly of a humor that we could associate with ease to both. Misanthropes, we believed ourselves to be; but I have thought since that we were only sulky fellows. It was scarcely a companionship, but a co-existence in unsociability. Northmour's exceptional violence of temper made it no easy affair for him to keep the peace with any one but me; and as he respected my silent ways, and let me come and go as I pleased, I could tolerate his presence without concern. I think we called each other friends.

When Northmour took his degree and I decided to leave the university without one, he invited me on a long visit to Graden Easter; and it was thus that I first became acquainted with the scene of my adventures. The mansion house of Graden stood in a bleak stretch of country some three miles from the shore of the German Ocean. It was as large as a barrack; and as it had been built of a soft stone, liable to consume in the eager air of the seaside, it was damp and drafty within and half ruinous without. It was impossible for two young men to lodge with comfort in such a dwelling. But there stood in the northern part of the estate, in a wilderness of links and blowing sand-hills, and between a plantation and the sea, a small Pavilion or Belvedere, of modern design, which was exactly suited to our wants; and in this hermitage, speaking little, reading much, and rarely associating except at meals, Northmour and I spent four tempestuous winter months. I might have stayed longer; but one March night there sprang up between us a dispute, which rendered my departure necessary. Northmour spoke hotly, I remember, and I suppose I must have made some tart rejoinder. He leaped from his chair and grappled me; I had to fight, without exaggeration, for my life; and it was only with a great effort that I mastered him, for he was near as strong in body as myself, and seemed filled with the devil. The next morning, we met on our usual terms; but I judged it more delicate to withdraw; nor did he attempt to dissuade me.

It was nine years before I revisited the neighborhood. I traveled at that time with a tilt cart, a tent, and a cooking-stove, tramping all day beside the wagon, and at night, whenever it was possible, gipsying in a cove of the hills, or by the side of a wood. I believe I visited in this manner most of the wild and desolate regions both in England and Scotland; and, as I had neither friends nor relations, I was troubled with no correspondence, and had nothing in the

nature of headquarters, unless it was the office of my solicitors, from whom I drew my income twice a year. It was a life in which I delighted; and I fully thought to have grown old upon the march, and at last die in a ditch.

It was my whole business to find desolate corners, where I could camp without the fear of interruption; and hence, being in another part of the same shire, I bethought me suddenly of the Pavilion on the Links. No thoroughfare passed within three miles of it. The nearest town, and that was but a fisher village, was at a distance of six or seven. For ten miles of length, and from a depth varying from three miles to half a mile, this belt of barren country lay along the sea. The beach, which was the natural approach, was full of quicksands. Indeed I may say there is hardly a better place of concealment in the United Kingdom. I determined to pass a week in the Sea-Wood of Graden Easter, and making a long stage, reached it about sundown on a wild September day.

The country, I have said, was mixed sand-hill and links; links being a Scottish name for sand which has ceased drifting and become more or less solidly covered with turf. The pavilion stood on an even space; a little behind it, the wood began in a hedge of elders huddled together by the wind; in front, a few tumbled sand-hills stood between it and the sea. An outcropping of rock had formed a bastion for the sand, so that there was here a promontory in the coast-line between two shallow bays; and just beyond the tides, the rock again cropped out and formed an islet of small dimensions but strikingly designed. The quicksands were of great extent at low water, and had an infamous reputation in the country. Close inshore, between the islet and the promontory, it was said they would swallow a man in four minutes and a half; but there may have been little ground for this precision. The district was alive with rabbits, and haunted by gulls which made a continual piping about the pavilion. On summer days the outlook was bright and even gladsome; but at sundown in September, with a high wind, and a heavy surf rolling in close along the links, the place told of nothing but dead mariners and sea disaster. A ship beating to windward on the horizon, and a huge truncheon of wreck half buried in the sands at my feet, completed the innuendo of the scene.

The pavilion—it had been built by the last proprietor, Northmour's uncle, a silly and prodigal virtuoso—presented little signs of age. It was two stories in height, Italian in design, surrounded by a patch of garden in which nothing had prospered but a few coarse flowers; and looked, with its shuttered windows, not like a house that had been deserted, but like one that had never been tenanted by man. Northmour was plainly from home; whether, as usual, sulking in the cabin of his yacht, or in one of his fitful and extravagant appearances in the world of society, I had, of course, no means of guessing. The place had an air of solitude that daunted even a solitary like myself; the wind cried in the chimneys with a strange and wailing note; and it was with a sense of escape, as if I were going indoors, that I turned away and, driving my cart before me, entered the skirts of the wood.

The Sea-Wood of Graden had been planted to shelter the cultivated fields behind, and check the encroachments of the blowing sand. As you advanced into it from coastward, elders were succeeded by other hardy shrubs; but the timber was all stunted and bushy; it led a life of conflict; the trees were accustomed to swing there all night long in fierce winter tempests; and even in early spring, the leaves were already flying, and autumn was beginning, in this exposed plantation. Inland the ground rose into a little hill, which, along with the islet, served as a sailing mark for seamen. When the hill was open of the islet to the north, vessels must bear well to the eastward to clear Graden Ness and the Graden Bullets. In the lower ground, a streamlet ran among the trees, and, being dammed with dead leaves and clay of its own carrying, spread out every here and there, and lay in stagnant pools. One or two ruined cottages were dotted about the wood; and, according to Northmour, these were ecclesiastical foundations, and in their time had sheltered pious hermits.

I found a den, or small hollow, where there was a spring of pure water; and there, clearing away the brambles, I pitched the tent, and made a fire to cook my supper. My horse I picketed further in the wood where there was a patch of sward. The banks of the den not only concealed the light of my fire, but sheltered me from the wind, which was cold as well as high.

The life I was leading made me both hardy and frugal. I never drank but water, and rarely ate anything more costly than oatmeal; and I required so little sleep, that, although I rose with the peep of day, I would often lie long awake in the dark or starry watches of the night. Thus in Graden Sea-Wood, although I fell thankfully asleep by eight in the evening I was awake again before eleven with a full possession of my faculties, and no sense of drowsiness or fatigue. I rose and sat by the fire, watching the trees and clouds tumultuously tossing and fleeing overhead, and hearkening to the wind and the rollers along the shore; till at length, growing weary of inaction, I quitted the den, and strolled toward the borders of the wood. A young moon, buried in mist, gave a faint illumination to my steps; and the light grew brighter as I walked forth into the links. At the same moment, the wind, smelling salt of the open ocean and carrying particles of sand, struck me with its full force, so that I had to bow my head.

When I raised it again to look about me, I was aware of a light in the pavilion. It was not stationary; but passed from one window to another, as though some one were reviewing the different apartments with a lamp or candle. I watched it for some seconds in great surprise. When I had arrived in the afternoon the house had been plainly deserted; now it was as plainly occupied. It was my first idea that a gang of thieves might have broken in and be now ransacking Northmour's cupboards, which were many and not ill supplied. But what should bring thieves to Graden Easter? And, again, all the shutters had been thrown open, and it would have been more in the character of such gentry to close them. I dismissed the notion, and fell back upon another. Northmour himself must have arrived, and was now airing and inspecting the pavilion.

I have said that there was no real affection between this man and me; but, had I loved him like a brother, I was then so much more in love with solitude that I should none the less have shunned his company. As it was, I turned and ran for it; and it was with genuine satisfaction that I found myself safely back beside the fire. I had escaped an acquaintance; I should have one more night in comfort. In the morning I might either slip away before Northmour was abroad or pay him as short a visit as I chose.

But when morning came I thought the situation so diverting that I forgot my shyness. Northmour was at my mercy; I arranged a good practical jest, though I knew well that my neighbor was not the man to jest with in security; and, chuckling beforehand over its success, took my place among the elders at the edge of the wood, whence I could command the door of the pavilion. The shutters were all once more closed, which I remember thinking odd; and the house, with its white walls and green Venetians, looked spruce and habitable in the morning light. Hour after hour passed, and still no sign of Northmour. I knew him for a sluggard in the morning; but, as it drew on toward noon, I lost my patience. To say the truth, I had promised myself to break my fast in the pavilion, and hunger began to prick me sharply. It was a pity to let the opportunity go by without some cause for mirth; but the grosser appetite prevailed, and I relinquished my jest with regret, and sallied from the wood.

The appearance of the house affected me, as I drew near, with disquietude. It seemed unchanged since last evening; and I had expected it, I scarce knew why, to wear some external signs of habitation. But no: the windows were all closely shuttered, the chimneys breathed no smoke, and the front door itself was closely padlocked. Northmour, therefore, had entered by the back; this was the natural, and, indeed, the necessary conclusion; and you may judge of my surprise when, on turning the house, I found the back door similarly secured.

My mind at once reverted to the original theory of thieves; and I blamed myself sharply for my last night's inaction. I examined all the windows on the lower story, but none of them had been tampered with; I tried the padlocks, but they were both secure. It thus became a problem how the thieves, if thieves they were, had managed to enter the house. They must have got, I reasoned, upon the roof of the outhouse where Northmour used to keep his photographic battery; and from thence, either by the window of the study or that of my old bedroom, completed their burglarious entry.

I followed what I supposed was their example; and, getting on the roof, tried the shutters of each room. Both were secure; but I was not to be beaten; and, with a little force, one of them flew open, grazing, as it did so, the back of my hand. I remember, I put the wound to my

mouth, and stood for perhaps half a minute licking it like a dog, and mechanically gazing behind me over the waste links and the sea; and, in that space of time, my eye made note of a large schooner yacht some miles to the northeast. Then I threw up the window and climbed in.

I went over the house, and nothing can express my mystification. There was no sign of disorder, but, on the contrary, the rooms were unusually clean and pleasant. I found fires laid, ready for lighting; three bedrooms prepared with a luxury quite foreign to Northmour's habits, and with water in the ewers and the beds turned down; a table set for three in the dining-room; and an ample supply of cold meats, game, and vegetables on the pantry shelves. There were guests expected, that was plain; but why guests, when Northmour hated society? And, above all, why was the house thus stealthily prepared at dead of night? and why were the shutters closed and the doors padlocked?

I effaced all traces of my visit, and came forth from the window feeling sobered and concerned.

The schooner yacht was still in the same place; and it flashed for a moment through my mind that this might be the "Red Earl" bringing the owner of the pavilion and his guests. But the vessel's head was set the other way.

II

Tells of the Nocturnal Landing from the Yacht

I returned to the den to cook myself a meal, of which I stood in great need, as well as to care for my horse, whom I had somewhat neglected in the morning. From time to time I went down to the edge of the wood; but there was no change in the pavilion, and not a human creature was seen all day upon the links. The schooner in the offing was the one touch of life within my range of vision. She, apparently with no set object, stood off and on or lay to, hour after hour; but as the evening deepened, she drew steadily nearer. I became more convinced that she carried Northmour and his friends, and that they would probably come ashore after dark; not only because that was of a piece with the secrecy of the preparations, but because the tide would not have flowed sufficiently before eleven to cover Graden Floe and the other sea-quags that fortified the shore against invaders.

All day the wind had been going down, and the sea along with it; but there was a return toward sunset of the heavy weather of the day before. The night set in pitch dark. The wind came off the sea in squalls, like the firing of a battery of cannon; now and then there was a flaw of rain, and the surf rolled heavier with the rising tide. I was down at my observatory among the elders, when a light was run up to the masthead of the schooner, and showed she was closer in than when I had last seen her by the dying daylight. I concluded that this must be a signal to Northmour's associates on shore; and, stepping forth into the links, looked around me for something in response.

A small footpath ran along the margin of the wood, and formed the most direct communication between the pavilion and the mansion-house; and, as I cast my eyes to that side, I saw a spark of light, not a quarter of a mile away, and rapidly approaching. From its uneven course it appeared to be the light of a lantern carried by a person who followed the windings of the path, and was often staggered and taken aback by the more violent squalls. I concealed myself once more among the elders, and waited eagerly for the new-comer's advance. It proved to be a woman; and, as she passed within half a rod of my ambush, I was able to recognize the features. The deaf and silent old dame, who had nursed Northmour in his childhood, was his associate in this underhand affair.

I followed her at a little distance, taking advantage of the innumerable heights and hollows, concealed by the darkness, and favored not only by the nurse's deafness, but by the uproar of the wind and surf. She entered the pavilion, and, going at once to the upper story, opened and set a light in one of the windows that looked toward the sea. Immediately

afterward the light at the schooner's masthead was run down and extinguished. Its purpose had been attained, and those on board were sure that they were expected. The old woman resumed her preparations; although the other shutters remained closed, I could see a glimmer going to and fro about the house; and a gush of sparks from one chimney after another soon told me that the fires were being kindled. Northmour and his guests, I was now persuaded, would come ashore as soon as there was water on the floe. It was a wild night for boat service; and I felt some alarm mingle with my curiosity as I reflected on the danger of the landing. My old acquaintance, it was true, was the most eccentric of men; but the present eccentricity was both disquieting and lugubrious to consider. A variety of feelings thus led me toward the beach, where I lay flat on my face in a hollow within six feet of the track that led to the pavilion. Thence, I should have the satisfaction of recognizing the arrivals, and, if they should prove to be acquaintances, greeting them as soon as they had landed.

Some time before eleven, while the tide was still dangerously low, a boat's lantern appeared close inshore; and, my attention being thus awakened, I could perceive another still far to seaward, violently tossed, and sometimes hidden by the billows. The weather, which was getting dirtier as the night went on, and the perilous situation of the yacht upon a lee-shore, had probably driven them to attempt a landing at the earliest possible moment.

A little afterward, four yachtsmen carrying a very heavy chest, and guided by a fifth with a lantern, passed close in front of me as I lay, and were admitted to the pavilion by the nurse. They returned to the beach, and passed me a third time with another chest, larger but apparently not so heavy as the first. A third time they made the transit; and on this occasion one of the yachtsmen carried a leather portmanteau, and the others a lady's trunk and carriage bag. My curiosity was sharply excited. If a woman were among the guests of Northmour, it would show a change in his habits and an apostasy from his pet theories of life well calculated to fill me with surprise. When he and I dwelt there together, the pavilion had been a temple of misogyny. And now, one of the detested sex was to be installed under its roof. I remembered one or two particulars, a few notes of daintiness and almost of coquetry which had struck me the day before as I surveyed the preparations in the house; their purpose was now clear, and I thought myself dull not to have perceived it from the first.

While I was thus reflecting, a second lantern drew near me from the beach. It was carried by a yachtsman whom I had not yet seen, and who was conducting two other persons to the pavilion. These two persons were unquestionably the guests for whom the house was made ready; and, straining eye and ear, I set myself to watch them as they passed. One was an unusually tall man, in a traveling hat slouched over his eyes, and a highland cape closely buttoned and turned up so as to conceal his face. You could make out no more of him than that he was, as I have said, unusually tall, and walked feebly with a heavy stoop. By his side, and either clinging to him or giving him support—I could not make out which—was a young, tall, and slender figure of a woman. She was extremely pale; but in the light of the lantern her face was so marred by strong and changing shadows that she might equally well have been as ugly as sin or as beautiful as I afterward found her to be.

When they were just abreast of me, the girl made some remark which was drowned by the noise of the wind.

"Hush!" said her companion; and there was something in the tone with which the word was uttered that thrilled and rather shook my spirits. It seemed to breathe from a bosom laboring under the deadliest terror; I have never heard another syllable so expressive; and I still hear it again when I am feverish at night, and my mind runs upon old times. The man turned toward the girl as he spoke; I had a glimpse of much red beard and a nose which seemed to have been broken in youth; and his light eyes seemed shining in his face with some strong and unpleasant emotion.

But these two passed on and were admitted in their turn to the pavilion.

One by one, or in groups, the seamen returned to the beach. The wind brought me the sound of a rough voice crying, "Shove off!" Then, after a pause, another lantern drew near. It was Northmour alone.

My wife and I, a man and a woman, have often agreed to wonder how a person could be, at the same time, so handsome and so repulsive as Northmour. He had the appearance of a finished gentleman; his face bore every mark of intelligence and courage; but you had only to look at him, even in his most amiable moment, to see that he had the temper of a slaver captain. I never knew a character that was both explosive and revengeful to the same degree; he combined the vivacity of the south with the sustained and deadly hatreds of the north; and both traits were plainly written on his face, which was a sort of danger signal. In person, he was tall, strong, and active; his hair and complexion very dark; his features handsomely designed, but spoiled by a menacing expression.

At that moment he was somewhat paler than by nature; he wore a heavy frown; and his lips worked, and he looked sharply round him as he walked, like a man besieged with apprehensions. And yet I thought he had a look of triumph underlying all, as though he had already done much, and was near the end of an achievement.

Partly from a scruple of delicacy—which I dare say came too late—partly from the pleasure of startling an acquaintance, I desired to make my presence known to him without delay.

I got suddenly to my feet, and stepped forward.

"Northmour!" said I.

I have never had so shocking a surprise in all my days. He leaped on me without a word; something shone in his hand; and he struck for my heart with a dagger. At the same moment I knocked him head over heels. Whether it was my quickness, or his own uncertainty, I know not; but the blade only grazed my shoulder, while the hilt and his fist struck me violently on the mouth.

I fled, but not far. I had often and often observed the capabilities of the sand-hills for protracted ambush or stealthy advances and retreats; and, not ten yards from the scene of the scuffle, plumped down again upon the grass. The lantern had fallen and gone out. But what was my astonishment to see Northmour slip at a bound into the pavilion, and hear him bar the door behind him with a clang of iron!

He had not pursued me. He had run away. Northmour, whom I knew for the most implacable and daring of men, had run away! I could scarce believe my reason; and yet in this strange business, where all was incredible, there was nothing to make a work about in an incredibility more or less. For why was the pavilion secretly prepared? Why had Northmour landed with his guests at dead of night, in half a gale of wind, and with the floe scarce covered? Why had he sought to kill me? Had he not recognized my voice? I wondered. And, above all, how had he come to have a dagger ready in his hand? A dagger, or even a sharp knife, seemed out of keeping with the age in which we lived; and a gentleman landing from his yacht on the shore of his own estate, even although it was at night and with some mysterious circumstances, does not usually, as a matter of fact, walk thus prepared for deadly onslaught. The more I reflected, the further I felt at sea. I recapitulated the elements of mystery, counting them on my fingers: the pavilion secretly prepared for guests; the guests landed at the risk of their lives and to the imminent peril of the yacht; the guests, or at least one of them, in undisguised and seemingly causeless terror; Northmour with a naked weapon; Northmour stabbing his most intimate acquaintance at a word; last, and not least strange, Northmour fleeing from the man whom he had sought to murder, and barricading himself, like a hunted creature, behind the door of the pavilion. Here were at least six separate causes for extreme surprise; each part and parcel with the others, and forming all together one consistent story. I felt almost ashamed to believe my own senses.

As I thus stood, transfixed with wonder, I began to grow painfully conscious of the injuries I had received in the scuffle; skulked round among the sand-hills; and, by a devious path, regained the shelter of the wood. On the way, the old nurse passed again within several yards of me, still carrying her lantern, on the return journey to the mansion-house of Graden. This made a seventh suspicious feature in the case. Northmour and his guests, it appeared, were to cook and do the cleaning for themselves, while the old woman continued to inhabit

the big empty barrack among the policies. There must surely be great cause for secrecy, when so many inconveniences were confronted to preserve it.

So thinking, I made my way to the den. For greater security, I trod out the embers of the fire, and lighted my lantern to examine the wound upon my shoulder. It was a trifling hurt, although it bled somewhat freely, and I dressed it as well as I could (for its position made it difficult to reach) with some rag and cold water from the spring. While I was thus busied, I mentally declared war against Northmour and his mystery. I am not an angry man by nature, and I believe there was more curiosity than resentment in my heart. But war I certainly declared; and, by way of preparation, I got out my revolver, and, having drawn the charges, cleaned and reloaded it with scrupulous care. Next I became preoccupied about my horse. It might break loose, or fall to neighing, and so betray my camp in the Sea-Wood. I determined to rid myself of its neighborhood; and long before dawn I was leading it over the links in the direction of the fisher village.

III

Tells How I Became Acquainted with my Wife

For two days I skulked round the pavilion, profiting by the uneven surface of the links. I became an adept in the necessary tactics. These low hillocks and shallow dells, running one into another, became a kind of cloak of darkness for my enthralling, but perhaps dishonorable, pursuit. Yet, in spite of this advantage, I could learn but little of Northmour or his guests.

Fresh provisions were brought under cover of darkness by the old woman from the mansion-house. Northmour, and the young lady, sometimes together, but more often singly, would walk for an hour or two at a time on the beach beside the quicksand. I could not but conclude that this promenade was chosen with an eye to secrecy; for the spot was open only to the seaward. But it suited me not less excellently; the highest and most accidented of the sand-hills immediately adjoined; and from these, lying flat in a hollow, I could overlook Northmour or the young lady as they walked.

The tall man seemed to have disappeared. Not only did he never cross the threshold, but he never so much as showed face at a window; or, at least, not so far as I could see; for I dared not creep forward beyond a certain distance in the day, since the upper floor commanded the bottoms of the links; and at night, when I could venture further, the lower windows were barricaded as if to stand a siege. Sometimes I thought the tall man must be confined to bed, for I remembered the feebleness of his gait; and sometimes I thought he must have gone clear away, and that Northmour and the young lady remained alone together in the pavilion. The idea, even then, displeased me.

Whether or not this pair were man and wife, I had seen abundant reason to doubt the friendliness of their relation. Although I could hear nothing of what they said, and rarely so much as glean a decided expression on the face of either, there was a distance, almost a stiffness, in their bearing which showed them to be either unfamiliar or at enmity. The girl walked faster when she was with Northmour than when she was alone; and I conceived that any inclination between a man and a woman would rather delay than accelerate the step. Moreover, she kept a good yard free of him, and trailed her umbrella, as if it were a barrier, on the side between them. Northmour kept sidling closer; and, as the girl retired from his advance, their course lay at a sort of diagonal across the beach, and would have landed them in the surf had it been long enough continued. But, when this was imminent, the girl would unostentatiously change sides and put Northmour between her and the sea. I watched these maneuvres, for my part, with high enjoyment and approval, and chuckled to myself at every move.

On the morning of the third day, she walked alone for some time, and I perceived, to my great concern, that she was more than once in tears. You will see that my heart was already interested more than I supposed. She had a firm yet airy motion of the body, and carried her

head with unimaginable grace; every step was a thing to look at, and she seemed in my eyes to breathe sweetness and distinction.

The day was so agreeable, being calm and sunshiny, with a tranquil sea, and yet with a healthful piquancy and vigor in the air, that, contrary to custom, she was tempted forth a second time to walk. On this occasion she was accompanied by Northmour, and they had been but a short while on the beach when I saw him take forcible possession of her hand. She struggled, and uttered a cry that was almost a scream. I sprang to my feet, unmindful of my strange position; but, ere I had taken a step, I saw Northmour bare-headed and bowing very low, as if to apologize; and dropped again at once into my ambush. A few words were interchanged; and then, with another bow, he left the beach to return to the pavilion. He passed not far from me, and I could see him, flushed and lowering, and cutting savagely with his cane among the grass. It was not without satisfaction that I recognized my own handiwork in a great cut under his right eye, and a considerable discoloration round the socket.

For some time the girl remained where he had left her, looking out past the islet and over the bright sea. Then with a start, as one who throws off preoccupation and puts energy again upon its mettle, she broke into a rapid and decisive walk. She also was much incensed by what had passed. She had forgotten where she was. And I beheld her walk straight into the borders of the quicksand where it is most abrupt and dangerous. Two or three steps further and her life would have been in serious jeopardy, when I slid down the face of the sand-hill, which is there precipitous, and, running half-way forward, called to her to stop.

She did so, and turned round. There was not a tremor of fear in her behavior, and she marched directly up to me like a queen. I was barefoot, and clad like a common sailor, save for an Egyptian scarf round my waist; and she probably took me at first for some one from the fisher village, straying after bait. As for her, when I thus saw her face to face, her eyes set steadily and imperiously upon mine, I was filled with admiration and astonishment, and thought her even more beautiful than I had looked to find her. Nor could I think enough of one who, acting with so much boldness, yet preserved a maidenly air that was both quaint and engaging; for my wife kept an old-fashioned precision of manner through all her admirable life—an excellent thing in woman, since it sets another value on her sweet familiarities.

"What does this mean?" she asked.

"You were walking," I told her, "directly into Graden Floe."

"You do not belong to these parts," she said again. "You speak like an educated man."

"I believe I have right to that name," said I, "although in this disguise."

But her woman's eye had already detected the sash.

"Oh!" she said; "your sash betrays you."

"You have said the word *betray*," I resumed. "May I ask you not to betray me? I was obliged to disclose myself in your interest; but if Northmour learned my presence it might be worse than disagreeable for me."

"Do you know," she asked, "to whom you are speaking?"

"Not to Mr. Northmour's wife?" I asked, by way of answer.

She shook her head. All this while she was studying my face with an embarrassing intentness. Then she broke out:

"You have an honest face. Be honest like your face, sir, and tell me what you want and what you are afraid of. Do you think I could hurt you? I believe you have far more power to injure me! And yet you do not look unkind. What do you mean—you, a gentleman—by skulking like a spy about this desolate place? Tell me," she said, "who is it you hate?"

"I hate no one," I answered; "and I fear no one face to face. My name is Cassilis—Frank Cassilis. I lead the life of a vagabond for my own good pleasure. I am one of Northmour's oldest friends; and three nights ago, when I addressed him on these links, he stabbed me in the shoulder with a knife."

"It was you!" she said.

"Why he did so," I continued, disregarding the interruption, "is more than I can guess, and more than I care to know. I have not many friends, nor am I very susceptible to friendship; but no man shall drive me from a place by terror. I had camped in Graden Sea-Wood ere he came; I camp in it still. If you think I mean harm to you or yours, madam, the remedy is in your hand. Tell him that my camp is in the Hemlock Den, and to-night he can stab me in safety while I sleep."

With this I doffed my cap to her, and scrambled up once more among the sand-hills. I do not know why, but I felt a prodigious sense of injustice, and felt like a hero and a martyr; while, as a matter of fact, I had not a word to say in my defense, nor so much as one plausible reason to offer for my conduct. I had stayed at Graden out of a curiosity natural enough, but undignified; and though there was another motive growing in along with the first, it was not one which, at that period, I could have properly explained to the lady of my heart.

Certainly, that night, I thought of no one else; and, though her whole conduct and position seemed suspicious, I could not find it in my heart to entertain a doubt of her integrity. I could have staked my life that she was clear of blame, and, though all was dark at the present, that the explanation of the mystery would show her part in these events to be both right and needful. It was true, let me cudgel my imagination as I pleased, that I could invent no theory of her relations to Northmour; but I felt none the less sure of my conclusion because it was founded on instinct in place of reason, and, as I may say, went to sleep that night with the thought of her under my pillow.

Next day she came out about the same hour alone, and, as soon as the sand-hills concealed her from the pavilion, drew nearer to the edge, and called me by name in guarded tones. I was astonished to observe that she was deadly pale, and seemingly under the influence of strong emotion. "Mr. Cassilis!" she cried; "Mr. Cassilis!"

I appeared at once, and leaped down upon the beach. A remarkable air of relief overspread her countenance as soon as she saw me.

"Oh!" she cried, with a hoarse sound, like one whose bosom has been lightened of a weight. And then, "Thank God you are still safe!" she added; "I knew, if you were, you would be here." (Was not this strange? So swiftly and wisely does Nature prepare our hearts for these great life-long intimacies, that both my wife and I had been given a presentiment on this the second day of our acquaintance. I had even then hoped that she would seek me; she had felt sure that she would find me.) "Do not," she went on swiftly, "do not stay in this place. Promise me that you will sleep no longer in that wood. You do not know how I suffer; all last night I could not sleep for thinking of your peril."

"Peril?" I repeated. "Peril from whom? From Northmour?"

"Not so," she said. "Did you think I would tell him after what you said?"

"Not from Northmour?" I repeated. "Then how? From whom? I see none to be afraid of."

"You must not ask me," was her reply, "for I am not free to tell you. Only believe me, and go hence—believe me, and go away quickly, quickly for your life!"

An appeal to his alarm is never a good plan to rid one's self of a spirited young man. My obstinacy was but increased by what she said, and I made it a point of honor to remain. And her solicitude for my safety still more confirmed me in the resolve.

"You must not think me inquisitive, madam," I replied; "but, if Graden is so dangerous a place, you yourself perhaps remain here at some risk."

She only looked at me reproachfully.

"You and your father—" I resumed; but she interrupted me almost with a gasp.

"My father! How do you know that?" she cried.

"I saw you together when you landed," was my answer; and I do not know why, but it seemed satisfactory to both of us, as indeed it was the truth. "But," I continued, "you need have no fear from me. I see you have some reason to be secret, and, you may believe me, your secret is as safe with me as if I were in Graden Floe. I have scarce spoken to any one for years; my horse is my only companion, and even he, poor beast, is not beside me. You see, then, you may count on me for silence. So tell me the truth, my dear young lady, are you not in danger?"

"Mr. Northmour says you are an honorable man," she returned, "and I believe it when I see you. I will tell you so much; you are right; we are in dreadful, dreadful danger, and you share it by remaining where you are."

"Ah!" said I; "you have heard of me from Northmour? And he gives me a good character?"

"I asked him about you last night," was her reply. "I pretended," she hesitated, "I pretended to have met you long ago, and spoken to you of him. It was not true; but I could not help myself without betraying you, and you had put me in a difficulty. He praised you highly."

"And—you may permit me one question—does this danger come from Northmour?" I asked.

"From Mr. Northmour?" she cried. "Oh, no; he stays with us to share it."

"While you propose that I should run away?" I said. "You do not rate me very high."

"Why should you stay?" she asked. "You are no friend of ours."

I know not what came over me, for I had not been conscious of a similar weakness since I was a child, but I was so mortified by this retort that my eyes pricked and filled with tears, as I continued to gaze upon her face.

"No, no," she said, in a changed voice; "I did not mean the words unkindly."

"It was I who offended," I said; and I held out my hand with a look of appeal that somehow touched her, for she gave me hers at once, and even eagerly. I held it for a while in mine, and gazed into her eyes. It was she who first tore her hand away, and, forgetting all about her request and the promise she had sought to extort, ran at the top of her speed, and without turning, till she was out of sight. And then I knew that I loved her, and thought in my glad heart that she—she herself—was not indifferent to my suit. Many a time she has denied it in after days, but it was with a smiling and not a serious denial. For my part, I am sure our hands would not have lain so closely in each other if she had not begun to melt to me already. And, when all is said, it is no great contention, since, by her own avowal, she began to love me on the morrow.

And yet on the morrow very little took place. She came and called me down as on the day before, upbraided me for lingering at Graden, and, when she found I was still obdurate, began to ask me more particularly as to my arrival. I told her by what series of accidents I had come to witness their disembarkation, and how I had determined to remain, partly from the interest which had been wakened in me by Northmour's guests, and partly because of his own murderous attack. As to the former, I fear I was disingenuous, and led her to regard herself as having been an attraction to me from the first moment that I saw her on the links. It relieves my heart to make this confession even now, when my wife is with God, and already knows all things, and the honesty of my purpose even in this; for while she lived, although it often

pricked my conscience, I had never the hardihood to undeceive her. Even a little secret, in such a married life as ours, is like the rose-leaf which kept the Princess from her sleep.

From this the talk branched into other subjects, and I told her much about my lonely and wandering existence; she, for her part, giving ear, and saying little. Although we spoke very naturally, and latterly on topics that might seem indifferent, we were both sweetly agitated. Too soon it was time for her to go; and we separated, as if by mutual consent, without shaking hands, for both knew that, between us, it was no idle ceremony.

The next, and that was the fourth day of our acquaintance, we met in the same spot, but early in the morning, with much familiarity and yet much timidity on either side. When she had once more spoken about my danger—and that, I understood, was her excuse for coming—I, who had prepared a great deal of talk during the night, began to tell her how highly I valued her kind interest, and how no one had ever cared to hear about my life, nor had I ever cared to relate it; before yesterday. Suddenly she interrupted me, saying with vehemence:

"And yet, if you knew who I was, you would not so much as speak to me!"

I told her such a thought was madness, and, little as we had met, I counted her already a dear friend; but my protestations seemed only to make her more desperate.

"My father is in hiding!" she cried.

"My dear," I said, forgetting for the first time to add "young lady," "what do I care? If he were in hiding twenty times over, would it make one thought of change in you?"

"Ah, but the cause!" she cried, "the cause! It is"—she faltered for a second—"it is disgraceful to us!"

IV

Tells in what a Startling Manner I Learned that I was not Alone in Graden Sea-Wood

This was my wife's story, as I drew it from her among tears and sobs. Her name was Clara Huddlestone: it sounded very beautiful in my ears; but not so beautiful as that other name of Clara Cassilis, which she wore during the longer and, I thank God, the happier portion of her life. Her father, Bernard Huddlestone, had been a private banker in a very large way of business. Many years before, his affairs becoming disordered, he had been led to try dangerous, and at last criminal, expedients to retrieve himself from ruin. All was in vain; he became more and more cruelly involved, and found his honor lost at the same moment with his fortune. About this period, Northmour had been courting his daughter with great assiduity, though with small encouragement; and to him, knowing him thus disposed in his favor, Bernard Huddlestone turned for help in his extremity. It was not merely ruin and dishonor, nor merely a legal condemnation, that the unhappy man had brought upon his head. It seems he could have gone to prison with a light heart. What he feared, what kept him awake at night or recalled him from slumber into frenzy, was some secret, sudden, and unlawful attempt upon his life. Hence, he desired to bury his existence and escape to one of the islands in the South Pacific, and it was in Northmour's yacht, the "Red Earl," that he designed to go. The yacht picked them up clandestinely upon the coast of Wales, and had once more deposited them at Graden, till she could be refitted and provisioned for the longer voyage. Nor could Clara doubt that her hand had been stipulated as the price of passage. For, although Northmour was neither unkind nor even discourteous, he had shown himself in several instances somewhat overbold in speech and manner.

I listened, I need not say, with fixed attention, and put many questions as to the more mysterious part. It was in vain. She had no clear idea of what the blow was, nor of how it was expected to fall. Her father's alarm was unfeigned and physically prostrating, and he had thought more than once of making an unconditional surrender to the police. But the scheme

was finally abandoned, for he was convinced that not even the strength of our English prisons could shelter him from his pursuers. He had had many affairs with Italy, and with Italians resident in London, in the later years of his business; and these last, as Clara fancied, were somehow connected with the doom that threatened him. He had shown great terror at the presence of an Italian seaman on board the "Red Earl," and had bitterly and repeatedly accused Northmour in consequence. The latter had protested that Beppo (that was the seaman's name) was a capital fellow, and could be trusted to the death; but Mr. Huddlestone had continued ever since to declare that all was lost, that it was only a question of days, and that Beppo would be the ruin of him yet.

I regarded the whole story as the hallucination of a mind shaken by calamity. He had suffered heavy loss by his Italian transactions; and hence the sight of an Italian was hateful to him, and the principal part in his nightmare would naturally enough be played by one of that nation.

"What your father wants," I said, "is a good doctor and some calming medicine."

"But Mr. Northmour?" objected Clara. "He is untroubled by losses, and yet he shares in this terror."

I could not help laughing at what I considered her simplicity.

"My dear," said I, "you have told me yourself what reward he has to look for. All is fair in love, you must remember; and if Northmour foments your father's terrors, it is not at all because he is afraid of any Italian man, but simply because he is infatuated with a charming Englishwoman."

She reminded me of his attack upon myself on the night of the disembarkation, and this I was unable to explain. In short, and from one thing to another, it was agreed between us that I should set out at once for the fisher village, Graden Wester, as it was called, look up all the newspapers I could find, and see for myself if there seemed any basis of fact for these continued alarms. The next morning, at the same hour and place, I was to make my report to Clara. She said no more on that occasion about my departure; nor, indeed, did she make it a secret that she clung to the thought of my proximity as something helpful and pleasant; and, for my part, I could not have left her, if she had gone upon her knees to ask it.

I reached Graden Wester before ten in the forenoon; for in those days I was an excellent pedestrian, and the distance, as I think I have said, was little over seven miles; fine walking all the way upon the springy turf. The village is one of the bleakest on that coast, which is saying much: there is a church in a hollow; a miserable haven in the rocks, where many boats have been lost as they returned from fishing; two or three score of stone houses arranged along the beach and in two streets, one leading from the harbor, and another striking out from it at right angles; and, at the corner of these two, a very dark and cheerless tavern, by way of principal hotel.

I had dressed myself somewhat more suitably to my station in life, and at once called upon the minister in his little manse beside the graveyard. He knew me, although it was more than nine years since we had met; and when I told him that I had been long upon a walking tour, and was behind with the news, readily lent me an armful of newspapers, dating from a month back to the day before. With these I sought the tavern, and, ordering some breakfast, sat down to study the "Huddlestone Failure."

It had been, it appeared, a very flagrant case. Thousands of persons were reduced to poverty; and one in particular had blown out his brains as soon as payment was suspended. It was strange to myself that, while I read these details, I continued rather to sympathize with Mr. Huddlestone than with his victims; so complete already was the empire of my love for Clara. A price was naturally set upon the banker's head; and, as the case was inexcusable and the public indignation thoroughly aroused, the unusual figure of 750*l.* was offered for his capture. He was reported to have large sums of money in his possession. One day, he had been heard of in Spain; the next, there was sure intelligence that he was still lurking between Manchester and Liverpool, or along the border of Wales; and the day after, a telegram would

announce his arrival in Cuba or Yucatan. But in all this there was no word of an Italian, nor any sign of mystery.

In the very last paper, however, there was one item not so clear. The accountants who were charged to verify the failure had, it seemed, come upon the traces of a very large number of thousands, which figured for some time in the transactions of the house of Huddlestone; but which came from nowhere, and disappeared in the same mysterious fashion. It was only once referred to by name, and then under the initials "X.X."; but it had plainly been floated for the first time into the business at a period of great depression some six years ago. The name of a distinguished royal personage had been mentioned by rumor in connection with this sum. "The cowardly desperado"—such, I remember, was the editorial expression—was supposed to have escaped with a large part of this mysterious fund still in his possession.

I was still brooding over the fact, and trying to torture it into some connection with Mr. Huddlestone's danger, when a man entered the tavern and asked for some bread and cheese with a decided foreign accent.

"*Siete Italiano?*" said I.

"*Si, Signor*," was his reply.

I said it was unusually far north to find one of his compatriots; at which he shrugged his shoulders, and replied that a man would go anywhere to find work. What work he could hope to find at Graden Wester, I was totally unable to conceive; and the incident struck so unpleasantly upon my mind that I asked the landlord, while he was counting me some change, whether he had ever before seen an Italian in the village. He said he had once seen some Norwegians, who had been shipwrecked on the other side of Graden Ness and rescued by the lifeboat from Cauld-haven.

"No!" said I; "but an Italian, like the man who has just had bread and cheese."

"What?" cried he, "yon black-avised fellow wi' the teeth? Was he an I-talian? Weel, yon's the first that ever I saw, an' I daresay he's like to be the last."

Even as he was speaking, I raised my eyes, and, casting a glance into the street, beheld three men in earnest conversation together, and not thirty yards away. One of them was my recent companion in the tavern parlor; the other two, by their handsome, sallow features and soft hats, should evidently belong to the same race. A crowd of village children stood around them, gesticulating and talking gibberish in imitation. The trio looked singularly foreign to the bleak dirty street in which they were standing, and the dark gray heaven that overspread them; and I confess my incredulity received at that moment a shock from which it never recovered. I might reason with myself as I pleased, but I could not argue down the effect of what I had seen, and I began to share in the Italian terror.

It was already drawing toward the close of the day before I had returned the newspapers at the manse, and got well forward on to the links on my way home. I shall never forget that walk. It grew very cold and boisterous; the wind sang in the short grass about my feet; thin rain showers came running on the gusts; and an immense mountain range of clouds began to arise out of the bosom of the sea. It would be hard to imagine a more dismal evening; and whether it was from these external influences, or because my nerves were already affected by what I had heard and seen, my thoughts were as gloomy as the weather.

The upper windows of the pavilion commanded a considerable spread of links in the direction of Graden Wester. To avoid observation, it was necessary to hug the beach until I had gained cover from the higher sand-hills on the little headland, when I might strike across, through the hollows, for the margin of the wood. The sun was about setting; the tide was low, and all the quicksands uncovered; and I was moving along, lost in unpleasant thought, when I was suddenly thunderstruck to perceive the prints of human feet. They ran parallel to my own course, but low down upon the beach instead of along the border of the turf; and, when I examined them, I saw at once, by the size and coarseness of the impression, that it was a stranger to me and to those in the pavilion who had recently passed that way. Not only so; but from the recklessness of the course which he had followed, steering near to the most

formidable portions of the sand, he was as evidently a stranger to the country and to the ill-repute of Graden beach.

Step by step I followed the prints; until, a quarter of a mile further, I beheld them die away into the southeastern boundary of Graden Floe. There, whoever he was, the miserable man had perished. One or two gulls, who had, perhaps, seen him disappear, wheeled over his sepulchre with their usual melancholy piping. The sun had broken through the clouds by a last effort, and colored the wide level of quicksands with a dusky purple. I stood for some time gazing at the spot, chilled and disheartened by my own reflections, and with a strong and commanding consciousness of death. I remember wondering how long the tragedy had taken, and whether his screams had been audible at the pavilion. And then, making a strong resolution, I was about to tear myself away, when a gust fiercer than usual fell upon this quarter of the beach, and I saw, now whirling high in air, now skimming lightly across the surface of the sands, a soft black felt hat, somewhat conical in shape, such as I had remarked already on the heads of the Italians.

I believe, but I am not sure, that I uttered a cry. The wind was driving the hat shoreward, and I ran round the border of the floe to be ready against its arrival. The gust fell, dropping the hat for a while upon the quicksand, and then, once more freshening, landed it a few yards from where I stood. I seized it with the interest you may imagine. It had seen some service; indeed, it was rustier than either of those I had seen that day upon the street. The lining was red, stamped with the name of the maker, which I have forgotten, and that of the place of manufacture, Venedig. This (it is not yet forgotten) was the name given by the Austrians to the beautiful city of Venice, then, and for long after, a part of their dominions.

The shock was complete. I saw imaginary Italians upon every side; and for the first and, I may say, for the last time in my experience became overpowered by what is called a panic terror. I knew nothing, that is, to be afraid of, and yet I admit that I was heartily afraid; and it was with a sensible reluctance that I returned to my exposed and solitary camp in the Sea-Wood.

There I ate some cold porridge which had been left over from the night before, for I was disinclined to make a fire; and, feeling strengthened and reassured, dismissed all these fanciful terrors from my mind, and lay down to sleep with composure.

How long I may have slept it is impossible for me to guess; but I was awakened at last by a sudden, blinding flash of light into my face. It woke me like a blow. In an instant I was upon my knees. But the light had gone as suddenly as it came. The darkness was intense. And, as it was blowing great guns from the sea and pouring with rain, the noises of the storm effectually concealed all others.

It was, I dare say, half a minute before I regained my self-possession. But for two circumstances, I should have thought I had been awakened by some new and vivid form of nightmare. First, the flap of my tent, which I had shut carefully when I retired, was now unfastened; and, second, I could still perceive, with a sharpness that excluded any theory of hallucination, the smell of hot metal and of burning oil. The conclusion was obvious. I had been wakened by some one flashing a bull's-eye lantern in my face. It had been but a flash, and away. He had seen my face, and then gone. I asked myself the object of so strange a proceeding, and the answer came pat. The man, whoever he was, had thought to recognize me, and he had not. There was yet another question unresolved; and to this, I may say, I feared to give an answer; if he had recognized me, what would he have done?

My fears were immediately diverted from myself, for I saw that I had been visited in a mistake; and I became persuaded that some dreadful danger threatened the pavilion. It required some nerve to issue forth into the black and intricate thicket which surrounded and overhung the den; but I groped my way to the links, drenched with rain, beaten upon and deafened by the gusts, and fearing at every step to lay my hand upon some lurking adversary. The darkness was so complete that I might have been surrounded by an army and yet none the wiser, and the uproar of the gale so loud that my hearing was as useless as my sight.

For the rest of that night, which seemed interminably long, I patrolled the vicinity of the pavilion, without seeing a living creature or hearing any noise but the concert of the wind, the

sea, and the rain. A light in the upper story filtered through a cranny of the shutter, and kept me company till the approach of dawn.

V

Tells of an Interview between Northmour, Clara, and Myself

With the first peep of day, I retired from the open to my old lair among the sand-hills, there to await the coming of my wife. The morning was gray, wild, and melancholy; the wind moderated before sunrise, and then went about, and blew in puffs from the shore; the sea began to go down, but the rain still fell without mercy. Over all the wilderness of links there was not a creature to be seen. Yet I felt sure the neighborhood was alive with skulking foes. The light that had been so suddenly and surprisingly flashed upon my face as I lay sleeping, and the hat that had been blown ashore by the wind from over Graden Floe, were two speaking signals of the peril that environed Clara and the party in the pavilion.

It was, perhaps, half-past seven, or nearer eight, before I saw the door open, and that dear figure come toward me in the rain. I was waiting for her on the beach before she had crossed the sand-hills.

"I have had such trouble to come!" she cried. "They did not wish me to go walking in the rain."

"Clara," I said, "you are not frightened?"

"No," said she, with a simplicity that filled my heart with confidence. For my wife was the bravest as well as the best of women; in my experience I have not found the two go always together, but with her they did; and she combined the extreme of fortitude with the most endearing and beautiful virtues.

I told her what had happened; and, though her cheek grew visibly paler, she retained perfect control over her senses.

"You see now that I am safe," said I, in conclusion. "They do not mean to harm me; for, had they chosen, I was a dead man last night."

She laid her hand upon my arm.

"And I had no presentiment!" she cried.

Her accent thrilled me with delight. I put my arm about her, and strained her to my side; and, before either of us was aware, her hands were on my shoulders and my lips upon her mouth. Yet up to that moment no word of love had passed between us. To this day I remember the touch of her cheek, which was wet and cold with the rain; and many a time since, when she has been washing her face, I have kissed it again for the sake of that morning on the beach. Now that she is taken from me, and I finish my pilgrimage alone, I recall our old lovingkindnesses and the deep honesty and attention which united us, and my present loss seems but a trifle in comparison.

We may have thus stood for some seconds—for time passes quickly with lovers—before we were startled by a peal of laughter close at hand. It was not natural mirth, but seemed to be affected in order to conceal an angrier feeling. We both turned, though I still kept my left arm about Clara's waist: nor did she seek to withdraw herself; and there, a few paces off upon the beach, stood Northmour, his head lowered, his hands behind his back, his nostrils white with passion.

"Ah! Cassilis!" he said, as I disclosed my face.

"That same," said I: for I was not at all put about.

"And so, Miss Huddlestone," he continued slowly but savagely, "this is hew you keep your faith to your father and to me? This is the value you set upon father's life? And you are so infatuated with this young gentleman that you must brave ruin, and decency, and common human caution—"

"Miss Huddlestone—" I was beginning to interrupt him, when he, in his turn, cut in brutally—

"You hold your tongue," said he: "I am speaking to that girl."

"That girl, as you call her, is my wife." said I; and my wife only leaned a little nearer, so that I knew she had affirmed my words.

"Your what?" he cried, "You lie!"

"Northmour," I said, "we all know you have a bad temper, and I am the last man to be irritated by words. For all that, I propose that you speak lower, for I am convinced that we are not alone."

He looked round him, and it was plain my remark had in some degree sobered his passion, "What do you mean?" he asked.

I only said one word: "Italians."

He swore a round oath, and looked at us, from one to the other.

"Mr. Cassilis knows all that I know," said my wife.

"What I want to know," he broke out, "is where the devil Mr. Cassilis comes from, and what the devil Mr. Cassilis is doing here. You say you are married; that I do not believe. If you were, Graden Floe would soon divorce you; four minutes and a half, Cassilis. I keep my private cemetery for my friends."

"It took somewhat longer," said I, "for that Italian."

He looked at me for a moment half daunted, and then, almost civilly, asked me to tell my story. "You have too much the advantage of me, Cassilis," he added. I complied of course; and he listened, with several ejaculations, while I told him how I had come to Graden; that it was I whom he had tried to murder on the night of landing; and what I had subsequently seen and heard of the Italians.

"Well," said he, when I had done, "it is here at last; there is no mistake about that. And what, may I ask, do you propose to do?"

"I propose to stay with you and lend a hand," said I.

"You are a brave man," he returned, with a peculiar intonation.

"I am not afraid," said I.

"And so," he continued, "I am to understand that you two are married? And you stand up to it before my face, Miss Huddlestone?"

"We are not yet married," said Clara; "but we shall be as soon as we can."

"Bravo!" cried Northmour. "And the bargain? D—n it, you're not a fool, young woman; I may call a spade a spade with you. How about the bargain? You know as well as I do what your father's life depends upon. I have only to put my hands under my coat-tails and walk away, and his throat would be cut before the evening."

"Yes, Mr. Northmour," returned Clara, with great spirit; "but that is what you will never do. You made a bargain that was unworthy of a gentleman; but you are a gentleman for all that, and you will never desert a man whom you have begun to help."

"Aha!" said he. "You think I will give my yacht for nothing? You think I will risk my life and liberty for love of the old gentleman; and then, I suppose, be best man at the wedding, to wind up? Well," he added, with an old smile, "perhaps you are not altogether wrong. But ask Cassilis here. *He* knows me. Am I a man to trust? Am I safe and scrupulous? Am I kind?"

"I know you talk a great deal, and sometimes, I think, very foolishly," replied Clara, "but I know you are a gentleman, and I am not the least afraid."

He looked at her with a peculiar approval and admiration; then, turning to me, "Do you think I would give her up without a struggle, Frank?" said he. "I tell you plainly, you look out. The next time we come to blows—"

"Will make the third," I interrupted, smiling.

"Ay, true; so it will," he said. "I had forgotten. Well, the third time's lucky."

"The third time, you mean, you will have the crew of the 'Red Earl' to help," I said.

"Do you hear him?" he asked, turning to my wife.

"I hear two men speaking like cowards," said she. "I should despise myself either to think or speak like that. And neither of you believe one word that you are saying, which makes it the more wicked and silly."

"She's a trump!" cried Northmour. "But she's not yet Mrs. Cassilis. I say no more. The present is not for me."

Then my wife surprised me.

"I leave you here," she said suddenly. "My father has been too long alone. But remember this: you are to be friends, for you are both good friends to me."

She has since told me her reason for this step. As long as she remained, she declares that we two would have continued to quarrel; and I suppose that she was right, for when she was gone we fell at once into a sort of confidentiality.

Northmour stared after her as she went away over the sand-hill.

"She is the only woman in the world!" he exclaimed with an oath. "Look at her action."

I, for my part, leaped at this opportunity for a little further light.

"See here, Northmour," said I; "we are all in a tight place, are we not?"

"I believe you, my boy," he answered, looking me in the eyes, and with great emphasis. "We have all hell upon us, that's the truth. You may believe me or not, but I'm afraid of my life."

"Tell me one thing," said I. "What are they after, these Italians? What do they want with Mr. Huddlestone?"

"Don't you know?" he cried. "The black old scamp had Carbonaro funds on a deposit—two hundred and eighty thousand; and of course he gambled it away on stocks. There was to have been a revolution in the Tridentino, or Parma; but the revolution is off, and the whole wasps' nest is after Huddlestone. We shall all be lucky if we can save our skins."

"The Carbonari!" I exclaimed; "God help him indeed!"

"Amen!" said Northmour. "And now, look here: I have said that we are in a fix; and, frankly, I shall be glad of your help. If I can't save Huddlestone, I want at least to save the girl. Come and stay in the pavilion; and, there's my hand on it, I shall act as your friend until the old man is either clear or dead. But," he added, "once that is settled, you become my rival once again, and I warn you—mind yourself."

"Done!" said I; and we shook hands.

"And now let us go directly to the fort," said Northmour; and he began to lead the way through the rain.

VI

Tells of my Introduction to the Tall Man

We were admitted to the pavilion by Clara, and I was surprised by the completeness and security of the defenses. A barricade of great strength, and yet easy to displace, supported the door against any violence from without; and the shutters of the dining-room, into which I was led directly, and which was feebly illuminated by a lamp, were even more elaborately fortified. The panels were strengthened by bars and cross-bars; and these, in their turn, were kept in position by a system of braces and struts, some abutting on the floor, some on the roof, and others, in fine, against the opposite wall of the apartment. It was at once a solid and well-designed piece of carpentry; and I did not seek to conceal my admiration.

"I am the engineer," said Northmour. "You remember the planks in the garden? Behold them!"

"I did not know you had so many talents," said I.

"Are you armed?" he continued, pointing to an array of guns and pistols, all in admirable order, which stood in line against the wall or were displayed upon the sideboard.

"Thank you," I returned; "I have gone armed since our last encounter. But, to tell you the truth, I have had nothing to eat since early yesterday evening."

Northmour produced some cold meat, to which I eagerly set myself, and a bottle of good Burgundy, by which, wet as I was, I did not scruple to profit. I have always been an extreme temperance man on principle; but it is useless to push principle to excess, and on this occasion I believe that I finished three-quarters of the bottle. As I ate, I still continued to admire the preparations for defense.

"We could stand a siege," I said at length.

"Ye—es," drawled Northmour; "a very little one, per—haps. It is not so much the strength of the pavilion I misdoubt; it is the double danger that kills me. If we get to shooting, wild as the country is, some one is sure to hear it, and then—why then it's the same thing, only different, as they say: caged by law, or killed by Carbonari. There's the choice. It is a devilish bad thing to have the law against you in this world, and so I tell the old gentleman upstairs. He is quite of my way of thinking."

"Speaking of that," said I, "what kind of person is he?"

"Oh, he!" cried the other; "he's a rancid fellow, as far as he goes. I should like to have his neck wrung to-morrow by all the devils in Italy. I am not in this affair for him. You take me? I made a bargain for Missy's hand, and I mean to have it, too."

"That, by the way," said I. "I understand. But how will Mr. Huddlestone take my intrusion?"

"Leave that to Clara," returned Northmour.

I could have struck him in the face for this coarse familiarity; but I respected the truce, as, I am bound to say, did Northmour, and so long as the danger continued not a cloud arose in our relation. I bear him this testimony with the most unfeigned satisfaction; nor am I without pride when I look back upon my own behavior. For surely no two men were ever left in a position so invidious and irritating.

As soon as I had done eating, we proceeded to inspect the lower floor. Window by window we tried the different supports, now and then making an inconsiderable change; and the strokes of the hammer sounded with startling loudness through the house. I proposed, I remember, to make loopholes; but he told me they were already made in the windows of the upper story. It was an anxious business this inspection, and left me down-hearted. There were two doors and five windows to protect, and, counting Clara, only four of us to defend them against an unknown number of foes. I communicated my doubts to Northmour, who assured me, with unmoved composure, that he entirely shared them.

"Before morning," said he, "we shall all be butchered and buried in Graden Floe. For me, that is written."

I could not help shuddering at the mention of the quicksands, but reminded Northmour that our enemies had spared me in the wood.

"Do not flatter yourself," said he. "Then you were not in the same boat with the old gentleman; now you are. It's the floe for all of us, mark my words."

I trembled for Clara; and just then her dear voice was heard calling us to come upstairs. Northmour showed me the way, and, when he had reached the landing, knocked at the door of what used to be called *My Uncle's Bedroom*, as the founder of the pavilion had designed it especially for himself.

"Come in, Northmour; come in, dear Mr. Cassilis," said a voice from within.

Pushing open the door, Northmour admitted me before him into the apartment. As I came in I could see the daughter slipping out by the side door into the study, which had been prepared as her bedroom. In the bed, which was drawn back against the wall, instead of standing, as I had last seen it, boldly across the window, sat Bernard Huddlestone, the defaulting banker. Little as I had seen of him by the shifting light of the lantern on the links, I had no difficulty in recognizing him for the same. He had a long and sallow countenance, surrounded by a long red beard and side-whiskers. His broken nose and high cheekbones gave him somewhat the air of a Kalmuck, and his light eyes shone with the excitement of a high fever. He wore a skullcap of black silk; a huge Bible lay open before him on the bed, with a pair of gold spectacles in the place, and a pile of other books lay on the stand by his side. The green curtains lent a cadaverous shade to his cheek; and, as he sat propped on pillows, his great stature was painfully hunched, and his head protruded till it overhung his knees. I believe if he had not died otherwise, he must have fallen a victim to consumption in the course of but a very few weeks.

He held out to me a hand, long, thin, and disagreeably hairy.

"Come in, come in, Mr. Cassilis," said he. "Another protector—ahem!—another protector. Always welcome as a friend of my daughter's, Mr. Cassilis. How they have rallied about me, my daughter's friends! May God in heaven bless and reward them for it!"

I gave him my hand, of course, because I could not help it; but the sympathy I had been prepared to feel for Clara's father was immediately soured by his appearance, and the wheedling, unreal tones in which he spoke.

"Cassilis is a good man," said Northmour; "worth ten."

"So I hear," cried Mr. Huddlestone eagerly; "so my girl tells me. Ah, Mr. Cassilis, my sin has found me out, you see! I am very low, very low; but I hope equally penitent. We must all come to the throne of grace at last, Mr. Cassilis. For my part, I come late indeed; but with unfeigned humility. I trust."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" said Northmour roughly.

"No, no, dear Northmour!" cried the banker. "You must not say that; you must not try to shake me. You forget, my dear, good boy, you forget I may be called this very night before my Maker."

His excitement was pitiful to behold; and I felt myself grow indignant with Northmour, whose infidel opinions I well knew and heartily derided, as he continued to taunt the poor sinner out of his humor of repentance.

"Pooh, my dear Huddlestone!" said he. "You do yourself injustice. You are a man of the world inside and out, and were up to all kinds of mischief before I was born. Your conscience is tanned like South American leather—only you forgot to tan your liver, and that, if you will believe me, is the seat of the annoyance."

"Rogue, rogue! bad boy!" said Mr. Huddlestone, shaking his finger. "I am no precisian, if you come to that; I always hated a precisian; but I never lost hold of something better through it all. I have been a bad boy, Mr. Cassilis; I do not seek to deny that; but it was after my wife's death, and you know, with a widower, it's a different thing: sinful—I won't say no; but there is a gradation, we shall hope. And talking of that—Hark!" he broke out suddenly, his hand raised, his fingers spread, his face racked with interest and terror. "Only the rain, bless God!" he added, after a pause, and with indescribable relief.

For some seconds he lay back among the pillows like a man near to fainting; then he gathered himself together, and, in somewhat tremulous tones, began once more to thank me for the share I was prepared to take in his defense.

"One question, sir," said I, when he had paused. "Is it true that you have money with you?"

He seemed annoyed by the question, but admitted with reluctance that he had a little.

"Well," I continued, "it is their money they are after, is it not? Why not give it up to them?"

"Ah!" replied he, shaking his head, "I have tried that already, Mr. Cassilis; and alas that it should be so! but it is blood they want."

"Huddlestone, that's a little less than fair," said Northmour. "You should mention that what you offered them was upward of two hundred thousand short. The deficit is worth a reference; it is for what they call a cool sum, Frank. Then, you see, the fellows reason in their clear Italian way; and it seems to them, as indeed it seems to me, that they may just as well have both while they're about it—money and blood together, by George, and no more trouble for the extra pleasure."

"Is it in the pavilion?" I asked.

"It is; and I wish it were in the bottom of the sea instead," said Northmour; and then suddenly—"What are you making faces at me for?" he cried to Mr. Huddlestone, on whom I had unconsciously turned my back. "Do you think Cassilis would sell you?"

Mr. Huddlestone protested that nothing had been further from his mind.

"It is a good thing," retorted Northmour in his ugliest manner. "You might end by wearying us. What were you going to say?" he added, turning to me.

"I was going to propose an occupation for the afternoon," said I. "Let us carry that money out, piece by piece, and lay it down before the pavilion door. If the Carbonari come, why, it's theirs at any rate."

"No, no," cried Mr. Huddlestone; "it does not, it can not belong to them! It should be distributed *pro rata* among all my creditors."

"Come now, Huddlestone," said Northmour, "none of that."

"Well, but my daughter," moaned the wretched man.

"Your daughter will do well enough. Here are two suitors, Cassilis and I, neither of us beggars, between whom she has to choose. And as for yourself, to make an end of arguments,

you have no right to a farthing, and, unless I'm much mistaken, you are going to die."

It was certainly very cruelly said; but Mr. Huddlestone was a man who attracted little sympathy; and, although I saw him wince and shudder, I mentally indorsed the rebuke; nay, I added a contribution of my own.

"Northmour and I," I said, "are willing enough to help you to save your life, but not to escape with stolen property."

He struggled for a while with himself, as though he were on the point of giving way to anger, but prudence had the best of the controversy.

"My dear boys," he said, "do with me or my money what you will. I leave all in your hands. Let me compose myself."

And so we left him, gladly enough I am sure. The last that I saw, he had once more taken up his great Bible, and with tremulous hands was adjusting his spectacles to read.

VII

Tells How a Word was Cried, through the Pavilion Window

The recollection of that afternoon will always be graven on my mind. Northmour and I were persuaded that an attack was imminent; and if it had been in our power to alter in any way the order of events, that power would have been used to precipitate rather than delay the critical moment. The worst was to be anticipated, yet we could conceive no extremity so miserable as the suspense we were now suffering. I have never been an eager, though always a great, reader; but I never knew books so insipid as those which I took up and cast aside that afternoon in the pavilion. Even talk became impossible, as the hours went on. One or other was always listening for some sound or peering from an upstairs' window over the links. And yet not a sign indicated the presence of our foes.

We debated over and over again my proposal with regard to the money; and had we been in complete possession of our faculties, I am sure we should have condemned it as unwise; but we were flustered with alarm, grasped at a straw, and determined, although it was as much as advertising Mr. Huddlestone's presence in the pavilion, to carry my proposal into effect.

The sum was part in specie, part in bank paper, and part in circular notes payable to the name of James Gregory. We took it out, counted it, enclosed it once more in a despatch-box belonging to Northmour, and prepared a letter in Italian which he tied to the handle. It was signed by both of us under oath, and declared that this was all the money which had escaped the failure of the house of Huddlestone. This was, perhaps, the maddest action ever perpetrated by two persons professing to be sane. Had the despatch-box fallen into other hands than those for which it was intended, we stood criminally convicted on our own written testimony; but, as I have said, we were neither of us in a condition to judge soberly, and had a thirst for action that drove us to do something, right or wrong, rather than endure the agony of waiting. Moreover, as we were both convinced that the hollows of the links were alive with hidden spies upon our movements, we hoped that our appearance with the box might lead to a parley, and, perhaps, a compromise.

It was nearly three when we issued from the pavilion. The rain had taken off; the sun shone quite cheerfully. I have never seen the gulls fly so close about the house or approach so fearlessly to human beings. On the very doorstep one flapped heavily past our heads, and uttered its wild cry in my very ear.

"There is an omen for you," said Northmour, who like all freethinkers was much under the influence of superstition. "They think we are already dead."

I made some light rejoinder, but it was with half my heart; for the circumstance had impressed me.

A yard or two before the gate, on a patch of smooth turf, we set down the despatch-box; and Northmour waved a white handkerchief over his head. Nothing replied. We raised our voices, and cried aloud in Italian that we were there as ambassadors to arrange the quarrel; but the stillness remained unbroken save by the sea-gulls and the surf. I had a weight at my heart when we desisted; and I saw that even Northmour was unusually pale. He looked over his shoulder nervously, as though he feared that some one had crept between him and the pavilion door.

"By God," he said in a whisper, "this is too much for me!"

I replied in the same key: "Suppose there should be none, after all!"

"Look there," he returned, nodding with his head, as though he had been afraid to point.

I glanced in the direction indicated; and there, from the northern quarter of the Sea-Wood, beheld a thin column of smoke rising steadily against the now cloudless sky.

"Northmour," I said (we still continued to talk in whispers), "it is not possible to endure this suspense. I prefer death fifty times over. Stay you here to watch the pavilion; I will go forward and make sure, if I have to walk right into their camp."

He looked once again all round him with puckered eyes, and then nodded assentingly to my proposal.

My heart beat like a sledge-hammer as I set out walking rapidly in the direction of the smoke; and, though up to that moment I had felt chill and shivering, I was suddenly conscious of a glow of heat over all my body. The ground in this direction was very uneven; a hundred men might have lain hidden in as many square yards about my path. But I had not practised the business in vain, chose such routes as cut at the very root of concealment, and, by keeping along the most convenient ridges, commanded several hollows at a time. It was not long before I was rewarded for my caution. Coming suddenly on to a mound somewhat more elevated than the surrounding hummocks, I saw, not thirty yards away, a man bent almost double, and running as fast as his attitude permitted, along the bottom of a gully. I had dislodged one of the spies from his ambush. As soon as I sighted him, I called loudly both in English and Italian; and he, seeing concealment was no longer possible, straightened himself out, leaped from the gully, and made off as straight as an arrow for the borders of the wood.

It was none of my business to pursue; I had learned what I wanted—that we were beleaguered and watched in the pavilion; and I returned at once, walking as nearly as possible in my old footsteps, to where Northmour awaited me beside the despatch-box. He was even paler than when I had left him, and his voice shook a little.

"Could you see what he was like?" he asked.

"He kept his back turned," I replied.

"Let us get into the house, Frank. I don't think I'm a coward, but I can stand no more of this," he whispered.

All was still and sunshiny about the pavilion as we turned to reenter it; even the gulls had flown in a wider circuit, and were seen flickering along the beach and sand-hills; and this loneliness terrified me more than a regiment under arms. It was not until the door was barricaded that I could draw a full inspiration and relieve the weight that lay upon my bosom. Northmour and I exchanged a steady glance; and I suppose each made his own reflections on the white and startled aspect of the other.

"You were right," I said. "All is over. Shake hands, old man, for the last time."

"Yes," replied he, "I will shake hands; for, as sure as I am here, I bear no malice. But, remember, if, by some impossible accident, we should give the slip to these blackguards, I'll take the upper hand of you by fair or foul."

"Oh," said I, "you weary me!"

He seemed hurt, and walked away in silence to the foot of the stairs, where he paused.

"You do not understand," said he. "I am not a swindler, and I guard myself; that is all. It may weary you or not, Mr. Cassilis, I do not care a rush; I speak for my own satisfaction, and not for your amusement. You had better go upstairs and court the girl; for my part, I stay here."

"And I stay with you," I returned. "Do you think I would steal a march, even with your permission?"

"Frank," he said, smiling, "it's a pity you are an ass, for you have the makings of a man. I think I must be fey to-day; you can not irritate me even when you try. Do you know," he continued softly, "I think we are the two most miserable men in England, you and I? we have got on to thirty without wife or child, or so much as a shop to look after—poor, pitiful, lost devils, both! And now we clash about a girl! As if there were not several millions in the United Kingdom! Ah, Frank, Frank, the one who loses this throw, be it you or me, he has my pity! It were better for him—how does the Bible say?—that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the depths of the sea. Let us take a drink," he concluded suddenly, but without any levity of tone.

I was touched by his words, and consented. He sat down on the table in the dining-room, and held up the glass of sherry to his eye.

"If you beat me, Frank," he said, "I shall take to drink. What will you do, if it goes the other way?"

"God knows," I returned.

"Well," said he, "here is a toast in the meantime: '*Italia irredenta!*'"

The remainder of the day was passed in the same dreadful tedium and suspense. I laid the table for dinner, while Northmour and Clara prepared the meal together in the kitchen. I could hear their talk as I went to and fro, and was surprised to find it ran all the time upon myself. Northmour again bracketed us together, and rallied Clara on a choice of husbands; but he continued to speak of me with some feeling, and uttered nothing to my prejudice unless he included himself in the condemnation. This awakened a sense of gratitude in my heart, which combined with the immediateness of our peril to fill my eyes with tears. After all, I thought—and perhaps the thought was laughably vain—we were here three very noble human beings to perish in defense of a thieving banker.

Before we sat down to table, I looked forth from an upstairs window. The day was beginning to decline; the links were utterly deserted; the despatch-box still lay untouched where we had left it hours before.

Mr. Huddlestone, in a long yellow dressing-gown, took one end of the table, Clara the other; while Northmour and I faced each other from the sides. The lamp was brightly trimmed; the wine was good; the viands, although mostly cold, excellent of their sort. We seemed to have agreed tacitly; all reference to the impending catastrophe was carefully avoided; and, considering our tragic circumstances, we made a merrier party than could have been expected. From time to time, it is true, Northmour or I would rise from the table and make a round of the defenses; and, on each of these occasions, Mr. Huddlestone was recalled to a sense of his tragic predicament, glanced up with ghastly eyes, and bore for an instant on his countenance the stamp of terror. But he hastened to empty his glass, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and joined again in the conversation.

I was astonished at the wit and information he displayed. Mr. Huddlestone's was certainly no ordinary character; he had read and observed for himself; his gifts were sound; and, though I could never have learned to love the man, I began to understand his success in business, and the great respect in which he had been held before his failure. He had, above all, the talent of society; and though I never heard him speak but on this one and most unfavorable occasion, I set him down among the most brilliant conversationalists I ever met.

He was relating with great gusto, and seemingly no feeling of shame, the maneuvres of a scoundrelly commission merchant whom he had known and studied in his youth, and we were all listening with an odd mixture of mirth and embarrassment, when our little party was brought abruptly to an end in the most startling manner.

A noise like that of a wet finger on the window-pane interrupted Mr. Huddlestone's tale; and in an instant we were all four as white as paper, and sat tongue-tied and motionless around the table.

"A snail," I said at last; for I had heard that these animals make a noise somewhat similar in character.

"Snail be d—d!" said Northmour. "Hush!"

The same sound was repeated twice at regular intervals; and then a formidable voice shouted through the shutters the Italian word "*Traditore!*"

Mr. Huddlestone threw his head in the air; his eyelids quivered; next moment he fell insensible below the table. Northmour and I had each run to the armory and seized a gun. Clara was on her feet with her hand at her throat.

So we stood waiting, for we thought the hour of attack was certainly come; but second passed after second, and all but the surf remained silent in the neighborhood of the pavilion.

"Quick," said Northmour; "upstairs with him before they come."

VIII

Tells the Last of the Tall Man

Somehow or other, by hook and crook, and between the three of us, we got Bernard Huddlestone bundled upstairs and laid upon the bed in My Uncle's Room. During the whole process, which was rough enough, he gave no sign of consciousness, and he remained, as we had thrown him, without changing the position of a finger. His daughter opened his shirt and began to wet his head and bosom; while Northmour and I ran to the window. The weather continued clear; the moon, which was now about full, had risen and shed a very clear light upon the links; yet, strain our eyes as we might, we could distinguish nothing moving. A few dark spots, more or less, on the uneven expanse were not to be identified; they might be crouching men, they might be shadows; it was impossible to be sure.

"Thank God," said Northmour, "Aggie is not coming to-night."

Aggie was the name of the old nurse; he had not thought of her till now; but that he should think of her at all was a trait that surprised me in the man.

We were again reduced to waiting. Northmour went to the fireplace and spread his hands before the red embers, as if he were cold. I followed him mechanically with my eyes, and in so doing turned my back upon the window. At that moment a very faint report was audible from without, and a ball shivered a pane of glass, and buried itself in the shutter two inches from my head. I heard Clara scream; and though I whipped instantly out of range and into a corner, she was there, so to speak, before me, beseeching to know if I were hurt. I felt that I could stand to be shot at every day and all day long, with such marks of solicitude for a

reward; and I continued to reassure her with the tenderest caresses and in complete forgetfulness of our situation till the voice of Northmour recalled me to myself.

"An air-gun," he said. "They wish to make no noise."

I put Clara aside and looked at him. He was standing with his back to the fire and his hands clasped behind him; and I knew by the black look on his face that passion was boiling within. I had seen just such a look before he attacked me, that March night, in the adjoining chamber; and, though I could make every allowance for his anger, I confess I trembled for the consequences. He gazed straight before him; but he could see us with the tail of his eye, and his temper kept rising like a gale of wind. With regular battle awaiting us outside, this prospect of an internecine strife within the walls began to daunt me.

Suddenly, as I was thus closely watching his expression and prepared against the worst, I saw a change, a flash, a look of relief, upon his face. He took up the lamp which stood beside him on the table, and turned to us with an air of some excitement.

"There is one point that we must know," said he. "Are they going to butcher the lot of us, or only Huddlestone? Did they take you for him, or fire at you for your own *beaux yeux*?"

"They took me for him, for certain," I replied. "I am near as tall, and my head is fair."

"I am going to make sure," returned Northmour; and he stepped up to the window, holding the lamp above his head, and stood there, quietly affronting death, for half a minute.

Clara sought to rush forward and pull him from the place of danger; but I had the pardonable selfishness to hold her back by force.

"Yes," said Northmour, turning coolly from the window; "it's only Huddlestone they want."

"Oh, Mr. Northmour!" cried Clara; but found no more to add; the temerity she had just witnessed seeming beyond the reach of words.

He, on his part, looked at me, cocking his head with a fire of triumph in his eyes; and I understood at once that he had thus hazarded his life merely to attract Clara's notice, and depose me from my position as the hero of the hour. He snapped his fingers.

"The fire is only beginning," said he. "When they warm up to their work, they won't be so particular."

A voice was now heard hailing us from the entrance. From the window we could see the figure of a man in the moonlight; he stood motionless, his face uplifted to ours, and a rag of something white on his extended arm; and as we looked right down upon him, though he was a good many yards distant on the links, we could see the moonlight glitter on his eyes.

He opened his lips again, and spoke for some minutes on end, in a key so loud that he might have been heard in every corner of the pavilion, and as far away as the borders of the wood. It was the same voice that had already shouted "*Traditore!*" through the shutters of the dining-room; this time it made a complete and clear statement. If the traitor "Oddlestone" were given up, all others should be spared; if not, no one should escape to tell the tale.

"Well, Huddlestone, what do you say to that?" asked Northmour, turning to the bed.

Up to that moment the banker had given no sign of life, and I, at least, had supposed him to be still lying in a faint; but he replied at once, and in such tones as I have never heard elsewhere, save from a delirious patient, adjured and besought us not to desert him. It was the most hideous and abject performance that my imagination can conceive.

"Enough," cried Northmour; and then he threw open the window, leaned out into the night, and in a tone of exultation, and with a total forgetfulness of what was due to the presence of a lady, poured out upon the ambassador a string of the most abominable raillery

both in English and Italian, and bade him begone where he had come from. I believe that nothing so delighted Northmour at that moment as the thought that we must all infallibly perish before the night was out.

Meantime the Italian put his flag of truce into his pocket, and disappeared, at a leisurely pace, among the sand-hills.

"They make honorable war," said Northmour. "They are all gentlemen and soldiers. For the credit of the thing, I wish we could change sides—you and I, Frank, and you too, missy, my darling—and leave that being on the bed to some one else. Tut! Don't look shocked! We are all going post to what they call eternity, and may as well be aboveboard while there's time. As far as I'm concerned, if I could first strangle Huddlestone and then get Clara in my arms, I could die with some pride and satisfaction. And as it is, by God, I'll have a kiss!"

Before I could do anything to interfere, he had rudely embraced and repeatedly kissed the resisting girl. Next moment I had pulled him away with fury, and flung him heavily against the wall. He laughed loud and long, and I feared his wits had given way under the strain; for even in the best of days he had been a sparing and a quiet laugher.

"Now, Frank," said he, when his mirth was somewhat appeased, "it's your turn. Here's my hand. Good-by; farewell!" Then, seeing me stand rigid and indignant, and holding Clara to my side—"Man!" he broke out, "are you angry? Did you think we were going to die with all the airs and graces of society? I took a kiss; I'm glad I had it; and now you can take another if you like, and square accounts."

I turned from him with a feeling of contempt which I did not seek to dissemble.

"As you please," said he. "You've been a prig in life; a prig you'll die."

And with that he sat down in a chair, a rifle over his knee, and amused himself with snapping the lock; but I could see that his ebullition of light spirits (the only one I ever knew him to display) had already come to an end, and was succeeded by a sullen, scowling humor.

All this time our assailants might have been entering the house, and we been none the wiser; we had in truth almost forgotten the danger that so imminently overhung our days. But just then Mr. Huddlestone uttered a cry, and leaped from the bed.

I asked him what was wrong.

"Fire!" he cried. "They have set the house on fire!"

Northmour was on his feet in an instant, and he and I ran through the door of communication with the study. The room was illuminated by a red and angry light. Almost at the moment of our entrance, a tower of flame arose in front of the window, and, with a tingling report, a pane fell inward on the carpet. They had set fire to the lean-to outhouse, where Northmour used to nurse his negatives.

"Hot work," said Northmour. "Let us try in your old room."

We ran thither in a breath, threw up the casement, and looked forth. Along the whole back wall of the pavilion piles of fuel had been arranged and kindled; and it is probable they had been drenched with mineral oil, for, in spite of the morning's rain, they all burned bravely. The fire had taken a firm hold already on the outhouse, which blazed higher and higher every moment; the back door was in the centre of a red-hot bonfire; the eaves we could see, as we looked upward, were already smoldering, for the roof overhung, and was supported by considerable beams of wood. At the same time, hot, pungent, and choking volumes of smoke began to fill the house. There was not a human being to be seen to right or left.

"Ah, well!" said Northmour, "here's the end, thank God."

And we returned to My Uncle's Room. Mr. Huddlestone was putting on his boots, still violently trembling, but with an air of determination such as I had not hitherto observed.

Clara stood close by him, with her cloak in both hands ready to throw about her shoulders, and a strange look in her eyes, as if she were half hopeful, half doubtful of her father.

"Well, boys and girl," said Northmour, "how about a sally? The oven is heating; it is not good to stay here and be baked; and, for my part, I want to come to my hands with them, and be done."

"There is nothing else left," I replied.

And both Clara and Mr. Huddlestone, though with a very different intonation, added, "Nothing."

As we went downstairs the heat was excessive, and the roaring of the fire filled our ears; and we had scarce reached the passage before the stairs window fell in, a branch of flame shot brandishing through the aperture, and the interior of the pavilion became lighted up with that dreadful and fluctuating glare. At the same moment we heard the fall of something heavy and inelastic in the upper story. The whole pavilion, it was plain, had gone alight like a box of matches, and now not only flamed sky-high to land and sea, but threatened with every moment to crumble and fall in about our ears.

Northmour and I cocked our revolvers. Mr. Huddlestone, who had already refused a firearm, put us behind him with a manner of command.

"Let Clara open the door," said he. "So, if they fire a volley, she will be protected. In the meantime stand behind me. I am the scapegoat; my sins have found me out."

I heard him, as I stood breathless by his shoulder, with my pistol ready, pattering off prayers in a tremulous, rapid whisper; and I confess, horrid as the thought may seem, I despised him for thinking of supplications in a moment so critical and thrilling. In the meantime, Clara, who was dead white but still possessed her faculties, had displaced the barricade from the front door. Another moment, and she had pulled it open. Firelight and moonlight illuminated the links with confused and changeful lustre, and far away against the sky we could see a long trail of glowing smoke.

Mr. Huddlestone, filled for the moment with a strength greater than his own, struck Northmour and myself a back-hander in the chest; and while we were thus for the moment incapacitated from action, lifting his arms above his head like one about to dive, he ran straight forward out of the pavilion.

"Here am I!" he cried—"Huddlestone! Kill me, and spare the others!"

His sudden appearance daunted, I suppose, our hidden enemies; for Northmour and I had time to recover, to seize Clara between us, one by each arm, and to rush forth to his assistance, ere anything further had taken place. But scarce had we passed the threshold when there came near a dozen reports and flashes from every direction among the hollows of the links. Mr. Huddlestone staggered, uttered a weird and freezing cry, threw up his arms over his head, and fell backward on the turf.

"*Traditore! Traditore!*" cried the invisible avengers.

And just then, a part of the roof of the pavilion fell in, so rapid was the progress of the fire. A loud, vague, and horrible noise accompanied the collapse, and a vast volume of flame went soaring up to heaven. It must have been visible at that moment from twenty miles out to sea, from the shore at Graden Wester, and far inland from the peak of Graystiel, the most eastern summit of the Caulder Hills. Bernard Huddlestone, although God knows what were his obsequies, had a fine pyre at the moment of his death.

IX

Tells how Northmour Carried out His Threat

I should have the greatest difficulty to tell you what followed next after this tragic circumstance. It is all to me, as I look back upon it, mixed, strenuous, and ineffectual, like the struggles of a sleeper in a nightmare. Clara, I remember, uttered a broken sigh and would have fallen forward to earth, had not Northmour and I supported her insensible body. I do not think we were attacked; I do not remember even to have seen an assailant; and I believe we deserted Mr. Huddlestone without a glance. I only remember running like a man in a panic, now carrying Clara altogether in my own arms, now sharing her weight with Northmour, now scuffling confusedly for the possession of that dear burden. Why we should have made for my camp in the Hemlock Den, or how we reached it, are points lost forever to my recollection. The first moment at which I became definitely sure, Clara had been suffered to fall against the outside of my little tent, Northmour and I were tumbling together on the ground, and he, with contained ferocity, was striking for my head with the butt of his revolver. He had already twice wounded me on the scalp; and it is to the consequent loss of blood that I am tempted to attribute the sudden clearness of my mind.

I caught him by the wrist.

"Northmour," I remember saying, "you can kill me afterward. Let us first attend to Clara."

He was at that moment uppermost. Scarcely had the words passed my lips, when he had leaped to his feet and ran toward the tent; and the next moment, he was straining Clara to his heart and covering her unconscious hands and face with his caresses.

"Shame!" I cried. "Shame to you, Northmour!"

And, giddy though I still was, I struck him repeatedly upon the head and shoulders.

He relinquished his grasp, and faced me in the broken moonlight.

"I had you under, and I let you go," said he; "and now you strike me! Coward!"

"You are the coward," I retorted. "Did she wish your kisses while she was still sensible of what she wanted? Not she! And now she may be dying; and you waste this precious time, and abuse her helplessness. Stand aside, and let me help her."

He confronted me for a moment, white and menacing; then suddenly he stepped aside.

"Help her then," said he.

I threw myself on my knees beside her, and loosened, as well as I was able, her dress and corset; but while I was thus engaged, a grasp descended on my shoulder.

"Keep your hands off her," said Northmour fiercely. "Do you think I have no blood in my veins."

"Northmour," I cried, "if you will neither help her yourself, nor let me do so, do you know that I shall have to kill you?"

"That is better!" he cried. "Let her die also, where's the harm? Step aside from that girl! and stand up to fight."

"You will observe," said I, half rising, "that I have not kissed her yet."

"I dare you to," he cried.

I do not know what possessed me; it was one of the things I am most ashamed of in my life, though, as my wife used to say, I knew that my kisses would be always welcome were she dead or living; down I fell again upon my knees, parted the hair from her forehead, and, with the dearest respect, laid my lips for a moment on that cold brow. It was such a caress as a father might have given; it was such a one as was not unbecoming from a man soon to die to a woman already dead.

"And now," said I, "I am at your service, Mr. Northmour."

But I saw, to my surprise, that he had turned his back upon me.

"Do you hear?" I asked.

"Yes," said he, "I do. If you wish to fight, I am ready. If not, go on and save Clara. All is one to me."

I did not wait to be twice bidden; but, stooping again over Clara, continued my efforts to revive her. She still lay white and lifeless; I began to fear that her sweet spirit had indeed fled beyond recall, and horror and a sense of utter desolation seized upon my heart. I called her by name with the most endearing inflections; I chafed and beat her hands; and now I laid her head low, now supported it against my knee; but all seemed to be in vain, and the lids still lay heavy on her eyes.

"Northmour," I said, "there is my hat. For God's sake bring some water from the spring."

Almost in a moment he was by my side with the water.

"I have brought it in my own," he said. "You do not grudge me the privilege?"

"Northmour," I was beginning to say, as I laved her head and breast; but he interrupted me savagely.

"Oh, you hush up!" he said. "The best thing you can do is to say nothing."

I had certainly no desire to talk, my mind being swallowed up in concern for my dear love and her condition; so I continued in silence to do my best toward her recovery, and, when the hat was empty, returned it to him, with one word—"More." He had, perhaps, gone several times upon this errand, when Clara reopened her eyes.

"Now," said he, "since she is better, you can spare me, can you not? I wish you a good-night, Mr. Cassilis."

And with that he was gone among the thicket. I made a fire, for I had now no fear of the Italians, who had even spared all the little possessions left in my encampment; and, broken as she was by the excitement and the hideous catastrophe of the evening, I managed, in one way or another—by persuasion, encouragement, warmth, and such simple remedies as I could lay my hand on—to bring her back to some composure of mind and strength of body.

Day had already come, when a sharp "Hist!" sounded from the thicket. I started from the ground; but the voice of Northmour was heard adding, in the most tranquil tones: "Come here, Cassilis, and alone; I want to show you something."

I consulted Clara with my eyes, and, receiving her tacit permission, left her alone, and clambered out of the den. At some distance off I saw Northmour leaning against an elder; and, as soon as he perceived me, he began walking seaward. I had almost overtaken him as he reached the outskirts of the wood.

"Look," said he, pausing.

A couple of steps more brought me out of the foliage. The light of the morning lay cold and clear over that well-known scene. The pavilion was but a blackened wreck; the roof had fallen in, one of the gables had fallen out; and, far and near, the face of the links was cicatrized with little patches of burned furze. Thick smoke still went straight upward in the windless air of the morning, and a great pile of ardent cinders filled the bare walls of the house, like coals in an open grate. Close by the islet a schooner yacht lay to, and a well-manned boat was pulling vigorously for the shore.

"The 'Red Earl!'" I cried. "The 'Red Earl,' twelve hours too late!"

"Feel in your pocket, Frank. Are you armed?" asked Northmour.

I obeyed him, and I think I must have become deadly pale. My revolver had been taken from me.

"You see I have you in my power," he continued. "I disarmed you last night while you were nursing Clara; but this morning—here—take your pistol. No thanks!" he cried, holding up his hand. "I do not like them; that is the only way you can annoy me now."

He began to walk forward across the links to meet the boat, and I followed a step or two behind. In front of the pavilion I paused to see where Mr. Huddlestone had fallen; but there was no sign of him, nor so much as a trace of blood.

"Graden Floe," said Northmour.

He continued to advance till we had come to the head of the beach.

"No further, please," said he. "Would you like to take her to Graden House?"

"Thank you," replied I; "I shall try to get her to the minister's at Graden Wester."

The prow of the boat here grated on the beach, and a sailor jumped ashore with a line in his hand.

"Wait a minute, lads!" cried Northmour; and then lower and to my private ear: "You had better say nothing of all this to her," he added.

"On the contrary," I broke out, "she shall know everything that I can tell."

"You do not understand," he returned, with an air of great dignity. "It will be nothing to her; she expects it of me. Good-by!" he added, with a nod.

I offered him my hand.

"Excuse me," said he. "It's small, I know; but I can't push things quite so far as that. I don't wish any sentimental business, to sit by your hearth a white-haired wanderer, and all that. Quite the contrary: I hope to God I shall never again clap eyes on either one of you."

"Well, God bless you, Northmour!" I said heartily.

"Oh, yes," he returned.

He walked down the beach; and the man who was ashore gave him an arm on board, and then shoved off and leaped into the bows himself. Northmour took the tiller; the boat rose to the waves, and the oars between the thole-pins sounded crisp and measured in the morning air.

They were not yet half-way to the "Red Earl," and I was still watching their progress, when the sun rose out of the sea.

One word more, and my story is done. Years after, Northmour was killed fighting under the colors of Garibaldi for the liberation of the Tyrol.

THE PRISONERS

BY GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Henri René Albert Guy de Maupassant, a French novelist, was born in 1850, and died, insane, in 1893. He served a long apprenticeship under the instruction of Flaubert (his godfather), before publishing any of his writings. When his first story, "Boule de Suif," appeared in the collection entitled "Les Soirées de Médan," in

1880, he was greeted as a master. Notwithstanding his pessimism, he is one of the most highly esteemed French story-writers of the Nineteenth Century.

THE PRISONERS

By GUY DE MAUPASSANT

There was no sound in the forest except the slight rustle of the snow as it fell upon the trees. It had been falling, small and fine, since midday; it powdered the branches with a frosty moss, cast a silver veil over the dead leaves in the hollow, and spread upon the pathways a great, soft, white carpet that thickened the immeasurable silence amid this ocean of trees.

Before the door of the keeper's lodge stood a bare-armed young woman, chopping wood with an ax upon a stone. She was tall, thin and strong—a child of the forest, a daughter and wife of gamekeepers.

A voice called from within the house: "Come in, Berthine; we are alone to-night, and it is getting dark. There may be Prussians or wolves about."

She who was chopping wood replied by splitting another block; her bosom rose and fell with the heavy blows, each time she lifted her arm.

"I have finished, mother. I'm here. There's nothing to be frightened at; it isn't dark yet."

Then she brought in her fagots and her logs, and piled them up at the chimney-side, went out again to close the shutters—enormous shutters of solid oak—and then, when she again came in, pushed the heavy bolts of the door.

Her mother was spinning by the fire, a wrinkled old woman who had grown timorous with age.

"I don't like father to be out," said she. "Two women have no strength."

The younger answered: "Oh, I could very well kill a wolf or a Prussian, I can tell you." And she turned her eyes to a large revolver hanging over the fireplace. Her husband had been put into the army at the beginning of the Prussian invasion, and the two women had remained alone with her father, the old gamekeeper, Nicholas Pichou, who had obstinately refused to leave his home and go into the town.

The nearest town was Rethel, an old fortress perched on a rock. It was a patriotic place, and the townspeople had resolved to resist the invaders, to close their gates and stand a siege, according to the traditions of the city. Twice before, under Henry IV and under Louis XIV, the inhabitants of Rethel had won fame by heroic defenses. They would do the same this time; by Heaven, they would, or they would be burned within their walls.

So they had bought cannons and rifles, and equipped a force, and formed battalions and companies, and they drilled all day long in the Place d'Armes. All of them—bakers, grocers, butchers, notaries, attorneys, carpenters, booksellers, even the chemists—went through their maneuvres in due rotation at regular hours, under the orders of M. Lavigne, who had once been a non-commissioned officer in the dragoons, and now was a draper, having married the daughter and inherited the shop of old M. Ravaudan.

He had taken the rank of major in command of the place, and all the young men having gone to join the army, he enrolled all the others who were eager for resistance. The stout men now walked the streets at the pace of professional pedestrians, in order to bring down their fat, and to lengthen their breath; the weak ones carried burdens, in order to strengthen their muscles.

The Prussians were expected. But the Prussians did not appear. Yet they were not far off; for their scouts had already twice pushed across the forest as far as Nicholas Pichou's lodge.

The old keeper, who could run like a fox, had gone to warn the town. The guns had been pointed, but the enemy had not shown.

The keeper's lodge served as a kind of outpost in the forest of Aveline. Twice a week the man went for provisions, and carried to the citizens news from the outlying country.

He had gone that day to announce that a small detachment of German infantry had stopped at his house, the day before, about two in the afternoon, and had gone away again almost directly. The subaltern in command spoke French.

When the old man went on such errands he took with him his two dogs—two great beasts with the jaws of lions—because of the wolves who were beginning to get fierce; and he left his two women, advising them to lock themselves into the house as soon as night began to fall.

The young one was afraid of nothing, but the old one kept on trembling and repeating:

"It will turn out badly, all this sort of thing. You'll see, it will turn out badly."

This evening she was more anxious even than usual.

"Do you know what time your father will come back?" said she.

"Oh, not before eleven for certain. When he dines with the Major he is always late."

She was hanging her saucepan over the fire to make the soup, when she stopped short, listened to a vague sound which had reached her by way of the chimney, and murmured:

"There's some one walking in the wood—seven or eight men at least."

Her mother, alarmed, stopped her wheel and muttered: "Oh, good Lord! And father not here!"

She had not finished speaking when violent blows shook the door.

The women made no answer, and a loud guttural voice called out: "Open the door."

Then, after a pause, the same voice repeated: "Open the door, or I'll break it in."

Then Berthine slipped into her pocket the big revolver from over the mantelpiece, and, having put her ear to the crack of the door, asked: "Who are you?"

The voice answered: "I am the detachment that came the other day."

The woman asked again: "What do you want?"

"I have lost my way, ever since the morning, in the forest, with my detachment. Open the door, or I will break it in."

The keeper's wife had no choice; she promptly drew the great bolt, and pulling back the door she beheld six men in the pale snow-shadows—six Prussian men, the same who had come the day before. She said in a firm tone: "What do you want here at this time of night?"

The officer answered: "I had lost my way, lost it completely; I recognized the house. I have had nothing to eat since the morning, nor my men either."

Berthine replied: "But I am all alone with mother, this evening."

The soldier, who seemed a good sort of fellow, answered: "That makes no difference. I shall not do any harm; but you must give us something to eat. We are faint and tired to death."

The keeper's wife stepped back.

"Come in," said she.

They came in, powdered with snow and with a sort of mossy cream on their helmets that made them look like meringues. They seemed tired, worn out.

The young woman pointed to the wooden benches on each side of the big table.

"Sit down," said she, "and I'll make you some soup. You do look quite knocked up."

Then she bolted the door again.

She poured some more water into her saucepan, threw in more butter and potatoes; then, unhooking a piece of bacon that hung in the chimney, she cut off half, and added that also to the stew. The eyes of the six men followed her every movement with an air of awakened hunger. They had set their guns and helmets in a corner, and sat waiting on their benches, like well-behaved school children. The mother had begun to spin again, but she threw terrified glances at the invading soldiers. There was no sound except the slight purring of the wheel, the crackle of the fire, and the bubbling of the water as it grew hot.

But all at once a strange noise made them all start—something like a horse breathing at the door, the breathing of an animal, deep and snorting.

One of the Germans had sprung toward the guns. The woman with a movement and a smile stopped him.

"It is the wolves," said she. "They are like you; they are wandering about, hungry."

The man would hardly believe, he wanted to see for himself; and as soon as the door was opened, he perceived two great gray beasts making off at a quick, long trot.

He came back to his seat, murmuring: "I should not have believed it."

And he sat waiting for his meal.

They ate voraciously; their mouths opened from ear to ear to take the largest of gulps; their round eyes opened sympathetically with their jaws, and their swallowing was like the gurgle of rain in a water-pipe.

The two silent women watched the rapid movements of the great red beards; the potatoes seemed to melt away into these moving fleeces.

Then, as they were thirsty, the keeper's wife went down into the cellar to draw cider for them. She was a long time gone; it was a little vaulted cellar, said to have served both as prison and hiding-place in the days of the Revolution. The way down was by a narrow winding stair, shut in by a trap-door at the end of the kitchen.

When Berthine came back, she was laughing, laughing slyly to herself. She gave the Germans her pitcher of drink. Then she, too, had her supper, with her mother, at the other end of the kitchen.

The soldiers had finished eating and were falling asleep, all six, around the table. From time to time, a head would fall heavily on the board, then the man, starting awake, would sit up.

Berthine said to the officer: "You may just as well lie down here before the fire. There's plenty of room for six. I'm going up to my room with my mother."

The two women went to the upper floor. They were heard to lock their door and to walk about for a little while, then they made no further sound.

The Prussians stretched themselves on the stone floor, their feet to the fire, their heads on their rolled-up cloaks, and soon all six were snoring on six different notes, sharp or deep, but all sustained and alarming.

They had certainly been asleep for a considerable time when a shot sounded, and so loud that it seemed to be fired close against the walls of the house. The soldiers sat up instantly. There were two more shots, and then three more.

The door of the staircase opened hastily, and the keeper's wife appeared, barefooted, a short petticoat over her night-dress, a candle in her hand, and a face of terror. She whispered: "Here are the French—two hundred of them at least. If they find you here, they will burn the house. Go down, quick, into the cellar, and don't make a noise. If you make a noise, we are lost." The officer, scared, murmured: "I will, I will. Which way do we go down?"

The young woman hurriedly raised the narrow square trap-door, and the men disappeared by the winding stair, one after another going underground, backward, so as to feel the steps with their feet. But when the point of the last helmet had disappeared, Berthine, shutting down the heavy oaken plank, thick as a wall, and hard as steel, kept in place by clamps and a padlock, turned the key twice, slowly, and then began to laugh with a laugh of silent rapture, and with a wild desire to dance over the heads of her prisoners.

They made no noise, shut in as if they were in a stone box, only getting air through a grating.

Berthine at once relighted her fire, put on her saucepan once more, and made more soup, murmuring: "Father will be tired to-night."

Then she sat down and waited. Nothing but the deep-toned pendulum of the clock went to and fro with its regular tick in the silence. From time to time, the young woman cast a look at the dial—an impatient look, which seemed to say: "How slowly it goes!"

Presently she thought she heard a murmur under her feet; low, confused words reached her through the vaulted masonry of the cellar. The Prussians were beginning to guess her trick, and soon the officer came up the little stair, and thumped the trap-door with his fist. Once more he cried: "Open the door."

She rose, drew near, and imitating his accent, asked: "What do you want?"

"Open the door!"

"I shall not open it."

The man grew angry.

"Open the door, or I'll break it in."

She began to laugh.

"Break away, my man; break away."

Then he began to beat, with the butt end of his gun, upon the oaken trap-door closed over his head; but it would have resisted a battering-ram.

The keeper's wife heard him go down again. Then, one after another, the soldiers came up to try their strength and inspect the fastenings. But, concluding no doubt that their efforts were in vain, they all went back into the cellar and began to talk again.

The young woman listened to them; then she went to open the outer door, and stood straining her ears for a sound.

A distant barking reached her. She began to whistle like a huntsman, and almost immediately two immense dogs loomed through the shadows and jumped upon her with signs of joy. She held them by the neck, to keep them from running away, and called with all her might: "Halloa, father!"

A voice, still very distant, answered: "Halloa, Berthine!"

She waited some moments, then called again: "Halloa, father!"

The voice repeated, nearer: "Halloa, Berthine!"

The keeper's wife returned: "Don't pass in front of the grating. There are Prussians in the cellar."

All at once the black outline of the man showed on the left, where he had paused between two tree-trunks. He asked, uneasily: "Prussians in the cellar! What are they doing there?"

The young woman began to laugh.

"It is those that came yesterday. They got lost in the forest ever since the morning; I put them in the cellar to keep cool."

And she related the whole adventure; how she had frightened them with shots of the revolver, and shut them up in the cellar.

The old man, still grave, asked: "What do you expect me to do with them at this time of night?"

She answered: "Go and fetch M. Lavigne and his men. He'll take them prisoners; and won't he be pleased!"

Then Father Pichou smiled: "Yes; he will be pleased."

His daughter resumed: "Here's some soup for you; eat it quick and go off again."

The old keeper sat down and began to eat his soup, after having put down two plates full for his dogs.

The Prussians, hearing voices, had become silent.

A quarter of an hour later, Pichou started again. Berthine, with her head in her hands, waited.

The prisoners were moving about again. They shouted and called, and beat continually with their guns on the immovable trap-door of the cellar.

Then they began to fire their guns through the grating, hoping, no doubt, to be heard if any German detachment were passing in the neighborhood.

The keeper's wife did not stir; but all this noise tried her nerves, and irritated her. An evil anger awoke in her; she would have liked to kill them, the wretches, to keep them quiet.

Then, as her impatience increased, she began to look at the clock and count the minutes.

At last the hands marked the time which she had fixed for their coming.

She opened the door once more to listen for them. She perceived a shadow moving cautiously. She was frightened and screamed.

It was her father.

He said: "They sent me to see if there's any change."

"No, nothing."

Then he in his turn gave a long, strident whistle into the darkness. And soon, something brown was seen coming slowly through the trees—the advance guard composed of ten men.

The old man kept repeating: "Don't pass before the grating."

And the first comers pointed out the formidable grating to those who followed.

Finally, the main body appeared, two hundred men in all, each with two hundred cartridges.

M. Lavigne, trembling with excitement, posted them so as to surround the house on all sides, leaving, however, a wide, free space round the little black hole, level with the earth, which admitted air to the cellar.

Then he entered the dwelling and inquired into the strength and position of the enemy, now so silent that it might be thought to have disappeared, flown away, or evaporated through the grating. M. Lavigne stamped his foot on the trap-door and called: "Mr. Prussian officer!"

The German did not reply.

The Major repeated: "Mr. Prussian officer!"

It was in vain. For a whole twenty minutes he summoned this silent officer to capitulate with arms and baggage, promising him life and military honors for himself and his soldiers. But he obtained no sign of consent or of hostility. The situation was becoming difficult.

The soldier-citizens were stamping their feet and striking wide-armed blows upon their chests, as coachmen do for warmth, and they were looking at the grating with an ever-growing childish desire to pass in front of it. At last one of them risked it, a very nimble fellow called Potdevin. He took a start and ran past like a stag. The attempt succeeded. The prisoners seemed dead.

A voice called out: "There's nobody there."

Another soldier crossed the space before the dangerous opening. Then it became a game. Every minute, a man ran out, passing from one troop to the other as children at play do, and raising showers of snow behind him with the quick movement of his feet. They had lighted fires of dead branches to keep themselves warm, and the flying profile of each Garde-National showed in a bright illumination as he passed over to the camp on the left.

Some one called out: "Your turn, Maloison."

Maloison was a big baker whom his comrades laughed at, because he was so fat.

He hesitated. They teased him. Then, making up his mind, he started at a regular breathless trot which shook his stout person. All the detachment laughed till they cried. They called out: "Bravo, Maloison!" to encourage him.

He had gone about two-thirds of the distance when a long flame, rapid and red, leaped from the grating. A report followed, and the big baker fell upon his nose with a frightful shriek.

No one ran to help him. Then they saw him drag himself on all fours across the snow, moaning, and when he was beyond that terrible passage he fainted. He had a bullet high up in the flesh of the thigh.

After the first surprise and alarm there was more laughter.

Major Lavigne appeared upon the threshold of the keeper's lodge. He had just framed his plan of attack, and gave his word of command in a ringing voice: "Plumber Planchet and his men!"

Three men drew near.

"Unfasten the gutters of the house."

In a quarter of an hour some twenty yards of leaden gutter-pipe were brought to the Major.

Then, with innumerable prudent precautions, he had a little round hole bored in the edge of the trap-door, and having laid out an aqueduct from the pump to this opening, announced with an air of satisfaction: "We are going to give these German gentlemen something to drink." A wild cheer of admiration burst forth, followed by shouts of delight and roars of laughter. The Major organized gangs of workers, who were to be employed in relays of five minutes. Then he commanded: "Pump!"

And the iron handle having been put in motion, a little sound rustled along the pipes and slipped into the cellar, falling from step to step with the tinkle of a waterfall, suggestive of rocks and little red fishes.

They waited.

An hour passed; then two, then three.

The Major walked about the kitchen in a fever, putting his ear to the floor from time to time, trying to guess what the enemy was doing and whether it would soon capitulate.

The enemy was moving now. Sounds of rattling, of speaking, of splashing, could be heard. Then toward eight in the morning a voice issued from the grating: "I want to speak to the French officer."

Lavigne answered from the window, without putting out his head too far: "Do you surrender?"

"I surrender."

"Then pass out your guns."

A weapon was immediately seen to appear out of the hole and fall into the snow; then a second, a third—all; and the same voice declared: "I have no more. Make haste. I am drowned."

The Major commanded: "Stop."

And the handle of the pump fell motionless.

Then, having filled the kitchen with soldiers, all standing armed, he slowly lifted the trap-door.

Six drenched heads appeared, six fair heads with long light hair, and the six Germans were seen issuing forth one by one, shivering, dripping, scared.

They were seized and bound. Then, as a surprise was apprehended, the troops set out in two parties, one in charge of the prisoners, the other in charge of Maloison, on a mattress, carried on poles.

Rethel was entered in triumph.

M. Lavigne received a decoration for having taken prisoner a Prussian advance-guard; and the fat baker had the military medal for wounds received in face of the enemy.

THE SIEGE OF BERLIN

BY ALPHONSE DAUDET

Alphonse Daudet (born 1840, died 1897) has been reckoned for such of his novels as "Sapho," "Sidonie," "Numa Roumestan," etc., as a stern censor,

unsparing in his exposition and satire of the weakness and hypocrisy of human nature. In the present selection, however, he shows us the warm, sympathetic side of his nature. The story is a political as well as a human document in that it is a moving protest against Germany's annexation of Alsace and Lorraine.

THE SIEGE OF BERLIN*

By ALPHONSE DAUDET

* Translated for "Great Short Stories" by Mrs. I. L. Meyer.

We were going up the Champs Elysées with Doctor V——, gathering from the walls pierced by shells, and from the pavements broken by grape-shot, the story of Paris under siege. Just before we came to the Place de l'Etoile, the Doctor halted, and, pointing to one of the great corner houses grouped around the Arch of Triumph, "Do you see those four closed windows?" he asked. "One of the first days of August—the terrible month of August of last year, so full of anguish and disaster—I was called there to a case of apoplexy.

"Colonel Jouve, a cuirassier of the First Empire (a stubborn fellow, bristling with glory and with patriotism), had leased that flat with the balcony looking on the Champs Elysées. He had come there at the beginning of the war (1870-71). Guess for what purpose. To be present at the triumphal entry of our troops! Poor old man! The news from Wissembourg arrived one day just as he arose from table; he read the name of the Napoleon at the foot of the bulletin, of our defeat, and dropped as if felled by a sledgehammer. I found the old fellow stretched at full length upon the carpet, livid, apparently dead. He must have been very tall. As he lay there he looked gigantic—with fine, clear-cut features, fair teeth, and curling white hair. Eighty years old! but he did not look sixty. His granddaughter, a beautiful young girl, knelt close to him, weeping. She resembled him. Seeing the two faces together you might have thought them two fine Greek medals of the same impression, one an antique dimmed by age, somewhat worn around the edges; the other resplendent in all the velvet gloss of its pristine days. I was touched by the child's grief; later I became her ally and devoted friend. She was the daughter and grand-daughter of soldiers. Her father was on MacMahon's staff; and the man before her, lying, to all appearances, dead, must have suggested to her mind another equally terrible possibility. I did my best to give her courage. I had very little hope. It was an unquestionable hemiplegia, and men eighty years old never come out of that. The sick man lay in a stupor three days. During that time the news from Reichshofen reached Paris. You remember how it reached us! Until that night we had believed it a great victory—twenty thousand Prussians killed, the Prince Royal a prisoner.... I do not know by what miracle or stirred by what magnetic current an echo of the national joy reached the numb brain and thrilled the paralyzed limbs of my unconscious patient; but when I approached his bed I found him another man. His eyes were almost clear, his tongue less thick; he found strength to smile and to stammer the words: 'Vic-to-ry! Vic-to-ry!'"

"'Yes, Colonel,' I answered, 'a great victory!' In measure as I gave him the details of our triumph, his features softened and his whole face brightened. When I went out the granddaughter was waiting for me. She was very pale. I took her hand in mine. 'Do not weep,' I said, 'your grandfather is better; he will recover.' And then she told me the true story of Reichshofen—MacMahon in flight, the army crushed! We stood there face to face, speechless. She was thinking of her father. I own that all my thoughts were with her grandfather. I trembled for him! What could I do? To tell him the truth would kill him! But what right had I to leave him to the delusive joy that had called him back from the grave?

"'I can not help it,' said the heroic girl, 'I must tell a lie!' and drying her eyes, radiant, smiling, she entered the sick room.

"At first it was not so hard; the old fellow was very weak, and as easily deceived as a child. But as he gained strength our difficulties increased; his brain cleared; he was impatient for news; he insisted upon following the movements of the army; and his granddaughter was forced to sit by his bed and invent bulletins from the conquered country. It was piteous! The

beautiful, tired child forced to bend over the map of Germany, marking the imaginary progress of the army with little flags—Bazaine in command in Berlin, Froissart in Bavaria, MacMahon on the Baltic!

"In her ignorance she came to me for all her details; and I—almost as ignorant—did what I could for her. But now our best aid came from the grandfather. He helped us at every point in our imaginary invasion. He had conquered Germany so many times under the First Empire he knew the way. He could tell just what was coming.

"'Can you see what they are doing?' he cried. 'They are here! They turn *right here*, where I place this pin!' As far as the route was concerned, all that he predicted came true, and when we told him so he gloried in it. Unhappily for us we could not work fast enough for him. We might well take cities, win battles, pursue flying armies—he was insatiable! Every day as soon as I entered the sick room I was told of new triumphs.

"'Doctor,' cried the young girl, hurrying into the room and facing me, to bar my progress —'Doctor, we have taken Mayence!' And I cried as gaily, 'I know it! I heard it this morning!' Sometimes her joyful voice cried the news to me through the closed door.

"'We are getting on! We are getting on!' laughed the invalid. 'In less than eight days we shall enter Berlin!'

"We knew that the Prussians were coming, and, as they neared Paris, we wondered if it would not be safer to get the old man into the country. But we dared not do it; once out of the house he would look around him; he would question; he would see and hear. He was too weak, too numb from his great shock to bear the truth! We decided to stay where we were. The first day of the investment I went upstairs with a heavy heart, I remember. I had come through the deserted streets of Paris, past the ramparts. The troops were dragging up their cannon. All our suburbs were frontiers. I found my old fellow sitting up in bed, jubilant and proud.

"'Well,' said he, 'at last the siege is begun!'

"I was stupefied; I stared at him. His granddaughter cried out: 'Yes, Doctor, we have had great news! The siege of Berlin is begun!'

"She said it so pleasantly, threading her needle and taking her little stitches so calmly! How could he doubt her? He could not hear the guns; they were too far away. And Paris, wretched, tortured, sinister under the icy sky. What could he know of that! Sitting propped up in his bed he could see nothing but a corner of the Arch of Triumph. In his room everything was of the epoch of the Empire. Even the bric-à-brac was well fitted to foster his illusions. Portraits of field-marshals, pictures of battles, the king of Rome in his cradle; and the stiff consoles ornamented with brass trophies, and laden with Imperial relics! Medals, bronzes, the rock of St. Helena under a glass shade, and miniatures (all portraits of the same pretty woman with curling hair, dressed for a ball, in a yellow high-necked robe with leg-of-mutton sleeves, and wide belt, in the stiff fashion of 1806).

"Brave and faithful soldier of Napoleon! his relics formed an influence stronger for his deception than all our well-meant lies. He had lived for years in an atmosphere of conquest, and that atmosphere had prepared him for his dream of Berlin.

"From the beginning of the siege our military movements were simple; to take Berlin was merely an affair of time. When the old man was too tired of his enforced idleness, his granddaughter read him letters from his son—imaginary letters, of course, as nothing was permitted to enter Paris. Since the battle of Sedan the Colonel's son, MacMahon's aide, had been ordered to a German fortress.

"You may imagine the anguish of the poor man, separated from his family, knowing them to be prisoners in Paris, deprived of everything, possibly sick. Conscious as we were of his sorrow, it was not easy to pretend that he had written merry letters. Well, we did our best. The letters were vivacious, somewhat brief. Naturally, a soldier in the field—nay, more than that, a soldier always on the march in a conquered country!—could not write long letters.

Sometimes the poor grandchild's heart failed her; try as she might she could not write; then, for weeks there was no news. But the old man watched for it; and when we saw that the news must come, the little one ran into the room, letter in hand. Naturally, our strategic combinations were chimerical, difficult, even for their authors, to understand; but the old colonel invented explanations; it was all practical to him; he listened, smiled knowingly, criticized, approved. He was admirable when he answered his letters.

"'Never forget that thou art French,' dictated the vibrating voice. 'Be generous to the vanquished. Poor people! do not make them feel that they have lost! do not bear too heavy in this invasion.'

"Then followed advice oft-repeated, tender and touching little lay sermons, admonitions calculated to stimulate the young soldier to every military virtue. Truly, one could find in all that a code of honor—specially compiled for the use of conquerors; and scattered here and there throughout the letter were a few general reflections on politics, the preliminaries of peace, etc.

"'What must be done before the signing of the treaty?' The old man was not quite decided on the point; he 'must consider' before he could be sure; he was not exigeant: 'The indemnity of war—nothing more. Why should we take their provinces? What could we do with them? Could we ever make France out of Germany?' He dictated it all so firmly, in so strong a voice, and there was such truth, such candor, such patriotic zeal in his words, that it was impossible to listen to him unmoved.

"All that time the siege was in progress; but alas, it was not the siege of Berlin! It was just at that time of the year when Paris is bitter cold. The Prussians were shelling the city, and we were shut in there with epidemics and with famine. But surrounded by our indefatigable tenderness the old soldier lacked nothing. Even to the last I was able to provide him with fresh meat and with white bread. There was no white bread for us. I can not think of anything more touching than those dinners, so innocently, so ignorantly selfish! There he was, sitting in his bed fresh and smiling, his napkin under his chin, and his granddaughter, pale from privation, close to him, guiding his hand from his plate to his mouth, and holding his glass while he sipped his drinks with childlike satisfaction! Animated by the repast and by the calming influence of the warm room, he looked out on the winter: the tiled roofs; the snow whirling against the window-pane; and he thought of the far North, and for the hundredth time told us of the retreat from Russia when they had had nothing to eat but frozen biscuit and horse-meat.

"Horse-meat!

"'Can you imagine that, little one?'

"You may believe she could imagine that! For two months she had eaten no other meat. Our task was growing hard. In measure, as his strength returned, the numbness of all his senses—our chief aid to deception—was decreasing. Two or three times the volleys fired at the Porte Maillot had reached his ears, and he had lifted his head with ears pricked like the ears of a retriever. The last lie must be told, the last victory reported. Bazaine at Berlin! We told him that the shot that had startled him had been fired from the Invalides in honor of the victory.

"Another day they rolled his bed close to the window (I think that it was the Thursday of Buzenval), and he saw, distinctly, the National Guards massing on the Avenue de la Grande Armée.

"'What troops are those?' he asked sharply. Then he grumbled under his breath: 'Badly drilled! Very badly drilled! The whole outfit is slovenly!'

"Nothing came of it, but it was a warning. We had been warned before and we had taken precautions; but unfortunately they had fallen short.

"One day, when I arrived, the granddaughter ran to meet me, pale and anxious. 'They will enter the city to-morrow,' she murmured.

"Was the door of the sick-room open? As I think of it to-night, it seems to me that there was a strange expression on the fine, old face. It is probable that he had overheard his granddaughter.

"We had been speaking of the Prussians, but the old man could think of nothing but the French and their triumphal entry; MacMahon descending the Avenue in a shower of flowers, to the music of the fanfares. His son would be riding with the Marshal; and he, the Colonel, on the balcony, in full uniform, as he was at Lutzen, saluting the torn flags and the French eagles, dimmed by all the powder of the war!

"Poor old Jouve! Probably he believed that we had kept the good news to ourselves, fearing to excite him unduly. He did not say one word to any one; but the day following, when the victorious battalions of Prussia timidly entered the long road leading from the Porte Maillot to the Tuileries, the window was cautiously opened, and the Colonel appeared on the balcony, with his casque, his lance, and all the faded glory of the ex-cuirassier of Milhaud. I have often wondered what subconscious effort of the will, what sudden fanning of the vital flame, put the old man on his feet and into harness! What is sure is, that he was there, on foot, erect, looking with wild eyes over Paris—Paris in her mourning!—the wide, silent streets, the iron blinds drawn down. Paris, as sinister as a dead-house! He saw flags everywhere—white flags crossed with red! And not a soul to greet the returning army! For an instant he thought that he was dreaming. But, no! from away down there, below the Arch of Triumph, came a confused, metallic rattling, then a black line, advancing under the rising sun; then the gleaming combs of brazen helmets. The little drums of Jena rolled; and through the Arch of the Star of France, the day-star of the world, rhythmed by the heavy tread of the German sections, rang the triumphal march of Schubert!...

"Then the mournful silence of the Place de l'Etoile was broken by a cry:

"'*To arms! To arms! The Prussians!*' and the four Uhlans of the vanguard, looking up to the balcony, saw a tall, old man throw his arms above his head, waver, and fall backward.

. . . . . .

"And this time Colonel Jouve was really dead."

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

BY RUDYARD KIPLING

The question as to which is Kipling's greatest short story is one that brings different answers according to the temperament of the person to whom the question is addressed. Many of those who prefer sentiment in a story select "Without Benefit of Clergy"—those who prefer a strong study of character under most unusual circumstances are apt to say "The Man Who Would be King."

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

By RUDYARD KIPLING

Brother to a Prince and fellow to a beggar if he be found worthy

The Law, as quoted, lays down a fair conduct of life, and one not easy to follow. I have been fellow to a beggar again and again under circumstances which prevented either of us

finding out whether the other was worthy. I have still to be brother to a Prince, though I once came near to kinship with what might have been a veritable King and was promised the reversion of a Kingdom—army, law-courts, revenue, and policy all complete. But, to-day, I greatly fear that my King is dead, and if I want a crown I must go and hunt it for myself.

The beginning of everything was in a railway train upon the road to Mhow from Ajmir. There had been a Deficit in the Budget, which necessitated traveling, not Second-class, which is only half as dear as First-class, but by Intermediate, which is very awful indeed. There are no cushions in the Intermediate class, and the population are either Intermediate, which is Eurasian, or native, which for a long night journey is nasty, or Loafer, which is amusing though intoxicated. Intermediates do not patronize refreshment-rooms. They carry their food in bundles and pots, and buy sweets from the native sweetmeat-sellers, and drink the roadside water. That is why in the hot weather Intermediates are taken out of the carriages dead, and in all weathers are most properly looked down upon.

My particular Intermediate happened to be empty till I reached Nasirabad, when a huge gentleman in shirt-sleeves entered, and, following the custom of Intermediates, passed the time of day. He was a wanderer and a vagabond like myself, but with an educated taste for whisky. He told tales of things he had seen and done, of out-of-the-way corners of the Empire into which he had penetrated, and of adventures in which he risked his life for a few days' food. "If India was filled with men like you and me, not knowing more than the crows where they'd get their next day's rations, it isn't seventy millions of revenue the land would be paying—it's seven hundred millions," said he; and as I looked at his mouth and chin I was disposed to agree with him. We talked politics—the politics of Loaferdom that sees things from the underside where the lath and plaster are not smoothed off—and we talked postal arrangements because my friend wanted to send a telegram back from the next station to Ajmir, which is the turning-off place from the Bombay to the Mhow line as you travel westward. My friend had no money beyond eight annas which he wanted for dinner, and I had no money at all, owing to the hitch in the Budget before mentioned. Further, I was going into a wilderness where, though I should resume touch with the Treasury, there were no telegraph offices. I was, therefore, unable to help him in any way.

"We might threaten a Station-master, and make him send a wire on tick," said my friend, "but that'd mean inquiries for you and for me, and I've got my hands full these days. Did you say you are traveling back along this line within any days?"

"Within ten," I said.

"Can't you make it eight?" said he. "Mine is rather urgent business."

"I can send your telegram within ten days if that will serve you," I said.

"I couldn't trust the wire to fetch him, now I think of it. It's this way. He leaves Delhi on the 23d for Bombay. That means he'll be running through Ajmir about the night of the 23d."

"But I'm going into the Indian Desert," I explained.

"Well and good," said he. "You'll be changing at Marwar Junction to get into Jodhpore territory—you must do that—and he'll be coming through Marwar Junction in the early morning of the 24th by the Bombay Mail. Can you be at Marwar Junction on that time? 'Twon't be inconveniencing you, because I know that there's precious few pickings to be got out of these Central India States—even though you pretend to be correspondent of the 'Backwoodsman.'"

"Have you ever tried that trick?" I asked.

"Again and again, but the Residents find you out, and then you get escorted to the Border before you've time to get your knife into them. But about my friend here. I must give him a word o' mouth to tell him what's come to me, or else he won't know where to go. I would take it more than kind of you if you was to come out of Central India in time to catch him at Marwar Junction, and say to him: 'He has gone South for the week.' He'll know what that means. He's a big man with a red beard, and a great swell he is. You'll find him sleeping like a

gentleman with all his luggage round him in a Second-class compartment. But don't you be afraid. Slip down the window, and say: 'He has gone South for the week,' and he'll tumble. It's only cutting your time to stay in those parts by two days. I ask you as a stranger—going to the West," he said with emphasis.

"Where have you come from?" said I.

"From the East," said he, "and I am hoping that you will give him the message on the Square—for the sake of my Mother as well as your own."

Englishmen are not usually softened by appeals to the memory of their mothers, but for certain reasons, which will be fully apparent, I saw fit to agree.

"It's more than a little matter," said he, "and that's why I ask you to do it—and now I know that I can depend on you doing it. A Second-class carriage at Marwar Junction, and a red-haired man asleep in it. You'll be sure to remember. I get out at the next station, and I must hold on there till he comes or sends me what I want."

"I'll give the message if I catch him," I said, "and for the sake of your Mother as well as mine I'll give you a word of advice. Don't try to run the Central India States just now as the correspondent of the 'Backwoodsman.' There's a real one knocking about here, and it might lead to trouble."

"Thank you," said he simply, "and when will the swine be gone? I can't starve because he's ruining my work. I wanted to get hold of the Degumber Rajah down here about his father's widow, and give him a jump."

"What did he do to his father's widow, then?"

"Filled her up with red pepper and slippered her to death as she hung from a beam. I found that out myself, and I'm the only man that would dare going into the State to get hush-money for it. They'll try to poison me, same as they did in Chortumna when I went on the loot there. But you'll give the man at Marwar Junction my message?"

He got out at a little roadside station, and I reflected. I had heard, more than once, of men personating correspondents of newspapers and bleeding small Native States with threats of exposure, but I had never met any of the caste before. They lead a hard life, and generally die with great suddenness. The Native States have a wholesome horror of English newspapers, which may throw light on their peculiar methods of government, and do their best to choke correspondents with champagne, or drive them out of their mind with four-in-hand barouches. They do not understand that nobody cares a straw for the internal administration of Native States so long as oppression and crime are kept within decent limits, and the ruler is not drugged, drunk, or diseased from one end of the year to the other. Native States were created by Providence in order to supply picturesque scenery, tigers, and tall-writing. They are the dark places of the earth, full of unimaginable cruelty, touching the Railway and the Telegraph on one side, and, on the other, the days of Harun-al-Raschid. When I left the train I did business with divers Kings, and in eight days passed through many changes of life. Sometimes I wore dress-clothes and consorted with Princes and Politicals, drinking from crystal and eating from silver. Sometimes I lay out upon the ground and devoured what I could get, from a plate made of a flapjack, and drank the running water, and slept under the same rug as my servant. It was all in the day's work.

Then I headed for the Great Indian Desert upon the proper date, as I had promised, and the night Mail set me down at Marwar Junction, where a funny little happy-go-lucky, native-managed railway runs to Jodhpore. The Bombay Mail from Delhi makes a short halt at Marwar. She arrived as I got in, and I had just time to hurry to her platform and go down the carriages. There was only one Second-class on the train. I slipped the window and looked down upon a flaming red beard, half covered by a railway rug. That was my man, fast asleep, and I dug him gently in the ribs. He woke with a grunt, and I saw his face in the light of the lamps. It was a great and shining face.

"Tickets again?" said he.

"No," said I. "I am to tell you that he is gone South for the week. He is gone South for the week!"

The train had begun to move out. The red man rubbed his eyes. "He has gone South for the week!" he repeated. "Now that's just like his impidence. Did he say that I was to give you anything? 'Cause I won't."

"He didn't," I said, and dropped away and watched the red lights die out in the dark. It was horribly cold because the wind was blowing off the sands. I climbed into my own train—not an Intermediate Carriage this time—and went to sleep.

If the man with the beard had given me a rupee I should have kept it as a memento of a rather curious affair. But the consciousness of having done my duty was my only reward.

Later on I reflected that two gentlemen like my friends could not do any good if they foregathered and personated Correspondents of newspapers, and might, if they "stuck up" one of the little rat-trap states of Central India or Southern Rajputana, get themselves into serious difficulties. I therefore took some trouble to describe them as accurately as I could remember to people who would be interested in deporting them: and succeeded, so I was later informed, in having them headed back from the Degumber borders.

Then I became respectable, and returned to an Office where there were no Kings and no incidents except the daily manufacture of a newspaper. A newspaper office seems to attract every conceivable sort of person, to the prejudice of discipline. Zenana-mission ladies arrive, and beg that the Editor will instantly abandon all his duties to describe a Christian prize-giving in a back-slum of a perfectly inaccessible village; Colonels who have been overpassed for commands sit down and sketch the outline of a series of ten, twelve, or twenty-four leading articles on Seniority versus Selection; missionaries wish to know why they have not been permitted to escape from their regular vehicles of abuse and swear at a brother-missionary under special patronage of the editorial We; stranded theatrical companies troop up to explain that they can not pay for their advertisements, but on their return from New Zealand or Tahiti will do so with interest; inventors of patent punkah-pulling machines, carriage couplings, and unbreakable swords and axle-trees call with specifications in their pockets and hours at their disposal; tea-companies enter and elaborate their prospectuses with the office pens; secretaries of ball-committees clamor to have the glories of their last dance more fully expounded; strange ladies rustle in and say: "I want a hundred lady's cards printed at once, please," which is manifestly part of an Editor's duty; and every dissolute ruffian that ever tramped the Grand Trunk Road makes it his business to ask for employment as a proof-reader. And, all the time, the telephone-bell is ringing madly, and Kings are being killed on the Continent, and Empires are saying, "You're another," and Mister Gladstone is calling down brimstone upon the British Dominions, and the little black copy-boys are whining, "kaa-pi chay-ha-yeh" ("copy wanted"), like tired bees, and most of the paper is as blank as Modred's shield.

But that is the amusing part of the year. There are other six months wherein none ever come to call, and the thermometer walks inch by inch up to the top of the glass, and the office is darkened to just above reading-light, and the press machines are red-hot of touch, and nobody writes anything but accounts of amusements in the Hill-stations or obituary notices. Then the telephone becomes a tinkling terror, because it tells you of the sudden deaths of men and women that you knew intimately, and the prickly-heat covers you as with a garment, and you sit down and write: "A slight increase of sickness is reported from the Khuda Janta Khan District. The outbreak is purely sporadic in its nature, and, thanks to the energetic efforts of the District authorities, is now almost at an end. It is, however, with deep regret we record the death," etc.

Then the sickness really breaks out, and the less recording and reporting the better for the peace of the subscribers. But the Empires and the Kings continue to divert themselves as selfishly as before, and the Foreman thinks that a daily paper really ought to come out once in twenty-four hours, and all the people at the Hill-stations in the middle of their amusements say: "Good gracious! Why can't the paper be sparkling? I'm sure there's plenty going on up here."

That is the dark half of the moon, and, as the advertisements say, "must be experienced to be appreciated."

It was in that season, and a remarkably evil season, that the paper began running the last issue of the week on Saturday night, which is to say Sunday morning, after the custom of a London paper. This was a great convenience, for immediately after the paper was put to bed, the dawn would lower the thermometer from 96° to almost 84° for half an hour, and in that chill—you have no idea how cold is 84° on the glass until you begin to pray for it—a very tired man could set off to sleep ere the heat roused him.

One Saturday night it was my pleasant duty to put the paper to bed alone. A King or courtier or a courtezan or a community was going to die or get a new Constitution, or do something that was important on the other side of the world, and the paper was to be held open till the latest possible minute in order to catch the telegram. It was a pitchy black night, as stifling as a June night can be, and the loo, the red-hot wind from the westward, was booming among the tinder-dry trees and pretending that the rain was on its heels. Now and again a spot of almost boiling water would fall on the dust with the flop of a frog, but all our weary world knew that was only pretense. It was a shade cooler in the press-room than the office, so I sat there, while the type ticked and clicked, and the night-jars hooted at the windows, and the all but naked compositors wiped the sweat from their foreheads and called for water. The thing that was keeping us back, whatever it was, would not come off, though the loo dropped and the last type was set, and the whole round earth stood still in the choking heat, with its finger on its lip, to wait the event. I drowsed, and wondered whether the telegraph was a blessing, and whether this dying man, or struggling people, was aware of the inconvenience the delay was causing. There was no special reason beyond the heat and worry to make tension, but as the clock-hands crept up to three o'clock and the machines spun their flywheels two or three times to see that all was in order, before I said the word that would set them off, I could have shrieked aloud.

Then the roar and rattle of the wheels shivered the quiet into little bits. I rose to go away, but two men in white clothes stood in front of me. The first one said: "It's him!" The second said: "So it is!" And they both laughed almost as loudly as the machinery roared, and mopped their foreheads. "We see there was a light burning across the road and we were sleeping in that ditch there for coolness, and I said to my friend here, 'The office is open. Let's come along and speak to him as turned us back from the Degumber State,'" said the smaller of the two. He was the man I had met in the Mhow train, and his fellow was the red-bearded man of Marwar Junction. There was no mistaking the eyebrows of the one or the beard of the other.

I was not pleased, because I wished to go to sleep, not to squabble with loafers. "What do you want?" I asked.

"Half an hour's talk with you cool and comfortable, in the office," said the red-bearded man. "We'd like some drink—the Contrack doesn't begin yet, Peachey, so you needn't look—but what we really want is advice. We don't want money. We ask you as a favor, because you did us a bad turn about Degumber."

I led from the press-room to the stifling office with the maps on the walls, and the red-haired man rubbed his hands. "That's something like," said he. "This was the proper shop to come to. Now, Sir, let me introduce to you Brother Peachey Carnehan, that's him, and Brother Daniel Dravot, that is me, and the less said about our professions the better, for we have been most things in our time. Soldier, sailor, compositor, photographer, proof-reader, street-preacher, and correspondents of the 'Backwoodsman' when we thought the paper wanted one. Carnehan is sober, and so am I. Look at us first and see that's sure. It will save you cutting into my talk. We'll take one of your cigars apiece, and you shall see us light."

I watched the test. The men were absolutely sober, so I gave them each a tepid peg.

"Well and good," said Carnehan of the eyebrows, wiping the froth from his mustache. "Let me talk now, Dan. We have been all over India, mostly on foot. We have been boiler-fitters, engine-drivers, petty contractors, and all that, and we have decided that India isn't big enough for such as us."

They certainly were too big for the office. Dravot's beard seemed to fill half the room and Carnehan's shoulders the other half, as they sat on the big table. Carnehan continued: "The country isn't half worked out because they that governs it won't let you touch it. They spend all their blessed time in governing it, and you can't lift a spade, nor chip a rock, nor look for oil, nor anything like that without all the Government saying: 'Leave it alone and let us govern.' Therefore, such as it is, we will let it alone, and go away to some other place where a man isn't crowded and can come to his own. We are not little men, and there is nothing that we are afraid of except Drink, and we have signed a Contrack on that. Therefore, we are going away to be Kings."

"Kings in our own right," muttered Dravot.

"Yes, of course," I said. "You've been tramping in the sun, and it's a very warm night, and hadn't you better sleep over the notion? Come to-morrow."

"Neither drunk nor sunstruck," said Dravot. "We have slept over the notion half a year, and require to see Books and Atlases, and we have decided that there is only one place now in the world that two strong men can Sar-a-whack. They call it Kafiristan. By my reckoning it's the top right-hand corner of Afghanistan, not more than three hundred miles from Peshawar. They have two and thirty heathen idols there, and we'll be the thirty-third. It's a mountainous country, and the women of those parts are very beautiful."

"But that is provided against in the Contrack," said Carnehan. "Neither Women nor Liquor, Daniel."

"And that's all we know, except that no one has gone there, and they fight, and in any place where they fight a man who knows how to drill men can always be a King. We shall go to those parts and say to any King we find: 'D'you want to vanquish your foes?' and we will show him how to drill men; for that we know better than anything else. Then we will subvert that King and seize his Throne and establish a Dy-nasty."

"You'll be cut to pieces before you're fifty miles across the Border," I said. "You have to travel through Afghanistan to get to that country. It's one mass of mountains and peaks and glaciers, and no Englishman has been through it. The people are utter brutes, and even if you reached them you couldn't do anything."

"That's more like," said Carnehan. "If you could think us a little more mad we would be more pleased. We have come to you to know about this country, to read a book about it, and to be shown maps. We want you to tell us that we are fools and to show us your books." He turned to the book-cases.

"Are you at all in earnest?" I said.

"A little," said Dravot sweetly. "As big a map as you have got, even if it's all blank where Kafiristan is, and any books you've got. We can read, though we aren't very educated."

I uncased the big thirty-two-miles-to-the-inch map of India, and two smaller Frontier maps, hauled down volume INF-KAN of the "Encyclopædia Britannica," and the men consulted them.

"See here!" said Dravot, his thumb on the map. "Up to Jagdallak, Peachey and me know the road. We was there with Roberts's Army. We'll have to turn off to the right at Jagdallak through Laghmann territory. Then we get among the hills—fourteen thousand feet—fifteen thousand—it will be cold work there, but it don't look very far on the map."

I handed him Wood on the Sources of the Oxus. Carnehan was deep in the Encyclopædia.

"They're a mixed lot," said Dravot reflectively; "and it won't help us to know the names of their tribes. The more tribes the more they'll fight, and the better for us. From Jagdallak to Ashang. H'mm!"

"But all the information about the country is as sketchy and inaccurate as can be," I protested. "No one knows anything about it really. Here's the file of the United Services' Institute. Read what Bellew says."

"Blow Bellew!" said Carnehan. "Dan, they're an all-fired lot of heathens, but this book here says they think they're related to us English."

I smoked while the men pored over Raverty, Wood, the maps, and the Encyclopædia.

"There is no use your waiting," said Dravot politely. "It's about four o'clock now. We'll go before six o'clock if you want to sleep, and we won't steal any of the papers. Don't you sit up. We're two harmless lunatics, and if you come, to-morrow evening, down to the Serai we'll say good-by to you."

"You are two fools," I answered. "You'll be turned back at the Frontier or cut up the minute you set foot in Afghanistan. Do you want any money or a recommendation down-country? I can help you to the chance of work next week."

"Next week we shall be hard at work ourselves, thank you," said Dravot. "It isn't so easy being a King as it looks. When we've got our Kingdom in going order we'll let you know, and you can come up and help us to govern it."

"Would two lunatics make a Contrack like that?" said Carnehan, with subdued pride, showing me a greasy half-sheet of note-paper on which was written the following. I copied it, then and there, as a curiosity:

This Contract between me and you persuing witnesseth in the name of God—Amen and so forth.

(One) That me and you will settle this matter together: i.e., to be Kings of Kafiristan.

(Two) That you and me will not, while this matter is being settled, look at any Liquor, nor any Woman black, white, or brown, so as to get mixed up with one or the other harmful.

(Three) That we conduct ourselves with dignity and discretion, and if one of us gets into trouble the other will stay by him.

Signed by you and me this day,
Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan.
Daniel Dravot.
Both Gentlemen at Large.

"There was no need for the last article," said Carnehan, blushing modestly; "but it looks regular. Now you know the sort of men that loafers are—we are loafers, Dan, until we get out of India—and do you think that we would sign a Contrack like that unless we was in earnest? We have kept away from the two things that make life worth having."

"You won't enjoy your lives much longer if you are going to try this idiotic adventure. Don't set the office on fire," I said, "and go away before nine o'clock."

I left them still poring over the maps and making notes on the back of the "Contrack." "Be sure to come down to the Serai to-morrow," were their parting words.

The Kumharsen Serai is the great four-square sink of humanity where the strings of camels and horses from the North load and unload. All the nationalities of Central Asia may be found there, and most of the folk of India proper. Balkh and Bokhara there meet Bengal and Bombay, and try to draw eye-teeth. You can buy ponies, turquoises, Persian pussy-cats, saddle-bags, fat-tailed sheep and musk in the Kumharsen Serai, and get many strange things for nothing. In the afternoon I went down there to see whether my friends intended to keep their word or were lying about drunk.

A priest attired in fragments of ribbons and rags stalked up to me, gravely twisting a child's paper whirligig. Behind him was his servant, bending under the load of a crate of mud toys. The two were loading up two camels, and the inhabitants of the Serai watched them with shrieks of laughter.

"The priest is mad," said a horse-dealer to me. "He is going up to Kabul to sell toys to the Amir. He will either be raised to honor or have his head cut off. He came in here this morning and has been behaving madly ever since."

"The witless are under the protection of God," stammered a flat-cheeked Usbeg in broken Hindi. "They foretell future events."

"Would they could have foretold that my caravan would have been cut up by the Shinwaris almost within shadow of the Pass!" grunted the Eusufzai agent of a Rajputana trading-house, whose goods had been feloniously diverted into the hands of other robbers just across the Border, and whose misfortunes were the laughing-stock of the bazaar. "Ohe, priest, whence come you and whither do you go?"

"From Roum have I come," shouted the priest, waving his whirligig; "from Roum, blown by the breath of a hundred devils across the sea! Oh, thieves, robbers, liars, the blessing of Pir Khan on pigs, dogs, and perjurers! Who will take the Protected of God to the North to sell charms that are never still to the Amir? The camels shall not gall, the sons shall not fall sick, and the wives shall remain faithful while they are away, of the men who give me place in their caravan. Who will assist me to slipper the King of the Roos with a golden slipper with a silver heel? The protection of Pir Khan be upon his labors!" He spread out the skirts of his gaberdine and pirouetted between the lines of tethered horses.

"There starts a caravan from Peshawar to Kabul in twenty days, Huzrut," said the Eusufzai trader. "My camels go therewith. Do thou also go and bring us good luck."

"I will go even now!" shouted the priest. "I will depart upon my winged camels, and be at Peshawar in a day! Ho! Hazar Mir Khan," he yelled to his servant, "drive out the camels, but let me first mount my own."

He leaped on the back of his beast as it knelt, and, turning round to me, cried: "Come thou also, Sahib, a little along the road, and I will sell thee a charm—an amulet that shall make thee King of Kafiristan."

Then the light broke upon me, and I followed the two camels out of the Serai till we reached open road and the priest halted.

"What d'you think o' that?" said he in English. "Carnehan can't talk their patter, so I've made him my servant. He makes a handsome servant. 'Tisn't for nothing that I've been knocking about the country for fourteen years. Didn't I do that talk neat? We'll hitch on to a caravan at Peshawar till we get to Jagdallak, and then we'll see if we can get donkeys for our camels, and strike into Kafiristan. Whirligigs for the Amir, O Lord! Put your hand under the camel bags and tell me what you feel."

I felt the butt of a Martini, and another and another.

"Twenty of 'em," said Dravot placidly. "Twenty of 'em, and ammunition to correspond, under the whirligigs and the mud dolls."

"Heaven help you if you are caught with those things!" I said. "A Martini is worth her weight in silver among the Pathans."

"Fifteen hundred rupees of capital—every rupee we could beg, borrow, or steal—are invested on these two camels," said Dravot. "We won't get caught. We're going through the Khaiber with a regular caravan. Who'd touch a poor mad priest?"

"Have you got everything you want?" I asked, overcome with astonishment.

"Not yet, but we shall soon. Give us a memento of your kindness, Brother. You did me a service yesterday, and that time in Marwar. Half my Kingdom shall you have, as the saying is." I slipped a small charm compass from my watch-chain and handed it up to the priest.

"Good-by," said Dravot, giving me his hand cautiously. "It's the last time we'll shake hands with an Englishman these many days. Shake hands with him, Carnehan," he cried, as the second camel passed me.

Carnehan leaned down and shook hands. Then the camels passed away along the dusty road, and I was left alone to wonder. My eye could detect no failure in the disguises. The scene in the Serai attested that they were complete to the native mind. There was just the chance, therefore, that Carnehan and Dravot would be able to wander through Afghanistan without detection. But, beyond, they would find death, certain and awful death.

Ten days later a native friend of mine, giving me the news of the day from Peshawar, wound up his letter with: "There has been much laughter here on account of a certain mad priest who is going in his estimation to sell petty gauds and insignificant trinkets which he ascribes as great charms to H. H. the Amir of Bokhara. He passed through Peshawar and associated himself to the Second Summer caravan that goes to Kabul. The merchants are pleased, because through superstition they imagine that such mad fellows bring good fortune."

The two, then, were beyond the Border. I would have prayed for them, but, that night, a real King died in Europe, and demanded an obituary notice.

. . . . . .

The wheel of the world swings through the same phases again and again. Summer passed and winter thereafter, and came and passed again. The daily paper continued and I with it, and upon the third summer there fell a hot night, a night-issue, and a strained waiting for something to be telegraphed from the other side of the world, exactly as had happened before. A few great men had died in the past two years, the machines worked with more clatter, and some of the trees in the office garden were a few feet taller. But that was all the difference.

I passed over to the pressroom, and went through just such a scene as I have already described. The nervous tension was stronger than it had been two years before, and I felt the heat more acutely. At three o'clock I cried, "Print off," and turned to go, when there crept to my chair what was left of a man. He was bent into a circle, his head was sunk between his shoulders, and he moved his feet one over the other like a bear. I could hardly see whether he walked or crawled—this rag-wrapped, whining cripple who addressed me by name, crying that he was come back. "Can you give me a drink?" he whimpered. "For the Lord's sake, give me a drink!"

I went back to the office, the man following with groans of pain, and I turned up the lamp.

"Don't you know me?" he gasped, dropping into a chair, and he turned his drawn face, surmounted by a shock of gray hair, to the light.

I looked at him intently. Once before had I seen eyebrows that met over the nose in an inch-broad black band, but for the life of me I could not tell where.

"I don't know you," I said, handing him the whisky. "What can I do for you?"

He took a gulp of the spirit raw, and shivered in spite of the suffocating heat.

"I've come back," he repeated; "and I was the King of Kafiristan—me and Dravot—crowned Kings we was! In this office we settled it—you setting there and giving us the books. I am Peachey—Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan, and you've been setting here ever since—O Lord!"

I was more than a little astonished, and expressed my feelings accordingly.

"It's true," said Carnehan, with a dry cackle, nursing his feet, which were wrapped in rags. "True as gospel. Kings we were, with crowns upon our heads—me and Dravot—poor Dan—oh, poor, poor Dan, that would never take advice, not though I begged of him!"

"Take the whisky," I said, "and take your own time. Tell me all you can recollect of everything from beginning to end. You got across the border on your camels, Dravot dressed as a mad priest and you his servant. Do you remember that?"

"I ain't mad—yet, but I shall be that way soon. Of course I remember. Keep looking at me, or maybe my words will go all to pieces. Keep looking at me in my eyes and don't say anything."

I leaned forward and looked into his face as steadily as I could. He dropped one hand upon the table and I grasped it by the wrist. It was twisted like a bird's claw, and upon the back was a ragged, red, diamond-shaped scar.

"No, don't look there. Look at me," said Carnehan.

"That comes afterward, but for the Lord's sake don't distrack me. We left with that caravan, me and Dravot playing all sorts of antics to amuse the people we were with. Dravot used to make us laugh in the evenings when all the people was cooking their dinners—cooking their dinners, and ... what did they do then? They lit little fires with sparks that went into Dravot's beard, and we all laughed—fit to die. Little red fires they was, going into Dravot's big red beard—so funny." His eyes left mine and he smiled foolishly.

"You went as far as Jagdallak with that caravan," I said at a venture, "after you had lit those fires. To Jagdallak, where you turned off to try to get into Kafiristan."

"No, we didn't neither. What are you talking about? We turned off before Jagdallak, because we heard the roads was good. But they wasn't good enough for our two camels—mine and Dravot's. When we left the caravan, Dravot took off all his clothes and mine too, and said we would be heathen, because the Kaffirs didn't allow Mohammedans to talk to them. So we dressed betwixt and between, and such a sight as Daniel Dravot I never saw yet nor expect to see again. He burned half his beard, and slung a sheep-skin over his shoulder, and shaved his head into patterns. He shaved mine, too, and made me wear outrageous things to look like a heathen. That was in a most mountainous country, and our camels couldn't go along any more because of the mountains. They were tall and black, and coming home I saw them fight like wild goats—there are lots of goats in Kafiristan. And these mountains, they never keep still, no more than the goats. Always fighting they are, and don't let you sleep at night."

"Take some more whisky," I said very slowly. "What did you and Daniel Dravot do when the camels could go no further because of the rough roads that led into Kafiristan?"

"What did which do? There was a party called Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan that was with Dravot. Shall I tell you about him? He died out there in the cold. Slap from the bridge fell old Peachey, turning and twisting in the air like a penny whirligig that you can sell to the Amir. No; they was two for three ha'pence, those whirligigs, or I am much mistaken and woful sore. And then these camels were no use, and Peachey said to Dravot: 'For the Lord's sake, let's get out of this before our heads are chopped off,' and with that they killed the camels all among the mountains, not having anything in particular to eat, but first they took off the boxes with the guns and the ammunition, till two men came along driving four mules. Dravot up and dances in front of them, singing: 'Sell me four mules.' Says the first man: 'If you are rich enough to buy, you are rich enough to rob;' but before ever he could put his hand to his knife, Dravot breaks his neck over his knee, and the other party runs away. So Carnehan loaded the mules with the rifles that was taken off the camels, and together we starts forward into those bitter cold mountainous parts, and never a road broader than the back of your hand."

He paused for a moment, while I asked him if he could remember the nature of the country through which he had journeyed.

"I am telling you as straight as I can, but my head isn't as good as it might be. They drove nails through it to make me hear better how Dravot died. The country was mountainous and the mules were most contrary, and the inhabitants was dispersed and solitary. They went up and up, and down and down, and that other party, Carnehan, was imploring of Dravot not to sing and whistle so loud, for fear of bringing down the tremenjus avalanches. But Dravot says that if a King couldn't sing it wasn't worth being King, and whacked the mules over the rump, and never took no heed for ten cold days. We came to a big level valley all among the mountains, and the mules were near dead, so we killed them, not having anything in special for them or us to eat. We sat upon the boxes, and played odd and even with the cartridges that was jolted out.

"Then ten men with bows and arrows ran down that valley, chasing twenty men with bows and arrows, and the row was tremenjus. They was fair men—fairer than you or me—with yellow hair and remarkable well built. Says Dravot, unpacking the guns—'This is the beginning of the business. We'll fight for the ten men,' and with that he fires two rifles at the twenty men, and drops one of them at two hundred yards from the rock where we was sitting. The other men began to run, but Carnehan and Dravot sits on the boxes picking them off at all ranges, up and down the valley. Then we goes up to the ten men that had run across the snow too, and they fires a footy little arrow at us. Dravot he shoots above their heads and they all falls down flat. Then he walks over them and kicks them, and then he lifts them up and shakes hands all round to make them friendly like. He calls them and gives them the boxes to carry, and waves his hand for all the world as though he was King already. They takes the boxes and him across the valley and up the hill into a pine wood on the top, where there was half a dozen big stone idols. Dravot he goes to the biggest—a fellow they call Imbra—and lays a rifle and a cartridge at his feet, rubbing his nose respectful with his own nose, patting him on the head, and saluting in front of it. He turns round to the men and nods his head, and says: 'That's all right. I'm in the know too, and all these old jim-jams are my friends.' Then he opens his mouth and points down it, and when the first man brings him food, he says: 'No;' and when the second man brings him food, he says: 'No;' but when one of the old priests and the boss of the village brings him food, he says: 'Yes,' very haughtily, and eats it slow. That was how we came to our first village, without any trouble, just as though we had tumbled from the skies. But we tumbled from one of those d—d rope-bridges, you see, and you couldn't expect a man to laugh much after that."

"Take some more whisky and go on," I said. "That was the first village you came into. How did you get to the King?"

"I wasn't King," said Carnehan. "Dravot he was the King, and a handsome man he looked with the gold crown on his head and all. Him and the other party stayed in that village, and every morning Dravot sat by the side of old Imbra, and the people came and worshiped. That was Dravot's order. Then a lot of men came into the valley, and Carnehan and Dravot picks them off with the rifles before they knew where they was, and runs down into the valley and up again the other side, and finds another village, same as the first one, and the people all falls down flat on their faces, and Dravot says: 'Now what is the trouble between you two villages?' and the people points to a woman, as fair as you or me, that was carried off, and Dravot takes her back to the first village and counts up the dead—eight there was. For each dead man Dravot pours a little milk on the ground and waves his arms like a whirligig and 'That's all right,' says he. Then he and Carnehan takes the big boss of each village by the arm and walks them down into the valley, and shows them how to scratch a line with a spear right down the valley, and gives each a sod of turf from both sides o' the line. Then all the people comes down and shouts like the devil and all, and Dravot says: 'Go and dig the land, and be fruitful and multiply,' which they did, though they didn't understand. Then we asks the names of things in their lingo—bread and water and fire and idols and such, and Dravot leads the priest of each village up to the idol, and says he must sit there and judge the people, and if anything goes wrong he is to be shot.

"Next week they was all turning up the land in the valley as quiet as bees and much prettier, and the priests heard all the complaints and told Dravot in dumb show what it was about. 'That's just the beginning,' says Dravot. 'They think we're Gods.' He and Carnehan picks out twenty good men and shows them how to click off a rifle, and form fours, and advance in line, and they was very pleased to do so, and clever to see the hang of it. Then he

takes out his pipe and his baccy-pouch and leaves one at one village and one at the other, and off we two goes to see what was to be done in the next valley. That was all rock, and there was a little village there, and Carnehan says: 'Send 'em to the old valley to plant,' and takes 'em there and gives 'em some land that wasn't took before. They were a poor lot, and we blooded 'em with a kid before letting 'em into the new Kingdom. That was to impress the people, and then they settled down quiet, and Carnehan went back to Dravot, who had got into another valley, all snow and ice and most mountainous. There was no people there and the Army got afraid, so Dravot shoots one of them, and goes on till he finds some people in a village, and the Army explains that unless the people wants to be killed they had better not shoot their little matchlocks; for they had matchlocks. We makes friends with the priest and I stays there alone with two of the Army, teaching the men how to drill, and a thundering big Chief comes across the snow with kettle-drums and horns twanging, because he heard there was a new God kicking about. Carnehan sights for the brown of the men half a mile across the snow and wings one of them. Then he sends a message to the Chief that, unless he wished to be killed, he must come and shake hands with me and leave his arms behind. The Chief comes alone first, and Carnehan shakes hands with him and whirls his arms about, same as Dravot used, and very much surprised that Chief was, and strokes my eyebrows. Then Carnehan goes alone to the Chief, and asks him in dumb show if he had an enemy he hated. 'I have,' says the Chief. So Carnehan weeds out the pick of his men, and sets two of the Army to show them drill and at the end of two weeks the men can maneuvre about as well as Volunteers. So he marches with the Chief to a great big plain on the top of a mountain, and the Chief's men rushes into a village and takes it; we three Martinis firing into the brown of the enemy. So we took that village too, and I gives the Chief a rag from my coat and says, 'Occupy till I come:' which was scriptural. By way of a reminder, when me and the Army was eighteen hundred yards away, I drops a bullet near him standing on the snow, and all the people falls flat on their faces. Then I sends a letter to Dravot, wherever he be, by land or by sea."

At the risk of throwing the creature out of train I interrupted: "How could you write a letter up yonder?"

"The letter?—Oh!—The letter! Keep looking at me between the eyes, please. It was a string-talk letter, that we'd learned the way of it from a blind beggar in the Punjab."

I remembered that there had once come to the office a blind man with a knotted twig and a piece of string which he wound round the twig according to some cipher of his own. He could, after the lapse of days or hours, repeat the sentence which he had reeled up. He had reduced the alphabet to eleven primitive sounds; and tried to teach me his method, but failed.

"I sent that letter to Dravot," said Carnehan; "and told him to come back because this Kingdom was growing too big for me to handle, and then I struck for the first valley, to see how the priests were working. They called the village we took along with the Chief, Bashkai, and the first village we took, Er-Heb. The priests at Er-Heb was doing all right, but they had a lot of pending cases about land to show me, and some men from another village had been firing arrows at night. I went out and looked for that village and fired four rounds at it from a thousand yards. That used all the cartridges I cared to spend, and I waited for Dravot, who had been away two or three months, and I kept my people quiet. One morning I heard the devil's own noise of drums and horns, and Dan Dravot marches down the hill with his Army and a tail of hundreds of men, and, which was the most amazing—a great gold crown on his head. 'My Gord, Carnehan,' says Daniel, 'this is a tremenjus business, and we've got the whole country as far as it's worth having. I am the son of Alexander by Queen Semiramis, and you're my younger brother and a God too! It's the biggest thing we've ever seen. I've been marching and fighting for six weeks with the Army, and every footy little village for fifty miles has come in rejoiceful; and more than that, I've got the key of the whole show, as you'll see, and I've got a crown for you! I told 'em to make two of 'em at a place called Shu, where the gold lies in the rock like suet in mutton. Gold I've seen, and turquoise I've kicked out of the cliffs, and there's garnets in the sand of the river, and here's a chunk of amber that a man brought me. Call up all the priests and, here, take your crown.'

"One of the men opens a black hair bag and I slips the crown on. It was too small and too heavy, but I wore it for the glory. Hammered gold it was—five pound weight, like a hoop of a

barrel.

"'Peachey,' says Dravot, 'we don't want to fight no more. The Craft's the trick, so help me!' and he brings forward that same Chief that I left at Bashkai—Billy Fish we called him afterward, because he was so like Billy Fish that drove the big tank-engine at Mach on the Bolan in the old days. 'Shake hands with him,' says Dravot, and I shook hands and nearly dropped, for Billy Fish gave me the Grip. I said nothing, but tried him with the Fellow Craft Grip. He answers, all right, and I tried the Master's Grip, but that was a slip. 'A Fellow Craft he is!' I says to Dan. 'Does he know the word?' 'He does,' says Dan, 'and all the priests know. It's a miracle! The Chiefs and the priests can work a Fellow Craft Lodge in a way that's very like ours, and they've cut the marks on the rocks, but they don't know the Third Degree, and they've come to find out. It's Gord's Truth. I've known these long years that the Afghans knew up to the Fellow Craft Degree, but this is a miracle. A God and a Grand-Master of the Craft am I, and a Lodge in the Third Degree I will open, and we'll raise the head priests and the Chiefs of the villages.'

"'It's against all the law,' I says, 'holding a Lodge without warrant from any one; and we never held office in any Lodge.'

"'It's a masterstroke of policy,' says Dravot. 'It means running the country as easy as a four-wheeled bogie on a down grade. We can't stop to inquire now, or they'll turn against us. I've forty Chiefs at my heel, and passed and raised according to their merit they shall be. Billet these men on the villages and see that we run up a Lodge of some kind. The temple of Imbra will do for the Lodge-room. The women must make aprons as you show them. I'll hold a levee of Chiefs to-night and Lodge to-morrow.'

"I was fair run off my legs, but I wasn't such a fool as not to see what a pull this Craft business gave us. I showed the priests' families how to make aprons of the degrees, but for Dravot's apron the blue border and marks was made of turquoise lumps on white hide, not cloth. We took a great square stone in the temple for the Master's chair, and little stones for the officers' chairs, and painted the black pavement with white squares, and did what we could to make things regular.

"At the levee which was held that night on the hillside with big bonfires, Dravot gives out that him and me were Gods and sons of Alexander, and Past Grand-Masters in the Craft, and was come to make Kafiristan a country where every man should eat in peace and drink in quiet, and specially obey us. Then the Chiefs come round to shake hands, and they was so hairy and white and fair it was just shaking hands with old friends. We gave them names according as they was like men we had known in India—Billy Fish, Holly Dilworth, Pikky Kergan that was Bazaar-master when I was at Mhow, and so on, and so on.

"The most amazing miracle was at Lodge next night. One of the old priests was watching us continuous, and I felt uneasy, for I knew we'd have to fudge the Ritual, and I didn't know what the men knew. The old priest was a stranger come in from beyond the village of Bashkai. The minute Dravot puts on the Master's apron that the girls had made for him, the priest fetches a whoop and a howl, and tries to overturn the stone that Dravot was sitting on. 'It's all up now,' I says. 'That comes of meddling with the Craft without warrant!' Dravot never winked an eye, not when ten priests took and tilted over the Grand-Master's chair—which was to say the stone of Imbra. The priest begins rubbing the bottom end of it to clear away the black dirt, and presently he shows all the other priests the Master's Mark, same as was on Dravot's apron, cut into the stone. Not even the priests of the temple of Imbra knew it was there. The old chap falls flat on his face at Dravot's feet and kisses 'em. 'Luck again,' says Dravot, across the Lodge to me, 'they say it's the missing Mark that no one could understand the why of. We're more than safe now.' Then he bangs the butt of his gun for a gavel and says: 'By virtue of the authority vested in me by my own right hand and the help of Peachey, I declare myself Grand-Master of all Freemasonry in Kafiristan in this the Mother Lodge o' the country, and King of Kafiristan equally with Peachey!' At that he puts on his crown and I puts on mine—I was doing Senior Warden—and we opens the Lodge in most ample form. It was an amazing miracle! The priests moved in Lodge through the first two degrees almost without telling, as if the memory was coming back to them. After that, Peachey and Dravot raised such as was worthy—high priests and Chiefs of far-off villages. Billy Fish was the first, and I

can tell you we scared the soul out of him. It was not in any way according to Ritual, but it served our turn. We didn't raise more than ten of the biggest men because we didn't want to make the Degree common. And they was clamoring to be raised.

"'In another six months,' says Dravot, 'we'll hold another Communication and see how you are working.' Then he asks them about their villages, and learns that they was fighting one against the other and were fair sick and tired of it. And when they wasn't doing that they was fighting with the Mohammedans. 'You can fight those when they come into our country,' says Dravot. 'Tell off every tenth man of your tribes for a Frontier guard, and send two hundred at a time to this valley to be drilled. Nobody is going to be shot or speared any more so long as he does well, and I know that you won't cheat me because you're white people—sons of Alexander—and not like common black Mohammedans. You are my people and by God,' says he, running off into English at the end—'I'll make a d— fine Nation of you, or I'll die in the making!'

"I can't tell all we did for the next six months, because Dravot did a lot I couldn't see the hang of, and he learned their lingo in a way I never could. My work was to help the people plow, and now and again go out with some of the Army and see what the other villages were doing, and make 'em throw rope-bridges across the ravines which cut up the country horrid. Dravot was very kind to me, but when he walked up and down in the pine wood, pulling that bloody red beard of his with both fists, I knew he was thinking plans I could not advise him about, and I just waited for orders.

"But Dravot never showed me disrespect before the people. They were afraid of me and the Army, but they loved Dan. He was the best of friends with the priests and the Chiefs; but any one could come across the hills with a complaint and Dravot would hear him out fair, and call four priests together and say what was to be done. He used to call in Billy Fish from Bashkai, and Pikky Kergan from Shu, and an old Chief we called Kafuzelum—it was like enough to his real name—and hold councils with 'em when there was any fighting to be done in small villages. That was his Council of War, and the four priests of Bashkai, Shu, Khawak, and Madora was his Privy Council. Between the lot of 'em they sent me, with forty men and twenty rifles, and sixty men carrying turquoises, into the Ghorband country to buy those hand-made Martini rifles, that come out of the Amir's workshops at Kabul, from one of the Amir's Herati regiments that would have sold the very teeth out of their mouths for turquoises.

"I stayed in Ghorband a month, and gave the Governor there the pick of my baskets for hush-money, and bribed the Colonel of the regiment some more, and, between the two and the tribes-people, we got more than a hundred hand-made Martinis, a hundred good Kohat Jezails that'll throw to six hundred yards, and forty man-loads of very bad ammunition for the rifles. I came back with what I had, and distributed 'em among the men that the Chiefs sent in to me to drill.

"Dravot was too busy to attend to those things, but the old Army that we first made helped me, and we turned out five hundred men that could drill, and two hundred that knew how to hold arms pretty straight. Even those cork-screwed, hand-made guns was a miracle to them. Dravot talked big about powder-shops and factories, walking up and down in the pine wood when the winter was coming on.

"'I won't make a Nation,' says he. 'I'll make an Empire! These men aren't niggers; they're English! Look at their eyes—look at their mouths. Look at the way they stand up. They sit on chairs in their own houses. They're the Lost Tribes, or something like it, and they've grown to be English. I'll take a census in the spring if the priests don't get frightened. There must be a fair two million of 'em in these hills. The villages are full o' little children. Two million people—two hundred and fifty thousand fighting men—and all English! They only want the rifles and a little drilling. Two hundred and fifty thousand men, ready to cut in on Russia's right flank when she tries for India! Peachey, man,' he says, chewing his beard in great hunks, 'we shall be emperors of the Earth! Rajah Brooke will be a suckling to us. I'll treat with the Viceroy on equal terms. I'll ask him to send me twelve picked English—twelve that I know of—to help us govern a bit. There's Mackay, Sergeant-pensioner at Segowli—many's the good dinner he's given me, and his wife a pair of trousers. There's Donkin, the Warder of Tounghoo

Jail; there's hundreds that I could lay my hand on if I was in India. The Viceroy shall do it for me. I'll send a man through in the spring for those men, and I'll write for a dispensation from the Grand Lodge for what I've done as Grand-Master. That—and all the Sniders that'll be thrown out when the native troops in India take up the Martini. They'll be worn smooth, but they'll do for fighting in these hills. Twelve English, a hundred thousand Sniders run through the Amir's country in driblets—I'd be content with twenty thousand in one year—and we'd be an Empire. When everything was shipshape, I'd hand over the crown—this crown I'm wearing now—to Queen Victoria on my knees, and she'd say: "Rise up, Sir Daniel Dravot." Oh, it's big! It's big, I tell you! But there's so much to be done in every place—Bashkai, Khawak, Shu, and everywhere else.'

"'What is it?' I says. 'There are no more men coming in to be drilled this autumn. Look at those fat, black clouds. They're bringing the snow.'

"'It isn't that,' says Daniel, putting his hand very hard on my shoulder; 'and I don't wish to say anything that's against you, for no other living man would have followed me and made me what I am as you have done. You're a first-class Commander-in-Chief, and the people know you; but—it's a big country, and somehow you can't help me, Peachey, in the way I want to be helped.'

"'Go to your blasted priests, then!' I said, and I was sorry when I made that remark, but it did hurt me sore to find Daniel talking so superior when I'd drilled all the men, and done all he told me.

"'Don't let's quarrel, Peachey,' says Daniel without cursing. 'You're a King too, and the half of this Kingdom is yours; but can't you see, Peachey, we want cleverer men than us now—three or four of 'em, that we can scatter about for our Deputies. It's a hugeous great State, and I can't always tell the right thing to do, and I haven't time for all I want to do, and here's the winter coming on and all.' He put half his beard into his mouth, and it was as red as the gold of his crown.

"'I'm sorry, Daniel,' says I. 'I've done all I could. I've drilled the men and shown the people how to stack their oats better; and I've brought in those tinware rifles from Ghorband—but I know what you're driving at. I take it Kings always feel oppressed that way.'

"'There's another thing too,' says Dravot, walking up and down. 'The winter's coming and these people won't be giving much trouble, and if they do we can't move about. I want a wife.'

"'For Gord's sake leave the women alone!' I says. 'We've both got all the work we can do, though I am a fool. Remember the Contrack, and keep clear o' women.'

"'The Contrack only lasted till such time as we was Kings; and Kings we have been these months past,' says Dravot, weighing his crown in his hand. 'You go get a wife too, Peachey—a nice, strappin', plump girl that'll keep you warm in the winter. They're prettier than English girls, and we can take the pick of 'em. Boil 'em once or twice in hot water, and they'll come as fair as chicken and ham.'

"'Don't tempt me!' I says. 'I will not have any dealings with a woman not till we are a dam' site more settled than we are now. I've been doing the work o' two men, and you've been doing the work o' three. Let's lie off a bit, and see if we can get some better tobacco from Afghan country and run in some good liquor; but no women.'

"'Who's talking o' women?' says Dravot. 'I said wife—a Queen to breed a King's son for the King. A Queen out of the strongest tribe, that'll make them your blood-brothers, and that'll lie by your side and tell you all the people thinks about you and their own affairs. That's what I want.'

"'Do you remember that Bengali woman I kept at Mogul Serai when I was a plate-layer?' says I. 'A fat lot o' good she was to me. She taught me the lingo and one or two other things; but what happened? She ran away with the Station Master's servant and half my month's pay. Then she turned up at Dadur Junction in tow of a half-caste, and had the impidence to say I was her husband—all among the drivers in the running-shed!'

"'We've done with that,' says Dravot. 'These women are whiter than you or me, and a Queen I will have for the winter months.'

"'For the last time o' asking, Dan, do not,' I says. 'It'll only bring us harm. The Bible says that Kings ain't to waste their strength on women, 'specially when they've got a new raw Kingdom to work over.'

"'For the last time of answering I will,' said Dravot, and he went away through the pine-trees looking like a big red devil. The low sun hit his crown and beard on one side, and the two blazed like hot coals.

"But getting a wife was not as easy as Dan thought. He put it before the Council, and there was no answer till Billy Fish said that he'd better ask the girls. Dravot d—d them all round. 'What's wrong with me?' he shouts, standing by the idol Imbra. 'Am I a dog or am I not enough of a man for your wenches? Haven't I put the shadow of my hand over this country? Who stopped the last Afghan raid?' It was me really, but Dravot was too angry to remember. 'Who bought your guns? Who repaired the bridges? Who's the Grand-Master of the sign cut in the stone? and he thumped his hand on the block that he used to sit on in Lodge, and at Council, which opened like Lodge always. Billy Fish said nothing and no more did the others. 'Keep your hair on, Dan,' said I; 'and ask the girls. That's how it's done at Home, and these people are quite English.'

"'The marriage of the King is a matter of state,' says Dan, in a white-hot rage, for he could feel, I hope, that he was going against his better mind. He walked out of the Council-room, and the others sat still, looking at the ground.

"'Billy Fish,' says I to the Chief of Bashkai, 'what's the difficulty here? A straight answer to a true friend.' 'You know,' says Billy Fish. 'How should a man tell you who know everything? How can daughters of men marry Gods or Devils? It's not proper.'

"I remembered something like that in the Bible; but if, after seeing us as long as they had, they still believed we were Gods, it wasn't for me to undeceive them.

"'A God can do anything,' says I. 'If the King is fond of a girl he'll not let her die.' 'She'll have to,' said Billy Fish. 'There are all sorts of Gods and Devils in these mountains, and now and again a girl marries one of them and isn't seen any more. Besides, you two know the Mark cut in the stone. Only the Gods know that. We thought you were men till you showed the sign of the Master.'

"I wished then that we had explained about the loss of the genuine secrets of a Master-Mason at the first go-off; but I said nothing. All that night there was a blowing of horns in a little dark temple half-way down the hill, and I heard a girl crying fit to die. One of the priests told us that she was being prepared to marry the King.

"'I'll have no nonsense of that kind,' says Dan. 'I don't want to interfere with your customs, but I'll take my own wife.' 'The girl's a little bit afraid,' says the priest. 'She thinks she's going to die, and they are a-heartening of her up down in the temple.'

"'Hearten her very tender, then,' says Dravot, 'or I'll hearten you with the butt of a gun so that you'll never want to be heartened again.' He licked his lips, did Dan, and stayed up walking about more than half the night, thinking of the wife that he was going to get in the morning. I wasn't by any means comfortable, for I knew that dealings with a woman in foreign parts, though you was a crowned King twenty times over, could not but be risky. I got up very early in the morning while Dravot was asleep, and I saw the priests talking together in whispers, and the Chiefs talking together, too, and they looked at me out of the corners of their eyes.

"'What is up, Fish?' I says to the Bashkai man, who was wrapped up in his furs and looking splendid to behold.

"I can't rightly say,' says he; 'but if you can induce the King to drop all this nonsense about marriage you'll be doing him and me and yourself a great service.'

"'That I do believe,' says I. 'But sure, you know, Billy, as well as me, having fought against and for us, that the King and me are nothing more than two of the finest men that God Almighty ever made. Nothing more, I do assure you.'

"'That may be,' says Billy Fish, 'and yet I should be sorry if it was.' He sinks his head upon his great fur cloak for a minute and thinks. 'King,' says he, 'be you man or God or Devil, I'll stick by you to-day. I have twenty of my men with me, and they will follow me. We'll go to Bashkai until the storm blows over.'

"A little snow had fallen in the night, and everything was white except the greasy fat clouds that blew down and down from the north. Dravot came out with his crown on his head, swinging his arms and stamping his feet, and looking more pleased than Punch.

"'For the last time, drop it, Dan,' says I in a whisper. 'Billy Fish here says that there will be a row.'

"'A row among my people!' says Dravot. 'Not much. Peachey, you're a fool not to get a wife too. Where's the girl?' says he with a voice as loud as the braying of a jackass. 'Call up all the chiefs and priests, and let the Emperor see if his wife suits him.'

"There was no need to call any one. They were all there leaning on their guns and spears round the clearing in the centre of the pine wood. A deputation of priests went down to the little empire to bring up the girl, and the horns blew up fit to wake the dead. Billy Fish saunters round and gets as close to Daniel as he could, and behind him stood his twenty men with matchlocks. Not a man of them under six feet. I was next to Dravot, and behind me was twenty men of the regular army. Up comes the girl, and a strapping wench she was, covered with silver and turquoises but white as death, and looking back every minute at the priests.

"'She'll do,' said Dan, looking her over. 'What's to be afraid of, lass? Come and kiss me.' He puts his arm round her. She shuts her eyes, gives a bit of a squeak, and down goes her face in the side of Dan's flaming red beard.

"'The slut's bitten me!' says he, clapping his hand to his neck, and, sure enough, his hand was red with blood. Billy Fish and two of his matchlock men catches hold of Dan by the shoulders and drags him into the Bashkai lot, while the priests howls in their lingo—'Neither God nor Devil, but a man!' I was all taken aback, for a priest cut at me in front, and the Army behind began firing into the Bashkai men.

"'God A-mighty!' says Dan. 'What is the meaning o' this?'

"'Come back! Come away!' says Billy Fish. 'Ruin and Mutiny is the matter. We'll break for Bashkai if we can.'

"I tried to give some sort of orders to my men—the men o' the regular army—but it was no use, so I fired into the brown of 'em with an English Martini and drilled three beggars in a line. The valley was full of shouting, howling creatures, and every soul was shrieking, 'Not a God nor a Devil, but only a man!' The Bashkai troops stuck to Billy Fish all they were worth, but their matchlocks wasn't half as good as the Kabul breechloaders, and four of them dropped. Dan was bellowing like a bull, for he was very wrathy; and Billy Fish had a hard job to prevent him running out at the crowd.

"'We can't stand,' says Billy Fish. 'Make a run for it down the valley! The whole place is against us.' The matchlock-men ran, and we went down the valley in spite of Dravot's protestations. He was swearing horribly and crying out that he was King. The priests rolled great stones on us, and the regular army fired hard, and there wasn't more than six men, not counting Dan, Billy Fish, and Me, that came down to the bottom of the valley alive.

"Then they stopped firing and the horns in the temple blew again. 'Come away—for Gord's sake come away!' says Billy Fish. 'They'll send runners out to all the villages before ever we get to Bashkai. I can protect you there, but I can't do anything now.'

"My own notion is that Dan began to go mad in his head from that hour. He stared up and down like a stuck pig. Then he was all for walking back alone and killing the priests with his bare hands; which he could have done. 'An Emperor am I,' says Daniel, 'and next year I shall be a Knight of the Queen.'

"'All right, Dan,' says I; 'but come along now while there's time.'

"'It's your fault,' says he, 'for not looking after your army better. There was mutiny in the midst, and you didn't know—you d—d engine-driving, plate-laying, missionary's-pass-hunting hound!' He sat upon a rock and called me every foul name he could lay tongue to. I was too heart-sick to care, though it was all his foolishness that brought the smash.

"'I'm sorry, Dan,' says I, 'but there's no accounting for natives. This business is our Fifty-Seven. Maybe we'll make something out of it yet, when we've got to Bashkai.'

"'Let's get to Bashkai, then,' says Dan, 'and, by Gord, when I come back here again I'll sweep the valley so there isn't a bug in a blanket left!'

"We walked all that day, and all that night Dan was stumping up and down on the snow, chewing his beard and muttering to himself.

"'There's no hope o' getting clear,' said Billy Fish. 'The priests will have sent runners to the villages to say that you are only men. Why didn't you stick on as Gods till things was more settled? I'm a dead man,' says Billy Fish, and he throws himself down on the snow and begins to pray to his Gods.

"Next morning we was in a cruel bad country—all up and down, no level ground at all, and no food either. The six Bashkai men looked at Billy Fish hungry-wise as if they wanted to ask something, but they said never a word. At noon we came to the top of a flat mountain all covered with snow, and when we climbed up into it, behold, there was an army in position waiting in the middle!

"'The runners have been very quick,' says Billy Fish, with a little bit of a laugh. 'They are waiting for us.'

"Three or four men began to fire from the enemy's side, and a chance shot took Daniel in the calf of the leg. That brought him to his senses. He looks across the snow at the army, and sees the rifles that we had brought into the country.

"'We're done for,' says he. 'They are Englishmen, these people—and it's my blasted nonsense that has brought you to this. Get back, Billy Fish, and take your men away; you've done what you could, and now cut for it. Carnehan,' says he, 'shake hands with me and go along with Billy. Maybe they won't kill you. I'll go and meet 'em alone. It's me that did it. Me, the King!'

"'Go!' says I. 'Go to Hell, Dan. I'm with you here. Billy Fish, you clear out, and we two will meet those folk.'

"'I'm a Chief,' says Billy Fish, quite quiet. 'I stay with you. My men can go.'

"The Bashkai fellows didn't wait for a second word but ran off, and Dan and me and Billy Fish walked across to where the drums were drumming and the horns were horning. It was cold—awful cold. I've got that cold in the back of my head now. There's a lump of it there."

The punkah-coolies had gone to sleep. Two kerosene lamps were blazing in the office, and the perspiration poured down my face and splashed on the blotter as I leaned forward. Carnehan was shivering, and I feared that his mind might go. I wiped my face, took a fresh grip of the piteously mangled hands, and said: "What happened after that?"

The momentary shift of my eyes had broken the clear current.

"What was you pleased to say?" whined Carnehan. "They took them without any sound. Not a little whisper all along the snow, not though the King knocked down the first man that set hand on him—not though old Peachey fired his last cartridge into the brown of 'em. Not a single solitary sound did those swines make. They just closed up tight, and I tell you their furs stunk. There was a man called Billy Fish, a good friend of us all, and they cut his throat, sir, then and there, like a pig; and the King kicks up the bloody snow and says: 'We've had a dashed fine run for our money. What's coming next?' But Peachey, Peachey Taliaferro, I tell you, sir, in confidence as betwixt two friends, he lost his head, sir. No, he didn't neither. The King lost his head, so he did, all along o' one of those cunning rope-bridges. Kindly let me have the paper-cutter, sir. It tilted this way. They marched him a mile across that snow to a rope-bridge over a ravine with a river at the bottom. You may have seen such. They prodded him behind like an ox. 'D— your eyes!' says the King. 'D'you suppose I can't die like a gentleman?' He turns to Peachey—Peachey that was crying like a child. 'I've brought you to this, Peachey,' says he. 'Brought you out of your happy life to be killed in Kafiristan, where you was late Commander-in-Chief of the Emperor's forces. Say you forgive me, Peachey.' 'I do,' says Peachey. 'Fully and freely do I forgive you, Dan.' 'Shake hands, Peachey,' says he. 'I'm going now.' Out he goes, looking neither right nor left, and when he was plumb in the middle of those dizzy dancing ropes, 'Cut, you beggars,' he shouts; and they cut, and old Dan fell, turning round and round and round, twenty thousand miles, for he took half an hour to fall till he struck the water, and I could see his body caught on a rock with the gold crown close beside.

"But do you know what they did to Peachey between two pine-trees? They crucified him, sir, as Peachey's hand will show. They used wooden pegs for his hands and his feet; and he didn't die. He hung there and screamed, and they took him down next day, and said it was a miracle that he wasn't dead. They took him down—poor old Peachey that hadn't done them any harm—that hadn't done them any..."

He rocked to and fro and wept bitterly, wiping his eyes with the back of his scarred hands and moaning like a child for some ten minutes.

"They was cruel enough to feed him up in the temple, because they said he was more of God than old Daniel that was a man. Then they turned him out on the snow, and told him to go home, and Peachey came home in about a year, begging along the roads quite safe; for Daniel Dravot he walked before and said: 'Come along, Peachey. 'It's a big thing we're doing.' The mountains they danced at night, and the mountains they tried to fall on Peachey's head, but Dan he held up his hand, and Peachey came along, bent double. He never let go of Dan's hand, and he never let go of Dan's head. They gave it to him as a present in the temple, to remind him not to come again, and though the crown was pure gold, and Peachey was starving, never would Peachey sell the same. You knew Right Worshipful Brother Dravot! Look at him now!"

He fumbled in the mass of rags round his bent waist; brought out a black horsehair bag embroidered with silver thread; and shook therefrom on to my table—the dried, withered head of Daniel Dravot! The morning sun that had long been paling the lamps struck the red beard and blind sunken eyes; struck, too, a heavy circlet of gold studded with raw turquoises, that Carnehan placed tenderly on the battered temples.

"You behold now," said Carnehan, "the Emperor in his habit as he lived—the King of Kafiristan with his crown upon his head. Poor old Daniel that was a monarch once!"

I shuddered, for, in spite of defacements manifold, I recognized the head of the man of Marwar Junction. Carnehan rose to go. I attempted to stop him. He was not fit to walk abroad. "Let me take away the whisky, and give me a little money," he gasped. "I was a King once. I'll go to the Deputy Commissioner and ask to set in the Poorhouse till I get my health. No, thank you, I can't wait till you get a carriage for me. I've urgent private affairs—in the south—at Marwar."

He shambled out of the office and departed in the direction of the Deputy Commissioner's house. That day at noon I had occasion to go down the blinding hot Mall, and I saw a crooked man crawling along the white dust of the roadside, his hat in his hand, quavering dolorously

after the fashion of street-singers at Home. There was not a soul in sight, and he was out of all possible earshot of the houses. And he sang through his nose, turning his head from right to left:

"The Son of Man goes forth to war,
  A golden crown to gain;
His blood-red banner streams afar—
  Who follows in his train?"

I waited to hear no more, but put the poor wretch into my carriage and drove him off to the nearest missionary for eventual transfer to the Asylum. He repeated the hymn twice while he was with me, whom he did not in the least recognize, and I left him singing it to the missionary.

Two days later I inquired after his welfare of the Superintendent of the Asylum.

"He was admitted suffering from sunstroke. He died early yesterday morning," said the Superintendent. "Is it true that he was half an hour bareheaded in the sun at midday?"

"Yes," said I, "but do you happen to know if he had anything upon him by any chance when he died?"

"Not to my knowledge," said the Superintendent.

And there the matter rests.

THE BLACK PEARL

BY VICTORIEN SARDOU

Victorien Sardou, born in 1831, is the most accomplished French playwright and dramatist. He is the author of "Divorçons," "Fédora," "Théodora," "La Tosca," "Madame Sans-Gêne," and other well-known plays, most if not all of which were written for Sarah Bernhardt. The present story is an excellent example of the author's manner in the use of dramatic material.

THE BLACK PEARL

By VICTORIEN SARDOU

I

When it rains in Amsterdam, it pours; and when the thunder takes a hand in the performance, things are pretty lively; this is what my friend Balthazar Van der Lys was saying to himself one summer night, as he ran along the Amstel on his way home to escape the storm. Unfortunately, the wind of the Zuyder Zee blew faster than he could run. A frightful gust tore along the quay, unhinging hundreds of shutters and twisting scores of signs and lamp posts. At the same moment, a number of towels and handkerchiefs which had been hung out to dry were blown pell-mell into the canal, followed by Balthazar's hat, and it is the greatest wonder in the world that he was not treated to a bath himself. Then there was another

flash of lightning, a deafening roar of thunder, and the rain came down in torrents anew, literally wetting our poor friend to the skin, and causing him to redouble his speed.

On reaching the Orphelinat Straat he rushed under the awning of a shop to seek refuge from the rain; in his hurry he did not take time to look where he was going, and the next moment he found himself fairly in the arms of another man, and the two went rolling over and over together. The person thus disturbed was seated at the time in an armchair; this person was no other than our mutual friend, Cornelius Pump, who was undoubtedly one of the most noted savants of the age.

"Cornelius! what the mischief were you doing in that chair?" asked Balthazar, picking himself up.

"Look out!" exclaimed Cornelius, "or you will break the string of my kite!"

Balthazar turned around, believing that his friend was joking; but, to his surprise, he saw Cornelius busily occupied in winding up the string of a gigantic kite, which was floating above the canal at a tremendous height, and which apparently was struggling fiercely against all effort made to pull it in. Cornelius pulled away with all his might in one direction, while the kite pulled away in another. The monstrous combination of paper and sticks was ornamented with a tremendous tail, which was decorated with innumerable pieces of paper.

"A curious idea!" remarked Balthazar, "to fly a kite in such a storm."

"I am not doing so for fun, you fool," answered Cornelius with a smile; "I wish to verify the presence of nitric acid in yonder clouds, which are charged with electricity. In proof of which, behold!" and with a desperate effort the man of science succeeded in pulling down the kite, and pointed with pride to the bits of paper which had been burned a dark red.

"Oh, bah!" replied Balthazar in that tone of voice so common to those who do not understand anything of these little freaks of science. "A nice time to experiment, upon my word!"

"The best time in the world, my friend," simply answered Cornelius. "And what an observatory! you can see for yourself! there is not an obstruction in the way! a glorious horizon! ten lightning-rods in sight and all on fire! I have been keeping my weather eye open for this storm and I am delighted that it has put in an appearance at last!"

A violent thunder-clap shook the ground like an earthquake.

"Go on! grumble away as much as you please," muttered Cornelius. "I have discovered your secret and will tell it to the world."

"And what is there so interesting in all this, anyway?" asked Balthazar, who, owing to his drenching, was in anything but a good humor.

"You poor fool," replied Cornelius, with a smile of pity; "now tell me, what is that?"

"Why, a flash of lightning, of course!"

"Naturally! but what is the nature of the flash?"

"Why, I always supposed that all flashes were alike."

"That shows how much you know!" answered Cornelius, in a tone of disgust. "Now, there are several classes of lightning. For instance, lightning of the first class is generally in the form of a luminous furrow and is very crooked and forked, effecting a zigzag movement, and of a white or purple color; then, there is the lightning of the second class, an extended sheet of flame, usually red, and which embraces the entire horizon in circumference; and finally lightning of the third class, which is invariably in the form of a rebounding, rolling, spherical body; the question is whether it is really globular in shape or merely an optical illusion? This

is exactly the problem I have been trying to solve! I suppose you will say that these globes of fire have been sufficiently observed by Howard, Schubler, Kamtz—"

"Oh, I don't know anything at all about such rot, so I won't venture an opinion. The rain is coming down again and I want to go home."

"Wait a moment," calmly replied Cornelius; "and as soon as I have seen a spherical or globular flash I will—"

"I haven't time to wait; besides, I would be a fool when I only have to go a hundred feet to reach my door. If you want a good fire, a good supper, a good bed and a good pipe, you will be welcome; and if you want to look at a globe, why, the globe of my lamp is at your disposal. I can say no more."

"Stop a moment; my flash will be along presently."

Balthazar, whose patience was now well-nigh exhausted, was preparing to take his departure, when suddenly the sky was lighted up by a bright flash, while the thunder burst with a loud report a short distance away.

The shock was so violent that it almost knocked Balthazar over.

"That was a spherical globe, and no mistake!" joyfully exclaimed Cornelius. "I have made a wonderful discovery: let's go to supper!" Balthazar rubbed his eyes and felt of his limbs to assure himself that he was still in the land of the living.

"The lightning struck near my house!"

"Not at all," replied Cornelius; "it was in the direction of the Hebrew quarter."

Balthazar did not stop to hear any more, but started off on a dead run; Cornelius picked up his little bits of paper and was soon following at his heels, in spite of the drenching rain.

II

An hour later the two friends, having enjoyed a bountiful supper, seated themselves in comfortable chairs, and, between the whiffs of their meerschaums, laughed at the storm which was still raging furiously outside.

"This is what I call real enjoyment," remarked Cornelius. "A good bottle of white curaçoa, a good fire, good tobacco, and a congenial friend to talk to; am I not right, Christina?"

Christina came and went; she was here, there, and everywhere at the same time, removing plates and placing fresh glasses and a huge earthen jug on the table. At the mention of her name by Cornelius she blushed a fiery red, but said nothing in reply.

Christina (it is high time that we tell you) was a young girl who had been raised out of charity, in the house of our friend Balthazar.

Shortly after the death of her husband, Madam Van der Lys, Balthazar's mother, felt some one tugging at her dress as she was kneeling at her devotions one Sunday morning. Fearing that some one was trying to pick her pocket, she grasped the hand of the supposed offender. The hand belonged to a little girl, and was as cute and small as it is possible for a hand to be. The good woman was deeply moved at this exhibition of crime in one so young, and her first thought was to let the little one go; but she finally decided to give the waif a home, like the dear, good woman that she was. Then she led little Christina out of the church and made her accompany her home, the child crying all the while with fear that her aunt would whip her. Madame Van der Lys told her not to be afraid, and succeeded at last in obtaining the information that the child's parents belonged to that class of idlers who spend their time in running about fairs and kermesses; that the child had been broken in at an early age to all the

tricks adopted by strolling mountebanks; that the father had been killed while performing a dangerous feat on the horizontal bar; that the mother died in want and misery; and finally that the aunt was an old hag who used to beat her black and blue, and who was instructing her in all the branches of crime. I do not know whether you have ever met Madam Van der Lys, but she was as good a woman as her son is a good man. She therefore decided to keep the child, whom the aunt never called to reclaim. She brought her up well and had her educated by an excellent woman. It was not long before the little waif knew how to spell, read, and write, and she soon became a model of good manners and refinement. Then, when the old lady shuffled off this mortal coil, she had the satisfaction of leaving behind her, in addition to Gudule, the cook, a lass of fifteen who was as bright as a florin, and who would never permit her master's fire to go out for want of proper attention. In addition to all these good qualities, she was polite, refined, clever, and pretty; at least such was the opinion of our friend Cornelius, who had discovered in her eyes a look not at all unlike a flash of lightning of the third class. But, a truce to this! If I gossip any more I will be divulging family secrets!

I will add, however, that Christina always gave Cornelius a hearty welcome because he brought her interesting books. The young savant made a greater fuss over this little housekeeper than over all the painted beauties of the town. But it seemed as if the storm had paralyzed the young girl's tongue. She had declined to take her seat at the table, and, under the pretext of waiting on the two friends, she came and went, scarcely listening to what they had to say, replying only in monosyllables, and making the sign of the cross every time there was a flash of lightning. Shortly after their supper, Balthazar turned round to ask her a question, but she was no longer there, having retired to her room. He rose from his chair, and approaching the door of her room, listened attentively; but as all was silent he was evidently convinced that the young girl was already fast asleep, for he returned to his place and sat down beside Cornelius, who was busily engaged filling his pipe.

"What's wrong with Christina to-night?" he asked, pointing to her room.

"Oh, it's the storm," replied Balthazar; "women are so timid!"

"If it were otherwise, we would be deprived of the pleasure of protecting them as we would children—especially Christina, who is anything but strong. I really can't look at her without crying; she is so frail, so delicate!"

"Oh, ho, Master Cornelius!" exclaimed Balthazar, with a knowing smile; "you are almost as enthusiastic over Christina as you were over the lightning a little while ago!"

Cornelius blushed to the very roots of his hair as he replied: "Oh, it's not the same kind of enthusiasm, however!"

"I suppose not!" remarked Balthazar with a hearty laugh. Then taking Cornelius by the hand and looking him square in the face, he added: "Come, now, you don't imagine that I can't see what is going on? You don't only amuse yourself at flying your kite over the Amstel, overgrown boy that you are, but you also play at racquets with Christina, and your two hearts answer the place of shuttlecocks."

"What, you suppose that—" muttered the savant, evidently confused.

"For over three months I have known that it was not merely to see my beautiful countenance that you have called here twice a day—at noon, on your way to the zoölogical garden, and at four on your way home."

"But this is the shortest way," ventured Cornelius.

"Yes, I know—to the heart!"

"But—"

"Come, now, let us reason: Christina is unlike most girls of her age; she has a wise head and a loving heart, I assure you; she is certainly clever enough to admire and appreciate such a talented person as Mijnheer Cornelius Pump, who thinks nothing of lending her his rare

books. You squeeze her hands, you are solicitous for her health. You read her a regular lecture on chemistry every time you see a spot on her dress, on natural history whenever you see a pot of flowers, and on anatomy whenever you see the cat! She listens to what you have to say with open ears, and a look of attention which is really charming; and yet you would pretend that love is a minor consideration in all this, especially when the man of science is only twenty-five and his pupil just eighteen?"

"Well, then, I do love her, since you will have it so!" answered Cornelius, with a look of defiance in his eyes. "So kindly tell me what you propose to do about it!"

"That's for you to say—"

"Oh, I intend to make her my wife!"

"Then, why the mischief don't you tell her so?"

"That's precisely what I intend to do."

"Then embrace me!" exclaimed Balthazar, "and drink to the health of Cupid, for I, too, am going to get married—"

"I congratulate you, my boy; and who is the fortunate one?"

"—And I am going to marry Mademoiselle Suzanne Van Miellis, the daughter of the rich banker," continued Balthazar, all in one breath.

Cornelius gave a low whistle, which, translated, means: The devil!

Balthazar continued:

"And just think of it—I have loved her for over six years! I never wanted to pop the question because I was afraid her father would tell me that it was his money and not his daughter that I was after. But my opportunity came at last. Her father died a short time ago, leaving her his sole heiress: she is one of the wealthiest girls in the town."

"The wealthiest by far," gravely interrupted Cornelius.

"One day, as we were walking together by the river she stopped for a moment, and looking into my eyes she said: 'Now, my friend, I don't want you to bear me any ill-feeling for what I am going to say; but, since the death of my father, and coming into my inheritance, I assure you that I am most unhappy. I can no longer distinguish between those who love me for my riches and those who love me for myself; there are so many who pretend to adore me that I am suspicious of them all; and I would rather throw my fortune into the Amstel than wed a man who would aspire to my hand through mercenary motives!'"

"'Ah, mademoiselle,' I sighed; 'you can understand that I was not overanxious to be mistaken for one of these fortune hunters.'

"'Oh, my dear friend,' she exclaimed; 'I know that you are not that kind of a man. Now I am going to tell you my ideal of a husband. I would never accept the love of a man who had not cared for me previous to the death of my father. Ah! I would indeed be confident of that man's love, and I would return it to him a hundred-fold!'

"'Then I am that man!' I cried out. 'I have loved you for over six long years, and I never dared to tell you so, although you must have noticed that I was slowly but surely dying for the want of your affection!' Then she looked down at the ground, and whispered: 'Maybe I have,' and she looked at me as if trying to read the truth in my eyes. It was easy to see that she wanted to believe what I said, but was afraid to do so.

"'Then you can prove the truth of your assertion,' she remarked, after a pause. 'Do you remember the first time we met, you gave me a bunch of flowers? One of these was in the shape of a little heart, with two blue wings on each side. Well, then—'

"'I know what you are going to say. Then as we were looking at this little flower together, our heads almost touched and your curls brushed against my face; as you perceived how close we were to one another, you suddenly drew back, and the flower was detached from its stem. I can still hear your little cry of disappointment ringing in my ears. Then you began to cry, and, as you were not looking, I picked up the little flower.' 'And you have it?' she asked. 'Yes, I have always kept it as a souvenir of the happiest moment in my existence. I will bring it with me the next time I call.'

"You should have seen the look of joy which spread over Suzanne's countenance at that moment! She held out her pretty hand, which I eagerly grasped and carried to my lips. 'Ah, my friend,' said she, 'this is all I wanted to know, and I am indeed happy! If you picked up that little flower it was because you loved me already at that time, and if you have preserved it, 'tis because you love me still! Bring it to-morrow; it will be the most welcome wedding gift you could possibly give me!'

"Oh, my dear old Cornelius, judge of my surprise, of my delight when I heard those words! I was tempted to do something rash; I was wild with joy. Suddenly her mother happened along. I threw my arms around the old lady's neck and kissed her on both cheeks—this cooled me off. Then I grabbed my hat and took to my heels, intending to return with the flower this very night. But this confounded storm has upset all my plans, and I will have to postpone my visit until to-morrow. There, you have the whole story of my courtship in a nutshell!"

"May Heaven be praised!" exclaimed Cornelius as he threw his arms around his friend. "Two weddings at the same time! Long live Madame Balthazar! Long live Madame Cornelius! Here's to the little Balthazars and the little Corneliuses!"

"Will you be quiet!" laughingly remarked Balthazar, placing his hand over his friend's mouth in order to silence him. "You will wake up Christina."

"Oh, I won't say another word, I promise you. And now show me your celebrated flower with its blue wings."

"I have it locked up in a little steel casket, which is hidden away with a lot of jewelry in my desk. I have had it framed in a little locket, surrounded with gold and black pearls. I was looking at it only this morning; it is charming. You can judge for yourself."

So saying, he took up the lamp, and, taking a huge bunch of keys from his pocket, he opened the door of his study. He had hardly crossed the threshold when Cornelius heard him cry out in surprise. He rose to go to his assistance, when Balthazar, pale as death, reappeared in the entrance:

"My God! Cornelius."

"What is it? what is wrong?" exclaimed the man of science.

"Great heavens! I am ruined! Come here! Look!"

And Balthazar raised his lamp so as to light up the interior of his study.

III

What Cornelius saw justified Balthazar's exclamation of surprise. The floor was literally strewn with papers of all kinds, and this profusion of documents clearly proved that something extraordinary had occurred. A large portfolio in which Balthazar kept all his private papers was torn open, notwithstanding that it had a steel lock, and was thrown carelessly on the floor, the papers it had contained being scattered far and wide.

But this was nothing when compared with that which was to follow. Balthazar now rushed up to his secrétaire. The lock had been forced. The top of the desk had been completely hacked to pieces, a great portion being reduced to splinters. The nails were twisted all out of shape, and the screws and hinges had alike received rough usage. As to the lid, it had been forced so as to permit the introduction of a hand in the pigeon-holes and private drawers.

But, strange to relate, most of the drawers containing valuable papers had not been touched by the thief, his attention evidently having been entirely absorbed in the contents of those which had contained gold and silver. About fifteen hundred ducats, two hundred florins and the little steel casket filled with jewels, of which we have heard Balthazar speak, were missing. This drawer was completely empty; everything had disappeared, gold, silver, jewels, without leaving a trace behind; and Balthazar experienced a still greater loss when, on picking up the steel casket from the floor, he perceived that the medallion had been taken along with the rest!

This discovery affected him more than the loss of all his money. Rushing to the window, he threw it open and cried out at the top of his voice:

"Help! Help! Stop thief!"

All the population turned out, and, in accordance with the custom, would have answered this call for aid with, "Fire! Here we come!" had not the first cry attracted a squad of policemen who were passing that way. They ran up to Balthazar's house, and M. Tricamp, the sergeant, realizing that a robbery had been committed, first cautioned him to make less noise, and then demanded that he and his men be admitted without further delay.

IV

The door opened noiselessly and M. Tricamp entered on tiptoe, followed by another of his men, whom he left on guard in the vestibule with orders not to permit any one either to come in or go out. It was almost twelve o'clock; the neighbors were fast asleep, and it was easy to see that Gudule, the deaf cook, and Christina, fatigued by the emotions caused by the storm, had heard nothing unusual, as both were sleeping the sleep of the just.

"And now," said the sergeant, lowering his voice; "what is it all about?"

Balthazar dragged him into the study and pointed to the torn papers and broken secrétaire.

M. Tricamp was a little man, whose legs were not big enough to support his unwieldy form; nevertheless, he was very sharp and unusually active. He had one more little peculiarity —he was frightfully near-sighted, which compelled him to look at what he was examining at very short range.

He was evidently surprised, but it was part of his stock in trade not to exhibit surprise at anything. He therefore contented himself with muttering: "Very good! Very good!" and he cast a look of contentment around the room.

"You see, Mijnheer, what has happened!" exclaimed Balthazar, with a voice choked with emotion.

"Perfectly!" replied M. Tricamp, with an air of importance. "The secrétaire has been broken open, your portfolio has been tampered with! Very well, it is superb!"

"Superb! Why, what do you mean?"

"They took all the money, I suppose?" continued the sergeant.

"Yes, all the money which was in my desk."

"Good!"

"And the jewels, and my medallion!"

"Bravo! a case of premeditated robbery! Capital! And you suspect no one?"

"No one, Mijnheer."

"So much the better. Then we will have the pleasure of discovering the criminals."

Balthazar and Cornelius looked at each other in surprise; but M. Tricamp continued in the same unconcerned manner:

"Let us examine the door!"

Balthazar pointed to the massive door of the study, which was provided with an old-fashioned brass lock, the likes of which are only found in the Netherlands at the present time.

Tricamp turned the key. Crick! Crack! It was evident that the lock had not been tampered with.

"And the window?" asked the officer, handing Balthazar the key of the study.

"The window was closed," said Cornelius; "we opened it when we called for assistance. Besides, Mijnheer, it has stout iron bars, and no one could possibly pass through there."

M. Tricamp assured himself that such was the case, and he remarked that not even a child could effect an entrance through those bars. Then he closed and bolted the window and turned his attention toward the fireplace.

Balthazar followed all of his movements without uttering a word.

M. Tricamp leaned over and examined the interior of the fireplace most minutely; but here again nothing but failure rewarded him for his trouble. A thick wall had been built there recently, allowing only enough room for a small stove-pipe.

M. Tricamp did not question for a moment whether this opening would permit the passage of a human being, for it seemed altogether too improbable; therefore, when he drew himself up, he appeared to be anything but pleased.

"Hum! Hum!" he muttered; "the devil," and he looked up at the ceiling, having replaced his eye-glass with a pair of spectacles. Then he took the lamp from Balthazar and placed it on the secrétaire, removing the shade; and this movement suddenly revealed to him a clue which had entirely escaped their attention until now.

V

An old knife, a gift from a friend in the Dutch Indies, was driven into the wainscoting, about three feet above the secrétaire and half-way between the floor and the ceiling.

Now, what was that old knife doing there?

A few hours previous to this discovery it was lying safe and snug in Balthazar's desk.

At the same moment Tricamp drew attention to the fact that the wire which was attached to the bell was twisted and broken and was fastened about the handle of the knife. He sprang upon a chair, and from there to the top of the desk, from whence he proceeded to examine this bit of fresh evidence.

Suddenly he gave a cry of triumph. He only had to raise his hand between the knife and the picture molding to ascertain that a large piece of wall paper had been cut out, together

with the wood and the plastering, the whole being replaced with a care to defy the closest inspection.

This discovery was so unexpected that the young men could not withhold their admiration at the sergeant's skill. M. Tricamp remarked that the paper had been removed with the greatest skill, thus denoting the work of a professional thief. Raising himself on tiptoe, he placed his hand through the opening and assured himself that the paper in the adjoining room had been tampered with in precisely the same manner.

There was no longer any room for doubt; the thief had certainly entered the room through this aperture. M. Tricamp descended from his pedestal and proceeded to describe the movements of the malefactors from the moment of their arrival until their departure, just as if he had witnessed the whole performance.

"The manner in which that knife has been planted in the wall plainly proves that it was intended as a step to assist the thief in his descent. The wire was used as a sort of rope by which he guided himself on his way back. Now, doesn't this strike you as being rational enough?"

Balthazar and Cornelius listened to this explanation with bated breath. But the former was not the kind of man to enthuse over a description of a theft, especially when he was the loser by the operation. What he wanted to know was where his medallion had gone; now that he knew how the thief had entered, he was anxious to know how he had gone out.

"Have patience," remarked M. Tricamp, following up his clue with professional pride; "now that we know their movements, we must assure ourselves as to their temperament—"

"What nonsense! We haven't the time to bother our heads about such rot!"

"Pardon me," replied Tricamp, "but in my estimation this is very important. The study of psychology in criminals is a more important feature than all the quack examinations formerly so popular with the police."

"But, Mijnheer, while you are discussing the methods of the police the thief is running away with my money."

"Well, let him run; we will catch him fast enough!" coldly replied M. Tricamp. "I claim that it is necessary to study the nature of the game in order to run it down. Now, all robberies differ more or less and it is rarely that murders are committed in the same manner. For instance, two servant girls were accused of stealing their mistress's shawl. I discovered the criminal at the first glance. The thief had the choice of two cashmeres: one was blue and the other white; now, she stole the blue one. One of the servants was a blonde and the other had red hair. I was confident that the blonde was guilty—the red-headed girl would never have selected the blue shawl on account of the combination."

"Wonderful!" remarked Cornelius.

"Then hurry up and tell me the name of the thief, for patience is wellnigh exhausted."

"I can't do this at the start, but I claim that this is the criminal's first robbery. You will no doubt not credit this assertion, as you will probably say to yourself that it shows the workmanship of an old hand; but any child could loosen a bit of dried-up wall paper. I will say nothing regarding your portfolio, or your broken secrétaire, for that plainly bears the imprint of a novice's hand."

"Then you are sure it is the work of a novice?" interrupted Cornelius.

"Undoubtedly. I will add that he is a clumsy greenhorn. An out-and-out thief would never have left your room in such disorder; he would take more pride in his workmanship. Furthermore, the criminal is neither very strong nor very tall, otherwise he could have drawn himself up there without the aid of that knife and bit of wire."

"But it must have required considerable strength to demolish that desk in that fashion."

"Not at all; a child, or even a woman—"

"A woman?" exclaimed Balthazar.

"Since I first set my foot in this room, such has been my impression."

Balthazar and Cornelius looked at one another, in doubt as to whom he could possibly suspect.

"Now then, to sum up: it is a young woman; she must be young or she would not climb so well—petite, since she needed a wire to pull herself up with. Then, again, she must be familiar with your habits, for she took advantage of your absence to commit the felony, and she went direct to the drawer in which you kept your money, as she apparently did not bother her head about the others. In a word, if you have a young housekeeper or servant you need look no further, for she is the guilty one!"

"Christina!" exclaimed the young men in one breath.

"Ah! so there is a Christina about the premises!" remarked M. Tricamp smilingly. "Well, then, Christina is guilty!"

VI

Both Cornelius and Balthazar were pale as death. Christina! Little Christina, so good, so kind, so pretty, a thief—nonsense! And then they remembered her origin and the manner in which she was adopted. She was only a Bohemian after all! Balthazar dropped into a chair as if he had been shot, and Cornelius felt as if his heart had just been seared with a red-hot iron.

"Will you kindly send for this person?" suddenly remarked M. Tricamp, awakening them from their reverie. "Or, better still, let us visit her room."

"Her room—her room," faltered Balthazar; "why, there it is," and he pointed to the adjoining apartment.

"And it took all this time for you to make up your mind who had committed the theft!" said the sergeant with a sneer.

"But," ventured Cornelius, "she certainly must have heard us."

Tricamp picked up the lamp and, pushing open the door of the adjoining room, entered, followed by the young men. The room was empty! Simultaneously they exclaimed: "She has escaped!"

M. Tricamp felt under the mattress to see whether he could find any of the stolen property. "She has not even slept on the bed to-night," he said, after carefully inspecting the couch.

At the same moment they heard the sound of struggling outside, and the officer who had been left on guard downstairs entered the room, pushing Christina before him. The poor girl appeared more surprised than afraid.

"This young woman was attempting to escape, Mijnheer; I arrested her just as she was drawing the bolts of the back door," said the officer.

Christina looked around her with such an air of innocence that no one believed in her guilt, excepting, of course, M. Tricamp.

"But do tell me what this all means?" asked she of the officer, who locked the door after her. "Why don't you tell them who I am?" she continued, addressing Balthazar.

"Where have you been?" he demanded.

"I have been upstairs with old Gudule, who, you know, is afraid of the lightning. As I was very tired, I fell asleep in the armchair in her room. When I awoke I looked out of the window, and as the storm had ceased I came downstairs with the intention of going to bed; but I first desired to assure myself that you had bolted the door, and it was at that moment that this gentleman placed his hand on my shoulder and informed me that I was under arrest. And, I assure you, he has given me a good fright—"

"You lie!" coarsely interrupted M. Tricamp. "You were just going out when my man arrested you; and I will add that you did not go to bed, so as to avoid the trouble of dressing when the moment arrived for you to make your escape."

Christina looked a him in astonishment. "Escape? What escape?" she asked.

"Ah!" muttered M. Tricamp. "What nerve, what deceit!"

"Come here," said Balthazar, who knew not what to believe, "and I will tell you what it all means!"

He took the young girl by the arm and dragged her into the adjoining room.

"My God!" exclaimed the young woman, as she crossed the threshold and perceived the scene of devastation for the first time; "who could have done this?"

Her surprise seemed to be so sincere that Balthazar hesitated for a moment, but M. Tricamp was not so easily affected; he dragged Christina by the arm up to the secrétaire and exclaimed:

"You did it!"

"I!" cried out Christina, who did not as yet realize what it all meant.

She looked at Balthazar as if to read his thoughts, then she cast a glance at the drawer of the secrétaire, and seeing that it was empty, she realized at last the terrible meaning of their accusation. With a heartrending cry, she exclaimed:

"My God! And you say I have done this!"

But no one had the courage to answer her. Christina advanced a step closer to Balthazar, but he only lowered his eyes at her approach. Suddenly she raised her hand to her heart, as if she were suffocating—she attempted to speak—she tried to pronounce two or three words, but all she could say was:

"A thief! They say I am a thief!" and she fell backward on the floor as if dead! Cornelius precipitated himself toward her and raised her gently in his arms.

"No!" he cried; "no! it is impossible! This child is innocent!"

Then he carried the young girl into her room and laid her on the bed. Balthazar followed him, and it was easy to see that he was deeply affected. M. Tricamp, still smiling, entered immediately after them, but one of his officers motioned to him that he had something to communicate to him.

"Mijnheer, we already have obtained some information regarding this young woman."

"Well, and what do you know?"

"The baker across the way says that a little while before the storm he saw Mademoiselle Christina at the window of the ground floor. She slipped a package to a man who was standing outside; this man wore a long cloak and a slouch hat—"

"A package, eh?" muttered M. Tricamp; "excellent! Now, secure the witness and keep a sharp watch outside. In the first place, go and send the cook to me at once."

The officer withdrew, and M. Tricamp entered Christina's room.

The young woman was stretched out on the bed in a dead faint, and Cornelius was rubbing her hands. Without stopping to notice the condition of the girl, he proceeded with his examination of the premises. He started in with the bureau and overhauled all the drawers. Then he approached Balthazar with a smile of satisfaction on his face.

"After all, what proof is there that this young girl is guilty?" asked the latter as he gazed tenderly upon the unconscious woman.

"Why, this!" answered M. Tricamp, as he handed Balthazar one of the missing pearls.

"Where did you find this?"

"There," and he pointed to the top drawer of Christina's bureau.

Balthazar rushed up to the drawer and began to overhaul all of the young girl's effects, but his search did not result in his finding any more of the stolen jewels.

At this moment Christina opened her eyes, and looking around her as if to recall the situation, burst into tears as she buried her face in the pillow.

"Oh, ho!" ejaculated M. Tricamp, "tears, eh? She is going to confess"; and as he leaned over her, he added in his sweetest voice: "Come, my child, return good for evil and confess the truth. Confession is good for the soul. After all, we are not all perfect. Now, I suppose you permitted yourself to be led astray, or you allowed yourself to succumb to a passion for finery. You wanted to make yourself look pretty, eh, my dear, to please some one you love?"

"What an idea, Mijnheer!" interrupted Cornelius.

"Hush, young man! I know what I am talking about. This woman has an accomplice as sure as my name is Tricamp;" and leaning over Christina, he continued: "Am I not right, my dear?"

"Oh, why don't you kill me, instead of torturing me thus!" cried Christina with a fresh outburst of tears.

This was so unexpected that M. Tricamp started back in surprise.

"Kindly leave us alone with the girl, Mijnheer; your presence irritates her," remarked Balthazar. "If she has anything to confess she will do so to my friend and me."

M. Tricamp bowed himself out of the room.

"Oh, just as you please," he replied, "but be very careful; she is a clever minx."

VII

Cornelius almost closed the door in the sergeant's face; then the two young men approached Christina, who had assumed a sitting posture, and was staring before her into space.

"Come, my child," said Balthazar, as he held out his hand; "we are now alone; you are with friends, so you need not be afraid."

"I don't want to stay here! I want to go away! Oh, let me—let me go!"

"No, Christina, you can not leave here until you answer us," said Cornelius.

"Tell us the truth, I beg of you, Christina," added Balthazar, "and I promise you no harm will come to you—I swear it on my honor. I will forgive you, and no one will ever know of this—I swear it, Christina, I swear it before God!—don't you hear me, my child?"

"Yes!" answered Christina, who did not appear to be listening. "Oh, if I could only cry—if I could only cry!"

Cornelius seized the young girl's burning hands in his. "Christina, my child, God forgives us all, and we love you too much not to pardon you. Listen to me, I beg of you. Don't you recognize me?"

"Yes," said Christina, as her eyes filled with tears.

"Well, then, I love you, do you hear?—I love you with all my heart!"

"Oh!" said the young girl as she burst into tears; "and yet you believe that I am a thief!"

"No, no!" hastily exclaimed Cornelius, "I do not believe it, I do not believe it! But, my dear child, you must help me to justify you, you must assist me to discover the criminal, and to do this you must be frank and tell me everything."

"Yes, you are good, you alone are kind to me. You pity me and do not believe what they say! They accuse me because I am a Bohemian—because I stole when I was a child. And they call me *a thief!—a thief!* They call me *a thief!*—"

And she fell backward on the bed, sobbing as if her heart would burst.

Balthazar could stand this no longer: he fell upon his knees by the side of the bed, and exclaimed in a voice of pity, as if he himself was the accused instead of the accuser:

"Christina, my sister, my child, my daughter—look at me! I am on my knees before you! I ask your forgiveness for the wrong I have done you. No one will say anything, no one will do anything; it is all over!—do you hear? I hope you do not wish to repay all the kindness my mother and I have shown you by making me suffer all the tortures of the damned! Well, then, I beg you to tell me what has become of my little medallion—(I do not ask you where it is, you understand?—I do not wish to know that, for I do not suspect you). But if you do know where it is, I beg of you to help me find it. I implore you by the love you bore my mother, whom you called your own, I implore you to find it—this is all I want. My future happiness depends on the recovery of this jewel—give me back my medallion—please give me back my medallion."

"Oh!" answered Christina in despair, "I would give my life to be able to tell you where it is!"

"Christina!"

"But I haven't got it; I haven't got it!" she cried, wringing her hands.

Balthazar, exasperated, sprang to his feet: "But, wretched woman—"

Cornelius silenced him with a gesture, and Christina raised her hands to her forehead.

"Ah!" she said, as she burst into a loud laugh, "when I am mad, this farce will be ended, I suppose?"

And, overcome with emotion, she fell backward, hiding her face in the pillow as if determined not to utter another word.

VIII

Cornelius dragged Balthazar out of the room; he staggered as though he had been shot. In the other room they found M. Tricamp, who had not been wasting his time. He had been cross-examining the old cook, Gudule, who, most unceremoniously aroused by one of the officers, was still half asleep.

"Come, come, my good woman," remarked M. Tricamp, "control yourself, if you please!"

"Oh, my good master, my good master!" she exclaimed as Balthazar entered the room accompanied by Cornelius. "What's the matter? They dragged me out of bed, and they are asking me all kinds of questions! For mercy's sake, tell me what it is all about!"

"Don't be alarmed, my good woman," said Balthazar kindly; "you have nothing to do with all this. But I have been robbed and we are looking for the thief."

"You have been robbed?"

"Yes."

"My God! I have lived in this house for over thirty years, and not as much as a pin was ever stolen before! Oh, Mijnheer, why didn't they wait until I was dead before they began their thieving!"

"Come, come, don't give way like that, my good woman," said M. Tricamp.

"You will have to speak a little louder, Mijnheer; the woman is deaf," remarked Balthazar.

"Now, I want to know whether you were in the house when the robbery was committed?" continued M. Tricamp, raising his voice.

"But I never go out at all, Mijnheer."

"Didn't you go out at all this evening?"

"I wasn't outside the house; besides, it was very stormy, and at my age one doesn't venture out in a blinding rainstorm for fun."

"Then you were in your room?"

"No, Mijnheer, I was in the kitchen most of the day, knitting by the stove."

"And you never left the kitchen for a moment?"

"Not for a minute—until I went upstairs to bed."

"Is your eyesight good?"

"Mijnheer?" questioned Gudule, not having heard aright.

"I asked you if you had good eyes," repeated M. Tricamp.

"Oh! I can see all right, even if I am a little bit hard of hearing. And I have a good memory, too—"

"So you have a good memory, eh? Then tell me who called here to-day."

"Oh, there was the postman; and a neighbor who called to borrow a pie-plate—and Petersen who came to ask something of Christina."

"Indeed! And who is this Petersen?"

"A neighbor, Mijnheer; a night-watchman; my master knows him well."

"Yes," said Balthazar, addressing the sergeant, "he is a poor devil who lost his wife a month ago, and his two little children are both sick. We help the poor fellow from time to time."

"And this Petersen was in the house to-day?"

"No, Mijnheer," replied Gudule; "he only spoke to Christina from the sidewalk."

"And what did he tell her?"

"I did not hear, Mijnheer."

"And did no one else call after him?"

Gudule asked him to repeat the question, then she replied:

"No one at all."

"And where was Christina while you were knitting?"

"Why, the dear child was looking after the cooking for me, as I was too tired to move from my chair. She is so kind and obliging!"

"But she wasn't in the kitchen all the time?"

"No, Mijnheer, she retired to her own room toward evening."

"So you say she retired to her own room toward evening?"

"Yes, Mijnheer, to dress for supper."

"And—did she remain in her room a long time?"

"About an hour, Mijnheer."

"An hour?"

"Yes, fully an hour, Mijnheer."

"And you heard nothing during all this time?"

"I beg your pardon—"

"I asked you if you heard any noise—for instance, the sound of some one hammering wood?"

"No, Mijnheer."

"Yes, gentlemen, she is as deaf as a door-post," said M. Tricamp, turning toward the young men. Then he approached Gudule, and raising his voice he added:

"I suppose the storm was at its height at this time?"

"Oh, yes, Mijnheer; I could hear the thunder plain enough."

"She has no doubt confounded the noise made by the thief, in breaking in, with the roar of the elements," he muttered to himself. "And then?" he asked of Gudule in a louder voice.

"And then, Mijnheer, night had fallen and the storm raged furiously; master had not returned. I was terribly frightened. I got down on my knees and said my prayers. Just then Christina came down from her room; she was as white as a ghost, and was trembling all over. Then the thunder burst overhead and deafened me—"

"Ah! then you noticed that she was nervous?"

"Certainly! And so was I; the storm frightened me almost to death. Shortly after this, master knocked at the door, and Christina let him in. Now, Mijnheer, this is all I know, as sure as I am an honest woman."

"Don't cry, my good woman! I tell you that no one suspects you."

"But then, master, whom do they suspect? Merciful Father!" she exclaimed, as the truth flashed upon her. "Then they accuse Christina?"

No one answered her.

"Ah!" continued the old woman, "you do not answer me! Master, is this true?"

"My poor Gudule!"

"And you let them accuse little Christina!" continued the old woman, who would not be silenced. "That angel of kindness and loveliness sent to us from Heaven!"

"Come, come, if it is not you it must be she," brutally interrupted Tricamp.

"Oh, why don't they blame me? I am an old woman and have not long to live; but this child is innocent and I won't let them touch a hair of her head! Ah, Mijnheer Balthazar, do not let them touch Christina, she is a sacred trust. Don't listen to that bad man—he is the cause of all this trouble!"

M. Tricamp made a sign to his men, and they seized the old woman by the arm. Gudule advanced a few steps, then fell on her knees near the fireplace, weeping and bemoaning her fate. M. Tricamp then ordered his men not to disturb the woman as she knelt there offering up a prayer to Heaven that Christina should not suffer for a crime committed by another.

IX

"You see," remarked the agent of police, turning toward Cornelius, "that no one has called here whom we might have cause to suspect—neither the postman, the neighbor, or that fellow Petersen. It therefore remains between the old woman and the young girl; and, as I do not believe the old one is sufficiently active to perform gymnastics, I beg you to draw your own conclusions."

"Oh, do not ask me to form an opinion; I really do not know what to think; it seems as if it were all a frightful nightmare!"

"I don't know whether it is a dream, but it strikes me that I am pretty wide awake, and that I reason remarkably well."

"Yes, yes," said Cornelius, pacing nervously up and down the room, "you reason remarkably well!"

"And my suppositions are logical enough."

"Yes, yes, very logical."

"And so far I have not made a single error. Therefore, you must admit that the young girl is guilty."

"Well, then, no!" eagerly replied Cornelius, looking the sergeant square in the face. "No! I will never believe her guilty, unless she says so herself! And God knows—she might declare that she is guilty, and yet I would protest that she is innocent!"

"But," objected the sergeant, "what proofs can you produce? I, at least, have proven the truth of my assertions."

"Ah! I know nothing, I can prove nothing," replied Cornelius, "and everything you have said, every proof you have produced, is not to be disputed—"

"Well, then?"

"But my conscience revolts against your assertions nevertheless, and something seems to cry out: 'No, no; her dear face, her despair, her agony, are not those of a guilty wretch, and I swear that she is innocent! I can't prove it—but still I am sure of it, and I will assert it in the face of the most damaging evidence!' Oh, do not listen to her accusers! They will lie away the future of a noble girl! Their logic is born of earthly evidence—mine comes direct from Heaven, and is therefore true!"

"Then—"

"Do not heed them," continued Cornelius, whose excitement was now tense; "and remember that when your pride is ready to dispute the existence of a God something within you cries out to affirm *that He does exist*! And now, since this voice proclaims the innocence of the girl, how could I suspect her?"

"If the police reasoned like that, criminals would have an easy time of it."

"Oh, I will not attempt to convince you," added Cornelius; "continue your work! Go on with your search for evidence, and pile your proofs one upon the other in your efforts to crush this unfortunate child. On the other hand, I will begin my search to discover the proofs of her innocence!"

"Then I would advise you not to include this among the latter."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I found this black pearl—"

"Where?"

"In her bureau drawer."

"Yes, my friend," interrupted Balthazar, "he found it in my presence in her drawer."

Cornelius eagerly seized the pearl. The proof was so convincing that he no longer knew what to believe. The miserable little pearl burned his hand as though it were a red-hot coal—he looked at it instinctively without being able to see it—and yet he could not remove his eyes from this bit of damning evidence! Balthazar took him by the hand, but Cornelius did not appear to notice him. He never removed his eyes from the pearl, yet the sight of it filled him with horror.

"Cornelius!" exclaimed Balthazar, now thoroughly alarmed; but Cornelius pushed him roughly aside, and leaned over so as to obtain a better view of the pearl.

"What's the matter with you, Cornelius?" Balthazar asked again.

"Get out of my way!" and he once more pushed his friend aside as he rushed to the open window.

Balthazar and Tricamp exchanged a knowing glance—while Cornelius, feverish with excitement, rushed into the study.

"He has gone mad!" grumbled M. Tricamp as he followed him with his eyes. "Will you permit me to give a drink of curaçoa to my men? It is daylight now, and the air is somewhat chilly."

"With pleasure. There is the bottle; let the men help themselves."

Tricamp then left the room. As Balthazar turned around, he perceived old Gudule still kneeling in the corner. A moment later he had rejoined Cornelius in the study.

Cornelius was examining the handle of the knife with the greatest attention. This scrutiny lasted several minutes; then, without offering a word of explanation, he mounted a chair and proceeded to examine the piece of broken wire.

"Where is the bell?" he suddenly demanded of Balthazar, who really believed that his friend had taken leave of his senses.

"In the hallway."

Cornelius pulled the wire a number of times, but the bell did not ring.

"Ah! she did not overlook anything; she has removed the tongue!" remarked Balthazar with a sneer.

Cornelius, still as silent as a sphinx, continued his examination of the wire; it passed through a little tin tube about the size of a putty-blower; the wire moved freely in this groove, therefore there was nothing out of gear in that direction.

"Now, look at the bell and tell me if it rings when I pull the wire."

Balthazar went out into the hall and did as directed.

"Does it move?" called out Cornelius.

"Just a little," answered Balthazar, "but it can't ring because the bell is turned upside down, with the tongue in the air."

"Good! We will look into that later. Now, steady the secrétaire while I get up there."

Then, with the assistance of the knife, Cornelius drew himself up painfully to where the paper had been removed, as if he desired to test the practicability of such an ascension.

Just then Gudule set up a frightful howl outside; Balthazar left his friend in mid-air while he ran out to see what was the matter.

"Oh, master," she cried; "she has just escaped!"

"Christina?"

"Yes, Mijnheer, I saw her as she fled through the garden. Make haste and follow her before it is too late!"

"The little serpent!" exclaimed M. Tricamp; "she was playing 'possum then, after all. Now, then, my lads, let me see how soon you will catch her."

All the officers started off, with Tricamp at their head; while Balthazar ran into the young girl's room, to assure himself that she was no longer there.

Instead of Christina, Balthazar was confronted by Cornelius, who had entered the room through the opening in the partition.

"That's right! Look for her, my friend. You must now admit that she is guilty, as she has just run away."

"I tell you that she is innocent," exclaimed Cornelius as his eyes flashed fire; "we alone are guilty—for we have wrongfully accused an innocent person!"

"You must be mad!"

"You will not say so after I have proven to you that I know the name of the thief," continued Cornelius as he smiled sarcastically at the doubts expressed on Balthazar's countenance. "And I am going to tell you how he entered and how he went out! In the first place, he did not come in by this window, nor by that opening; he simply glided down your chimney, and, via the fireplace, reached your study."

"You say that the thief entered my study by the chimney?"

"Certainly! And as he is celebrated for his weakness for metals, his first move was to gather your gold and your silver; then he forced the steel lock of your portfolio and the iron lock of your secrétaire, and gathering together your florins, your ducats, and your jewels, he carried them off, leaving your knife as a memento of his little visit. From the study, he jumped into the room of this unfortunate child, dashing through the woodwork and paper in his mad flight, and dropping the pearl in this drawer as he passed through here.—And if you want to know what has become of your medallion, look!"

He drew aside the curtains of the bed and pointed to the little copper crucifix suspended on the wall, and which was now completely gilded in melted gold.

"This is what he did with your medallion!"

And, plunging his hand into the receptacle for the holy water, he drew out the glass covers of the medallion, which were molded together with the flower in the centre.

"And this is what he did with the rest!"

Balthazar gazed upon his friend with astonishment. He did not know what to expect next.

"And now, if you want to know how he went out," continued Cornelius as he dragged him to the window, "look!"

He pointed to the top pane of the window, which was pierced by a little hole about the size of a cent.

"But what does all this mean!" exclaimed Balthazar, who began to believe that he, too, was taking leave of his senses. "Who did this?"

"Why, you fool! Can't you see that *the house has been struck by lightning*!"

Balthazar might have been struck by lightning, too, for that matter, as he was more dead than alive, when he at last realized how they had all been deceived by the hand of Nature. A loud noise was heard outside. They both rushed to the window and looked out.

A crowd surrounded the house as four officers, carrying a stretcher, on which Christina was lying, entered the front door!

X

The poor child, in her despair, had thrown herself into the Amstel, but Petersen the night-watchman, like the brave lad that he was, had sprung into the water and pulled her out.

After she had been put to bed, and had received a visit from a physician, who prescribed plenty of rest and quiet, M. Tricamp approached the young men.

"As the young girl is not in a condition to be removed to-day, my men and I will retire."

"Why, hasn't Cornelius told you? Christina is innocent and we know the thief."

"The thief!" exclaimed M. Tricamp, "and who is it?"

"Why, the lightning, of course!" laughingly replied Balthazar.

M. Tricamp opened his eyes in amazement, as he repeated:

"The lightning?"

"Why, naturally!" replied Cornelius. "You apply the study of psychology in your criminal researches, while I employ my knowledge of meteorology—that's the only difference in our methods."

"And you pretend to say that all this was caused by lightning?" demanded M. Tricamp, who was losing his temper.

"Why, all this is as nothing when compared with some of the capers lightning has been known to cut. How about the tack it tears up from the carpet and drives through a mirror without cracking the glass; and the key it takes out of the lock and conceals in the ice-box; and the package of cigarettes it delicately removes from the bronze ash-receiver which it has ignited; and the silver it volatilizes through the silken meshes of a purse without damaging the latter; and the needles it magnetizes so thoroughly that they run after a hammer; and the pretty little hole it made in Christina's window; and the wallpaper it so deftly disarranged to furnish you with your wonderful clue; and this medallion, the glass of which it melted without injuring in the least the flower it contained, thus forming the most beautiful specimen of enamel I have ever seen, and making a finer wedding gift than the most skilled artist could have turned out; and finally, the gold of the medallion which gilded Christina's crucifix!"

"Humbug!" protested M. Tricamp, "it is impossible! And how about the package! The package she was seen to hand a man from out the window?"

"The man is here to answer that question himself!"—and a perfect colossus entered the room.

"Petersen!"

"At your service. And the package contained some old dresses for my little children."

"Old clothes, that's excellent!" replied Tricamp, who was fairly boiling over with rage. "But how about the gold, and the silver, the ducats and the florins, and the other jewels; where are they?"

"Zounds!" exclaimed Cornelius, striking his forehead; "that reminds me—"

He sprang on the table, and reaching up to the overturned bell, he suddenly exclaimed:

"Here they are!"

A huge ingot of gold, silver, and jewels fell on the floor from the bell, together with the tongue of the bell, which had been detached, the whole being melted solidly together.

M. Tricamp picked up the ingot and examined it carefully.

"But tell me," he asked, "what put you on the track?"

Cornelius smiled as he replied:

"This black pearl, Mijnheer, which you handed to me, defying me to prove Christina's innocence in the face of such evidence."

"The black pearl!"

"Exactly, Mijnheer! Do you see this little white speck? Well, that was caused by electricity! And, thanks to this little speck, I have succeeded in saving the honor of a fellow-being."

"You must accept my congratulations," said he, bowing humbly; "the man of science is more far-sighted than the police, and in future I intend to add the study of natural philosophy and meteorology to my other acquirements. Were it not for this undoubted proof I might have committed a still more serious error. I actually began to suspect that you were her accomplice."

And then M. Tricamp withdrew, in order not to show his embarrassment, and Gudule rushed in to say that Christina was better and had heard everything through the partition.

"My little Christina," said Balthazar as he knelt by her bedstead a little later, "if you do not want to make me unhappy pray do not refuse to accept this little token of my esteem."

And he placed the ingot of melted gold and jewels on the bed.

Christina hesitated.

"Oh, you must take it, for you need a dower—" exclaimed Balthazar as he pressed her hand.

"That is, if you will accept me for a husband?" added Cornelius.

Christina did not reply, but she gave the man who had saved her honor a look which certainly did not mean—No.

THE PRISONER OF ASSIOUT

BY GRANT ALLEN

Charles Grant Blairfindie Allen (born 1848, died 1899) was a Canadian of Irish descent. Beginning as a writer of popular scientific and historical works, he gradually entered the field of fiction, publishing a number of notable novels, among which may be mentioned: "Philistia"; "The Devil's Die"; "The Woman Who Did"; and "A Bride from the Desert." The present tale, so Oriental in its feeling, is a convincing illustration of the versatility of the author's genius.

THE PRISONER OF ASSIOUT

By GRANT ALLEN

It was a sultry December day at Medinet Habu. Gray haze spread dim over the rocks in the desert. The arid red mountains twinkled and winked through the heated air. I was weary with climbing the great dry ridge from the Tombs of the Kings. I sat on the broken arm of a shattered granite Rameses. My legs dangled over the side of that colossal fragment. In front of me vast colonnades stood out clear and distinct against the hot, white sky. Beyond lay bare hills; in the distance, to the left, the muddy Nile, amid green fields, gleamed like a thin silver thread in the sunlight.

A native, in a single dirty garment, sat sunning himself on a headless sphinx hard by. He was carving a watermelon with his knife—thick, red, ripe, juicy. I eyed it hard. With a gesture of Oriental politeness, he offered me a slice. It was too tempting to refuse, that baking hot day, in that rainless land, though I knew acceptance meant ten times its worth in the end in bakshish.

"Arabi?" I asked inquiringly of my Egyptian friend, which is, being interpreted, "Are you a Mussulman?"

He shook his head firmly, and pointed with many nods to the tiny blue cross tattooed on his left wrist. "Nusráni," he answered, with a look of some pride. I smiled my acquiescence. He was a Nazarene, a Christian.

In a few minutes' time we had fallen into close talk of Egypt, past and present; the bad old days; the British occupation; the effect of strong government on the condition of fellahin. To the Christian population of the Nile valley, of course, the advent of the English has been a social revolution. For ages downtrodden, oppressed, despised, these Coptic schismatics at last find themselves suddenly, in the ends of the earth, co-religionists with the new ruling class in the country, and able to boast themselves in many ways over their old Moslem masters.

I speak but little colloquial Arabic myself, though I understand it with ease when it is spoken, so the conversation between us was necessarily somewhat one-sided. But my Egyptian friend soon grew voluble enough for two, and the sight of the piastres laid in his dusky palm loosed the strings of his tongue to such an alarming extent that I began to wonder before long whether I should ever get back again to the Luxor Hotel in time for dinner.

"Ah, yes, excellency," my Copt said slowly, when I asked him at last about the administration of justice under Ismail's rule, "things were different then, before the English came, as Allah willed it. It was stick, stick, stick every month of the year. No prayers availed; we were beaten for everything. If a fellah didn't pay his taxes when crops were bad, he was lashed till he found them; if he was a Christian, and offended the least Moslem official, he was stripped to the skin, and ruthlessly bastinadoed. And then, for any insubordination, it was death outright—hanging or beheading, slash, so, with a simitar." And my companion brought his hand round in a whirl with swishing force, as if he were decapitating some unseen criminal on the bare sand before him.

"The innocent must often have been punished with the guilty," I remarked, in my best Arabic, looking vaguely across at him.

"Ah, yes," he assented, smiling. "So Allah ordained. But sometimes, even then, the saints were kind; we got off unexpectedly. I could tell you a strange story that once happened to myself." His eyes twinkled hard. "It was a curious adventure," he went on; "the effendi might like, perhaps, to hear it. I was condemned to death, and all but executed. It shows the wonderful ways of Allah."

These Coptic Christians, indeed, speaking Arabic as they do, and living so constantly among a Mussulman population, have imbibed many Mahomedan traits of thought, besides the mere accident of language, such as speaking of the Christian God as Allah. Fatalism has taken as strong a hold of their minds as of Islam itself. "Say on," I answered lightly, drawing a cigarette from my case. "A story is always of interest to me, my friend. It brings grist to the mill. I am a man of the pen. I write down in books all the strange things that are told me."

My Egyptian smiled again. "Then this tale of mine," he said, showing all his white teeth, and brushing away the flies from his sore eye as he spoke, "should be worth you money, for it's as strange as any of the Thousand and One Nights men tell for hire at Cairo. It happened to me near Assiout, in Ismail's days. I was a bold young man then—too bold for Egypt. My father had a piece of ground by the river side that was afterward taken from us by Ismail for the Daira.

"In our village lived a Sheikh, a very hard man; a Mussulman, an Arab, a descendant of the Prophet. He was the greatest Sheik for miles and miles around. He had a large white house, with green blinds to the windows, while all the rest of us in his government lived in mud-built huts, round and low like beehives. He had date palms, very many, and doums, and doura patches. Camels were his, and buffaloes, and asses, and cows; 'twas a very rich man; oh, so rich and powerful. When he went forth to town he rode on a great white mule. And he had a harem, too; three wives of his own, who were beautiful as the day—so girls who had seen them said, for as for us, we saw them not—plump women every one of them, as the Khedive's at Cairo, with eyes like a gazelle's, marked round with kohl, and their nails stained red every day with henna. All the world said the Sheikh was a happy man, for he had the finest dates of the country to eat, and servants and camels in plenty to do his bidding.

"Now, there was a girl in our village, a Nusráni like me, a beautiful young girl; and her name was Laila. Her eyes were like those of that child there—Zanobi—who carries the effendi's water-gourd on her head, and her cheeks were round and soft as a grape after the inundation. I meant to wed her; and she liked me well. In the evening we sat and talked together under the whispering palm-trees. But when the time drew near for me to marry her, and I had arranged with her parents, there came a message from the Sheikh. He had seen the girl by the river as she went down to draw water with her face unveiled, and though she was a Nusráni, she fired his soul, and he wished to take her away from me to put her into his harem.

"When I heard that word I tore my clothes in my rage, and, all Christian that I was, and of no account with the Moslems, I went up to the Sheikh's house in a very white anger, and I fell on my face and asked leave to see him.

"The Sheikh sat in his courtyard, inside his house, and gave audience to all men, after the fashion of Islam. I entered and spoke to him. 'Oh, Sheikh,' I said boldly, 'Allah and the Khedive have prospered you with exceeding great prosperity. You have oxen and asses, buffaloes and camels, men-servants and maid-servants, much millet and cotton and corn and sugar-cane; you drink Frank wine every day of your life, and eat the fat of the land; and your harem is full of beautiful women. Now in the village where I live is a Nusráni girl, whose name is Laila. Her eyes are bright toward mine, and I love her as the thirsty land loves water. Yet, hear, O Sheikh; word is brought me now that you wish to take this girl, who is mine; and I come to plead with you to-day as Nathan the Prophet pleaded with David, the King of the Beni Israel. If you take away from me my Laila, my one ewe lamb—'

"But, at the word, the Sheikh rose up, and clenched his fist, and was very angry. 'Who is this dog,' he asked, 'that he should dare to dictate to me?' He called to his slaves that waited on his nod. 'Take this fellow,' he cried in his anger, 'and tie him hand and foot, and flog him as I bid on his naked back, that he may know, being a Christian, an infidel dog, not to meddle with the domestic affairs of Moslems. It were well he were made acquainted with his own vileness by the instrumentality of a hundred lashes. And go to-morrow and bring Laila to me, and take care that this Copt shall never again set eyes on her!'

"Well, effendi, at the words, three strong Arabs seized me—fierce sons of the desert—and bound me hand and foot, and beat me with a hundred lashes of the kurbash till my soul was sick and faint within me. I swooned with the disgrace and with the severity of the blows. And I was young in those days. And I was very angry.

"That night I went home to my own mud hut, with black blood in my heart, and took counsel with my brother Sirgeh how I should avenge this insult. But first I sent word by my brother to Laila's hut that Laila's father should bring her to meet us in the dusk, in very great secrecy, by the bank of the river. In the gray twilight she came down. A dahabiah was passing, and in it was a foreigner, a very great prince, an American prince of great wealth and wisdom. I remember his name even. Perhaps the effendi knows him. He was Cyrus P. Quackenboss, and he came from Cincinnati."

"I have not the honor," I answered, smiling at this very unexpected Western intrusion.

"Well, anyhow," my Copt continued, unheeding my smile, "we hailed the dahabiah, and made the American prince understand how the matter stood. He was very kind. We were brother Christians. He took Laila on board, and promised to deliver her safe to her aunt at Karnak, so that the Sheikh might not know where the girl was gone, nor send to fetch her. And the counsel I took next with my brother was this: In the dead of night I rose up from my hut, and put a mask of white linen over the whole of my face to conceal my features, and stole out alone, with a thick stick in my hands, and went to the Sheikh's house, down by the bank of the river. As I went, the jackals prowled around the village for food, and the owls from the tombs flitted high in the moonlight.

"I broke into the Sheikh's room by the flat-roofed outhouse that led to his window, and I locked the door; and there, before the Sheikh could rouse his household, I beat him, blow for blow, within an inch of his life, in revenge for my own beating, and because of his injustice in trying to take my Laila from me. The Sheikh was a powerful man, with muscles like iron, and he grappled me hard, and tried to wrench the stick from me, and bruised me about the body

by flinging me on the ground; and I was weak with my beating, and very sore all over. But still, being by nature a strong young man, very fierce with anger, I fought him hard, and got him under in the end, and thwacked him till he was as black and blue as I myself was, one mass of bruises from head to foot with my cudgeling. Then, just as his people succeeded in forcing the door, I jumped out of the window upon the flat-roofed outhouse, and leaped lightly to the ground, and darted like a jackal across the open cotton-fields and between the plots of doura to my own little hut on the outskirts of the village. I reached there panting, and I knew the Sheikh would kill me for my daring.

"Next morning, early, the Sheikh sent to arrest me. He was blind with rage and with the effect of the blows: his face was livid, and his cheeks purple. 'By the beard of the Prophet, Athanasio,' he said to me, hitting me hard on the cheek—my name is Athanasio, effendi, after our great patriarch—'your blood shall flow for this, you dog of a Christian. You dare to assault the wearer of a green turban, a prince in Islam, a descendant of the Prophet! You shall suffer for it, you cur! Your base blood shall flow for it!'

"I cast myself down, like a slave, on the ground before him—though I hated him like sin: for it is well to abase one's self in due time before the face of authority. Besides, by that time, Laila was safe, and that was all I cared about. 'Suffer for what, O my Sheikh?' I cried, as though I knew not what he meant. 'What have I done to your Excellency? Who has told you evil words concerning your poor servant? Who has slandered me to my lord, that he is so angry against me?'

"'Take him away!' roared the Sheikh to the three strong Arabs. 'Carry him off to be tried before the Cadi at Assiout.'

"For even in Ismail's days, you see, effendi, before the English came, the Sheikh himself would not have dared to put me to death untried. The power of life and death lay with the Cadi at Assiout.

"So they took me to Assiout, into the mosque of Ali, where the Cadi sat at the seat of judgment and arraigned me before him a week later. There the Sheikh appeared, end bore witness against me. Those who spoke for me pleaded that, as the Sheikh himself admitted, the man who broke into his room, and banged himself so hard, had his face covered with a linen cloth; how, then, could the Sheikh, in the hurry and the darkness, be sure he recognized me? Perhaps it was some other who took this means to ruin me. But the Sheikh, for his part swore by Allah, and by the Holy Stone of the Kaaba at Mecca, that he saw me distinctly, and knew it was I. The moonlight through the window revealed my form to him. And who else in the village but me had a grudge against his justice?

"The Cadi was convinced. The Cadi gave judgment. I was guilty of rebellion against the Sheikh and against ul-Islam; and, being a dog of a Christian, unworthy even to live, his judgment was that after three days' time I should be beheaded in the prison court of Assiout.

"You may guess, effendi, whether or not I was anxious. But Laila was safe; and to save my girl from that wretch's harem I was ready, for my part, to endure anything.

"Two nights long I lay awake and thought strange things by myself in the whitewashed cells of the jail at Assiout. The governor of the prison, who was a European—an Italian, he called himself—and a Christian of Roum, of those who obey the Pope, was very kind indeed to me. He knew me before (for I had worked in his fields), and was sorry when I told him the tale about Laila. But what would you have? Those were Ismail's days. It was the law of Islam. He could not prevent it.

"On the third evening, my brother came round to the prison to see me. He came with many tears in his eyes, bringing evil tidings. My poor old father, he said, was dying at home with grief. They didn't expect he would live till morning. And Laila, too, had stolen back from Karnak unperceived, and was hiding in the village. She wished to see me just once before I died. But if she came to the prison, the Sheikh would find her out, and carry her off in triumph to his own harem.

"Would the governor give me leave to go home just that one night, to bid farewell to Laila and to my dying father?

"Now, the governor, excellency, was a very humane man. And though he was a Christian of Roum, not a Copt like us, he was kind to the Copts as his brother Christians. He pondered awhile to himself, and roped his mustache thus; then he said to me:

"'Athanasio, you are an honest man; the execution is fixed for eight by the clock to-morrow morning. If I give you leave to go home to your father to-night, will you pledge me your word of honor before St. George and the Saints, to return before seven?'

"'Effendi,' I said, kissing his feet, 'you are indeed a good man. I swear by the mother of God and all the Saints that dwell in heaven, that if you let me go I will come back again a full hour before the time fixed for the execution.' And I meant it, too, for I only wished before I died to say good-by once more to Laila.

"Well, the governor took me secretly into his own house, and telling me many times over that he trusted to my honor, and would lose his place if it were known he had let me go, he put me forth, with my brother, by his own private door, making me swear on no account to be late for the execution.

"As soon as I got outside, I said to my brother: 'Tell me, Sirgeh, at whose house is Laila?'

"And my brother answered and smiled, 'Laila is still at Karnak, where we sent her for safety, and our father is well. But I have a plan for your escape that I think will serve you.'

"'Never!' I cried, horror-struck, 'if I am to break my word of honor to the governor of the prison.'

"'That isn't it,' he made reply. 'I have a plan of my own which I will proceed in words to make clear before you.'

"What happened next would be long to relate, effendi." But I noticed that the fellah's eyes twinkled as he spoke, like one who passes over of set purpose an important episode. "All I need tell you now is, that the whole night through the good governor lay awake, wondering whether or not I would come home to time, and blaming himself in his heart for having given such leave to a mere condemned criminal. Still, effendi, though I am but poor, I am a man of honor. As the clock struck six in the prison court next morning, I knocked at the governor's window with the appointed signal; and the governor rose, and let me into my cell, and praised me for my honor, and was well pleased to see me. 'I knew, Athanasio,' he said, roping his mustache once more, 'you were a man to be trusted.'

"At eight o'clock they took me out into the courtyard. The executioner was there already, a great black Nubian, with a very sharp simitar. It was terrible to look around; I was greatly frightened. 'Surely,' said I to myself, 'the bitterness of death is past. But Laila is saved; and I die for Laila.'

"I knelt down and bent my head. I feared, after all, no respite was coming. The executioner stood forth and raised the simitar in his hand. I almost thought I heard it swish through the air; I saw the bright gleam of the blade as it descended. But just at that moment, as the executioner delayed, a loud commotion arose in the outer court. I raised my head and listened. We heard a voice cry, 'In Allah's name, let me in. There must be no execution!' The gates opened wide, and into the inner courtyard there strode with long strides a great white mule, and on its back, scarcely able to sit up, a sorry figure!

"He was wrapped round in bandages, and swathed from head to foot like a man sore wounded. His face was bruised, and his limbs swollen. But he upheld one hand in solemn warning, and in a loud voice again he cried to the executioner, 'In Allah's name, Hassan, let there be no execution!'

"The lookers-on, to right and left, raised a mighty cry, and called out with one voice, 'The Sheikh! The Sheikh! Who can have thus disfigured him?'

"But the Sheikh himself came forward in great pain, like one whose bones ache, and, dismounting from the mule, spoke aloud to the governor. 'In Allah's name,' he said, trembling, 'let this man go; he is innocent. I swore to him falsely, though I believed it to be true. For see, last night, about twelve o'clock, the self-same dog who broke into my house before, entered my room, with violence, through the open window. He carried in his hands the self-same stick as last time, and had his face covered, as ever, with a linen cloth. And I knew by his figure and his voice he was the very same dog that had previously beaten me. But before I could cry aloud to rouse the house, the infidel had fallen upon me once more and thwacked me, as you see, within an inch of my life, and covered me with bruises, and then bid me take care how I accused innocent people like Athanasio of hurting me. And after that he jumped through the open window and went away once more. And I was greatly afraid, fearing the wrath of Allah, if I let this man Athanasio be killed in his stead, though he is but an infidel. And I rose and saddled my mule very early, and rode straight into Assiout, to tell you and the Cadi I had borne false witness, and to save myself from the guilt of an innocent soul on my shoulders.'

"Then all the people around cried out with one voice, 'A miracle! a miracle!' And the Sheikh stood trembling beside, with faintness and with terror.

"But the governor drew me a few paces apart.

"'Athanasio, you rascal,' he said, half laughing, 'it is you that have done this thing! It is you that have assaulted him! You got out last night on your word of honor on purpose to play this scurvy trick upon us!'

"'Effendi,' I made answer, bowing low, 'life is sweet; he beat me, unjustly, first, and he would have taken my Laila from me. Moreover, I swear to you, by St. George and the mother of God, when I left the prison last night I really believed my father was dying.'

"The governor laughed again. 'Well, you can go, you rogue,' he said. 'The Cadi will soon come round to deliver you. But I advise you to make yourself scarce as fast as you can, for sooner or later this trick of yours may be discovered. *I* can't tell upon you, or I would lose my place. But you may be found out, for all that. Go, at once, up the river.'

"That is my hut that you see over yonder, effendi, where Laila and I live. The Sheikh is dead. And the English are now our real lords in Egypt."

THE SMUGGLERS OF THE CLONE

BY S. R. CROCKETT

Samuel Rutherford Crockett was born in Duchral, Galloway, Scotland, in 1860, and was educated in Edinburgh, Heidelberg, and New College, Oxford. He became a minister of the Free Church of Scotland in 1886. His successful stories include: "The Stickit Minister"; "The Play-Actress"; "The Men of the Moss Hags"; "Cleg Kelly"; "The Gray Man"; "The Red Axe"; "The Black Douglas"; "The Silver Skull"; "The Dark o' the Moon"; "Flower o' the Corn"; and "Red Cap Tales."

THE SMUGGLERS OF THE CLONE

By S. R. CROCKETT

"Rise, Robin, rise! The partans are on the sands!"

The crying at our little window raised me out of a sound sleep, for I had been out seeing the lasses late the night before, and was far from being wakerife at two by the clock on a

February morning.

It was the first time the summons had come to me, for I was but young. Hitherto it was my brother John who had answered the raising word of the free-traders spoken at the window. But now John had a farmsteading of his own, thanks to Sir William and to my father's siller that had paid for the stock.

So with all speed I did my clothes upon me, with much eagerness and a beating heart—as who would not when, for the first time, he has the privilege of man. As I went out to the barn I could hear my mother (with whom I was ever a favorite) praying for me.

"Save the laddie—save the laddie!" she said over and over.

And I think my father prayed too; but, as I went, he also cried to me counsels.

"Be sure you keep up the chains—dinna let them clatter till ye hae the stuff weel up the hill. The Lord keep ye! Be a guid lad an' ride honestly. Gin ye see Sir William, keep your head doon, an' gae by withoot lookin'. He's a magistrate, ye ken. But he'll no' see you, gin ye dinna see him. Leave twa ankers a-piece o' brandy an' rum at our dike back. An' abune a', the Lord be wi' ye, an' bring ye safe back to your sorrowing parents!"

So, with pride, I did the harness graith upon the sonsy back of Brown Bess—the pad before where I was to sit—the lintow and the hooked chains behind. I had a cutlas, the jockteleg, or smuggler's sheaf-knife, and a pair of brass-mounted pistols ready swung in my leathern belt. Faith, but I wish Bell of the Mains could have seen me now, ready to ride with the light-horsemen. She would never scorn me more for a lingle-backed callant, I'se warrant.

"Haste ye, Robin! Heard ye no that the partans are on the sands?"

It was Geordie of the Clone who cried to me. He meant the free-traders from the Isle, rolling the barrels ashore.

"I am e'en as ready as ye are yoursel'!" I gave him answer, for I was not going to let him boast himself prideful all because he had ridden out with them once or twice before. Besides, his horse and accoutrement were not one half so good as mine. For my father was an honest and well-considered man, and in good standing with the laird and the minister, so that he could afford to do things handsomely.

We made haste to ride along the heuchs, which are very high, steep, and rocky at this part of the coast.

And at every loaning-end we heard the clinking of the smugglers' chains, and I thought the sound a livening and a merry one.

"A fair guide-e'en, young Airyolan!" cried one to me, as we came by Killantrae. And I own the name was sweet to my ears. For it was the custom to call men by the names of their farms, and Airyolan was my father's name by rights. But mine for the night, because in my hands was the honor of the house.

Ere we got down to the Clone, we could hear, all about in the darkness, athwart and athwart, the clattering of chains, the stir of many horses, and the voices of men.

Black Taggart was in with his lugger, the "Sea Pyet," and such a cargo as the Clone men had never run—so ran the talk on every side. There was not a sleeping wife or a man left indoors in all the parish of Mochrum, except only the laird and the minister.

By the time that we got down by the shore there was quite a company of the Men of the Fells, as the shore men called us—all dour, swack, determined fellows.

"Here come the hill nowt!" said one of the village men, as he caught sight of us. I knew him for a limber-tongued, ill-livered loon from the Port, so I delivered him a blow fair and

solid between the eyes, and he dropped without a gurgle. This was to learn him how to speak to innocent strangers.

Then there was a turmoil indeed, to speak about, for all the men of the laigh shore crowded about, and knives were drawn. But I cried, "Corwald, Mochrum, Chippermore, here to me!" And all the stout lads came about me.

Nevertheless, it looked black for a moment, as the shore men waved their torches in our faces, and yelled fiercely at us to put us down by fear.

Then a tall young man on a horse rode straight at the crowd which had gathered about the loon I had felled. He had a mask over his face which sometimes slipped awry. But, in spite of the disguise, he seemed perfectly well known to all there.

"What have we here?" he asked, in a voice of questioning that had also the power of command in it.

"'Tis these Men of the Fells that have stricken down Jock Webster of the Port, Maister William!" said one of the crowd.

Then I knew the laird's son, and did my duty to him, telling him of my provocation, and how I had only given the rascal strength of arm.

"And right well you did," said Maister William, "for these dogs would swatter in the good brandy, but never help to carry it to the caves, or bring the well-graithed horses to the shore-side! Carry the loon away, and stap him into a heather hole till he come to."

So that was all the comfort they got for their tale-telling.

"And you, young Airyolan," said Maister William, "that are so ready with your strength of arm—there is even a job that you may do. Muckle Jock, the Preventive man, rides to-night from Isle of Whithorn, where he has been warning the cutter. Do you meet him and keep him from doing himself an injury."

"And where shall I meet him, Maister William?" I asked of the young laird.

"Oh, somewhere on the heuch-taps," said he, carelessly; "and see, swing these on your horse and leave them at Myrtoun on the bygoing."

He called a man with a torch, who came and stood over me, while I laid on Brown Bess a pair of small casks of some fine liqueur, of which more than ordinary care was to be taken, and also a few packages of soft goods, silks and laces as I deemed.

"Take these to the Loch Yett, and ca' Sandy Fergus to stow them for ye. Syne do your work with the Exciseman as he comes hame. Gar him bide till the sun be at its height to-morrow. And a double share o' the plunder shall be lyin' in the hole at a back of the dike at Airyolan, when ye ride hame the morn at e'en."

So I bade him a good-night, and rode my ways over the fields and across many burns to Myrtoun. As I went I looked back, and there, below me, was a strange sight—all the little harbor of the Clone lighted up, a hurrying of men down to the shore, the flickering of torches, and the lappering of the sea making a stir of gallant life that set the blood to leaping in the veins. It was, indeed, I thought, worth while living to be a free-trader. Far out, I could see the dark spars of the lugger, "Sea Pyet," and hear the casks and ankers dumping into the boats alongside.

Then I began to bethink me that I had a more desperate ploy than any of them that were down there. For they were many, and I was only one. Moreover, easily as young Maister William might say, "Meet Muckle Jock and keep him till the morn at noon!" the matter was not so easy as supping one's porridge.

Now, I had never seen the Exciseman, but my brother had played at the cudgels with Jock before this. So I knew more of him than to suppose that he would bide for the bidding of one man when in the way of his duty.

When the young laird went away he slipped me a small, heavy packet.

"Half for you and half for the gauger, gin he hears reason," he said.

By the weight and the jingle I judged it to be yellow Geordies, the best thing that the wee, wee German lairdie ever sent Tory Mochrum. And not too plenty there, either! Though since the Clone folk did so well with the clean-run smuggling from the blessed Isle of Man, it is true that there are more of the Geordies than there used to be.

So I rode round by the back of the White Loch, for Sir William had a habit of daunering over by the Airlour and Barsalloch, and in my present ride I had no desire to meet with him.

Yet, as fate would have it, I was not to win clear that night. I had not ridden more than half-way round the loch when Brown Bess went floundering into a moss-hole, which are more plenty than paved roads in that quarter. And what with the weight of the pack, and her struggling, we threatened to go down altogether. When I thought of what my father would say, if I went home with my finger in my mouth, and neither Black Bess nor yet a penny's-worth to the value of her, I was fairly a-sweat with fear. I cried aloud for help, for there were cot-houses near by. And, as I had hoped, in a little a man came out of the shadows of the willow bushes.

"What want ye, yochel?" said he, in a mightily lofty tone.

"I'll 'yochel' ye, gin I had time. Pu' on that rope," I said, for my spirit was disturbed by the accident. Also, as I have said, I took ill-talk from no man.

So, with a little laugh, the man laid hold of the rope, and pulled his best, while I took off what of the packages I could reach, ever keeping my own feet moving, to clear the sticky glaur of the bog-hole from off them.

"Tak' that hook out, and ease doon the cask, man!" I cried to him, for I was in desperation; "I'll gie ye a heartsome gill, even though the stuff be Sir William's!"

And the man laughed again, being, as I judged, well pleased. For all that service yet was I not pleased to be called "yochel." But, in the meantime, I saw not how I could begin to cuff and clout one that was helping my horse and stuff out of a bog-hole. Yet I resolved somehow to be even with him, for, though a peaceable man, I never could abide the calling of ill names.

"Whither gang ye?" said he.

"To the Muckle Hoose o' Myrtoun," said I, "and gang ye wi' me, my man; and gie me a hand doon wi' the stuff, for I hae nae stomach for mair wasling in bog-holes. And wha kens but that auld Turk, Sir William, may happen on us?"

"Ken ye Sir William Maxwell?" said the man.

"Na," said I. "I never so muckle as set e'en on the auld wretch. But I had sax hard days' wark cutting bushes, and makin' a road for his carriage wi' wheels, for him to ride in to Mochrum Kirk."

"Saw ye him never there?" said the man as I strapped the packages on again.

"Na," said I. "My faither is a Cameronian, and gangs to nae Kirk hereaboots.'

"He has gi'en his son a bonny upbringing, then!" quoth the man.

Now this made me mainly angry, for I can not bide that folk should meddle with my folk. As far as I am concerned myself, I am a peaceable man.

"Hear ye," said I, "I ken na wha ye are that speers so mony questions. Ye may be the de'il, or ye may be the enemy o' Mochrum himsel', the blackavised Commodore frae Glasserton. But I can warrant ye that ye'll no mell and claw unyeuked with Robin o' Airyolan. Hear ye that, my man, and keep a civil tongue within your ill-lookin' cheek, gin ye want to gang hame in the morning wi' an uncracked croun!"

The man said no more, and by his gait I judged him to be some serving-man. For, as far as the light served me, he was not so well put on as myself. Yet there was a kind of neatness about the creature that showed him to be no outdoor man either.

However, he accompanied me willingly enough till we came to the Muckle House of Myrtoun. For I think that he was feared of his head at my words. And indeed it would not have taken the kittling of a flea to have garred me draw a staff over his crown. For there is nothing that angers a Galloway man more than an ignorant, upsetting town's body, putting in his gab when he desires to live peaceable.

So, when we came to the back entrance, I said to him: "Hear ye to this. Ye are to make no noise, my mannie, but gie me a lift doon wi' thae barrels, cannily. For that dour old tod, the laird, is to ken naething aboot it. Only Miss Peggy and Maister, they ken. 'Deed, it was William himsel' that sent me on this errand."

So with that the mannie gave a kind of laugh, and helped me down with the ankers far better than I could have expected. We rolled them into a shed at the back of the stables, and covered them up snug with some straw and some old heather thatching.

"Ay, my lad," says I to him, "for a' your douce speech and fair words ye hae been at this job afore!"

"Well, it is true," he said, "that I hae rolled a barrel or two in my time."

Then, in the waft of an eye, I knew who he was. I set him down for Muckle Jock, the Excise officer, that had never gone to the Glasserton at all, but had been lurking there in the moss, waiting to deceive honest men. I knew that I needed to be wary with him, for he was, as I had heard, a sturdy carl, and had won the last throw at the Stoneykirk wrestling. But all the men of the Fellside have an excellent opinion of themselves, and I thought I was good for any man of the size of this one.

So said I to him: "Noo, chiel, ye ken we are no' juist carryin' barrels o' spring water at this time o' nicht to pleasure King George. Hearken ye; we are in danger of being laid by the heels in the jail of Wigton gin the black lawyer corbies get us. Noo, there's a Preventive man that is crawling and spying ower by on the heights o' Physgill. Ye' maun e'en come wi' me an' help to keep him oot o' hairm's way. For it wad not be for his guid that he should gang doon to the port this nicht!"

The man that I took to be the ganger hummed and hawed a while, till I had enough of his talk and unstable ways.

"No back-and forrit ways wi' Robin," said I. "Will ye come and help to catch the King's officer, or will ye not?"

"No a foot will I go," says he. "I have been a King's officer, myself!"

I laid a pistol to his ear, for I was in some heat.

"Gin you war King Geordie himsel', ay, or Cumberland either, ye shall come wi' me and help to catch the gauger," said I.

For I bethought me that it would be a bonny ploy, and one long to be talked about in these parts, thus to lay by the heels the Exciseman and make him tramp to Glasserton to kidnap himself. The man with the bandy legs was taking a while to consider, so I said to him: "She is a guid pistol and new primed!"

"I'll come wi' ye!" said he.

So I set him first on the road, and left my horse in the stables of Myrtoun. It was the gloam of the morning when we got to the turn of the road by which, if he were to come at all, the new gauger would ride from Glasserton. And lo! as if we had set a tryst, there he was coming over the heathery braes at a brisk trot. So I covered him with my pistol, and took his horse by the reins, thinking no more of the other man I had taken for the gauger before.

"Dismount, my lad," I said. "Ye dinna ken me, but I ken you. Come here, my landlouper, and help to baud him!"

I saw the stranger who had come with me sneaking off, but with my other pistol I brought him to a stand. So together we got the gauger into a little thicket or planting. And here, willing or unwilling, we kept him all day, till we were sure that the stuff would all be run, and the long trains of honest smugglers on good horses far on their way to the towns of the north.

Then very honestly I counted out the half of the tale of golden guineas Maister William had given me, and put them into the pocket of the gauger's coat.

"Gin ye are a good still-tongued kind of cattle, there is more of that kind of oats where these came from," said I. "But lie ye here snug as a paitrick for an hour yet by the clock, lest even yet ye should come to harm!"

So there we left him, not very sorely angered, for all he had posed as so efficient and zealous a King's officer.

"Now," said I, to the man that helped me. "I promised ye half o' Maister William's guineas, that he bade me keep, for I allow that it micht hae been a different job but for your help. And here they are. Ye shall never say that Robin of Airyolan roguit ony man—even a feckless toon's birkie wi' bandy legs!"

The man laughed and took the siller, saying, "Thank'ee!" with an arrogant air as if he handled bags of them every day. But, nevertheless, he took them, and I parted from him, wishing him well, which was more than he did to me. But I know how to use civility upon occasion.

When I reached home I told my father, and described the man I had met. But he could make no guess at him. Nor had I myself till the next rent day, when my father, having a lame leg where the colt had kicked him, sent me down to pay the owing. The factor I know well, but I had my money in hand and little I cared for him. But what was my astonishment to find, sitting at the table with him, the very same man who had helped me to lay the Exciseman by the heels. But now, I thought, there was a strangely different air about him.

And what astonished me more, it was this man, and not the factor, who spoke first to me.

"Ay, Robin of Airyolan, and are you here? Ye are a chiel with birr and smeddum! There are the bones of a man in ye! Hae ye settled with the gauger for shackling him by the hill of Physgill?"

Now, as I have said, I thole snash from no man, and I gave him the word back sharply.

"Hae ye settled wi' him yoursel', sir? For it was you that tied the ropes!"

My adversary laughed, and looked not at all ill-pleased.

He pointed to the five gold Georges on the table.

"Hark ye, Robin of Airyolan, these are the five guineas ye gied to me like an honest man. I'll forgie ye for layin' the pistol to my lug, for ye are some credit to the land that fed ye. Gin ye promise to wed a decent lass, I'll e'en gie ye a farm. And as sure as my name is Sir William Maxwell, ye shall sit your lifetime rent free, for the de'il's errand that ye took me on the nicht of the brandy-running at the Clone."

I could have sunken through the floor when I heard that it was Sir William himself—whom, because he had so recently returned from foreign parts after a sojourn of many years, I had never before seen.

Then both the factor and the laird laughed heartily at my discomfiture.

"Ken ye o' a lass that wad tak' up wi' ye, Robin?" said Sir William.

"Half a dozen o' them, my lord," said I. "Lasses are neither ill to seek nor hard to find when Robin of Airyolan gangs a-coortin'!"

"Losh preserve us!" cried the laird, slapping his thigh, "but I never sallied forth to woo a lass so blithely confident mysel'!"

I said nothing, but dusted my knee-breeks.

"An' mind ye maun see to it that the bairns are a' loons, and as staunch and stark as yoursel'!" said the factor.

"A man can but do his best," answered I, very modestly as I thought. For I never can tell why it is that the folk will always say that I have a good opinion of myself. Nor, on the other hand, can I tell why I should not.

THE MYSTERIOUS MANSION

BY HONORE DE BALZAC

This is one of the best known of Balzac's short stories, and may be said to rank among the half-dozen best of all. It is one of his "Studies of Women," its French title is "La Grande Breteche," it forms part of the second volume in the series entitled "Scenes from Private Life," and was first published in 1830.

THE MYSTERIOUS MANSION

By HONORE DE BALZAC

About a hundred yards from the town of Vendôme, on the borders of the Loire, there is an old gray house, surmounted by very high gables, and so completely isolated that neither tanyard nor shabby hostelry, such as you may find at the entrance to all small towns, exists in its immediate neighborhood.

In front of this building, overlooking the river, is a garden, where the once well-trimmed box borders that used to define the walks now grow wild as they list. Several willows that spring from the Loire have grown as rapidly as the hedge that encloses it, and half conceal the house. The rich vegetation of those weeds that we call foul adorns the sloping shore. Fruit trees, neglected for the last ten years, no longer yield their harvest, and their shoots form coppices. The wall-fruit grows like hedges against the walls. Paths once graveled are overgrown with moss, but, to tell the truth, there is no trace of a path. From the height of the hill, to which cling the ruins of the old castle of the Dukes of Vendôme, the only spot whence the eye can plunge into this enclosure, it strikes you that, at a time not easy to determine, this plot of land was the delight of a country gentleman, who cultivated roses and tulips and horticulture in general, and who was besides a lover of fine fruit. An arbor is still visible, or rather the débris of an arbor, where there is a table that time has not quite destroyed. The aspect of this garden of bygone days suggests the negative joys of peaceful, provincial life, as one might reconstruct the life of a worthy tradesman by reading the epitaph on his tombstone.

As if to complete the sweetness and sadness of the ideas that possess one's soul, one of the walls displays a sun-dial decorated with the following commonplace Christian inscription: "Ultimam cogita!" The roof of this house is horribly dilapidated, the shutters are always closed, the balconies are covered with swallows' nests, the doors are perpetually shut, weeds have drawn green lines in the cracks of the flights of steps, the locks and bolts are rusty. Sun, moon, winter, summer, and snow have worn the paneling, warped the boards, gnawed the paint. The lugubrious silence which reigns there is only broken by birds, cats, martins, rats and mice, free to course to and fro, to fight and to eat each other. Everywhere an invisible hand has graven the word *mystery*.

Should your curiosity lead you to glance at this house from the side that points to the road, you would perceive a great door which the children of the place have riddled with holes. I afterward heard that this door had been closed for the last ten years. Through the holes broken by the boys you would have observed the perfect harmony that existed between the façades of both garden and courtyard. In both the same disorder prevails. Tufts of weed encircle the paving-stones. Enormous cracks furrow the walls, round whose blackened crests twine the thousand garlands of the pellitory. The steps are out of joint, the wire of the bell is rusted, the spouts are cracked. What fire from heaven has fallen here? What tribunal has decreed that salt should be strewn on this dwelling? Has God been blasphemed, has France been here betrayed? These are the questions we ask ourselves, but get no answer from the crawling things that haunt the place. The empty and deserted house is a gigantic enigma, of which the key is lost. In bygone times it was a small fief, and bears the name of the Grande Bretêche.

I inferred that I was not the only person to whom my good landlady had communicated the secret of which I was to be the sole recipient, and I prepared to listen.

"Sir," she said, "when the Emperor sent the Spanish prisoners of war and others here, the Government quartered on me a young Spaniard who had been sent to Vendôme on parole. Parole notwithstanding he went out every day to show himself to the sous-préfet. He was a Spanish grandee! Nothing less! His name ended in os and dia, something like Burgos de Férédia. I have his name on my books; you can read it if you like. Oh! but he was a handsome young man for a Spaniard; they are all said to be ugly. He was only five feet and a few inches high, but he was well-grown; he had small hands that he took such care of; ah! you should have seen! He had as many brushes for his hands as a woman for her whole dressing apparatus! He had thick black hair, a fiery eye, his skin was rather bronzed, but I liked the look of it. He wore the finest linen I have ever seen on any one, although I have had princesses staying here, and, among others, General Bertrand, the Duke and Duchess d'Abrantès, Monsieur Decazes, and the King of Spain. He didn't eat much; but his manners were so polite, so amiable, that one could not owe him a grudge. Oh! I was very fond of him, although he didn't open his lips four times in the day, and it was impossible to keep up a conversation with him. For if you spoke to him, he did not answer. It was a fad, a mania with them all, I heard say. He read his breviary like a priest, he went to Mass and to all the services regularly. Where did he sit? Two steps from the chapel of Madame de Merret. As he took his place there the first time he went to church, nobody suspected him of any intention in so doing. Besides, he never raised his eyes from his prayer-book, poor young man! After that, sir, in the evening he would walk on the mountains, among the castle ruins. It was the poor man's only amusement, it reminded him of his country. They say that Spain is all mountains! From the commencement of his imprisonment he stayed out late. I was anxious when I found that he did not come home before midnight; but we got accustomed to this fancy of his. He took the key of the door, and we left off sitting up for him. He lodged in a house of ours in the Rue des Casernes. After that, one of our stable-men told us that in the evening when he led the horses to the water, he thought he had seen the Spanish grandee swimming far down the river like a live fish. When he returned, I told him to take care of the rushes; he appeared vexed to have been seen in the water. At last, one day, or rather one morning, we did not find him in his room; he had not returned. After searching everywhere, I found some writing in the drawer of a table, where there were fifty gold pieces of Spain that are called doubloons and were worth about five thousand francs; and ten thousand francs' worth of diamonds in a small sealed box. The writing said, that in case he did not return, he left us the money and the diamonds, on condition of paying for Masses to thank God for his escape, and for his

salvation. In those days my husband had not been taken from me; he hastened to seek him everywhere.

"And now for the strange part of the story. He brought home the Spaniard's clothes, that he had discovered under a big stone, in a sort of pilework by the river-side near the castle, nearly opposite to the Grande Bretêche. My husband had gone there so early that no one had seen him. After reading the letter, he burned the clothes, and according to Count Férédia's desire we declared that he had escaped. The sous-préfet sent all the gendarmerie in pursuit of him; but brust! they never caught him. Lepas believed that the Spaniard had drowned himself. I, sir, don't think so; I am more inclined to believe that he had something to do with the affair of Madame de Merret, seeing that Rosalie told me that the crucifix that her mistress thought so much of, that she had it buried with her, was of ebony and silver. Now in the beginning of his stay here, Monsieur de Férédia had one in ebony and silver, that I never saw him with later. Now, sir, don't you consider that I need have no scruples about the Spaniard's fifteen thousand francs, and that I have a right to them?"

"Certainly; but you haven't tried to question Rosalie?" I said.

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir; but to no purpose! the girl's like a wall. She knows something, but it is impossible to get her to talk."

After exchanging a few more words with me, my landlady left me a prey to vague and gloomy thoughts, to a romantic curiosity, and a religious terror not unlike the profound impression produced on us when by night, on entering a dark church, we perceive a faint light under high arches; a vague figure glides by—the rustle of a robe or cassock is heard, and we shudder.

Suddenly the Grande Bretêche and its tall weeds, its barred windows, its rusty ironwork, its closed doors, its deserted apartments, appeared like a fantastic apparition before me. I essayed to penetrate the mysterious dwelling, and to find the knot of its dark story—the drama that had killed three persons. In my eyes Rosalie became the most interesting person in Vendôme. As I studied her, I discovered the traces of secret care, despite the radiant health that shone in her plump countenance. There was in her the germ of remorse or hope; her attitude revealed a secret, like the attitude of a bigot who prays to excess, or of the infanticide who ever hears the last cry of her child. Yet her manners were rough and ingenuous—her silly smile was not that of a criminal, and could you but have seen the great kerchief that encompassed her portly bust, framed and laced in by a lilac and blue cotton gown, you would have dubbed her innocent. No, I thought, I will not leave Vendôme without learning the history of the Grande Bretêche. To gain my ends I will strike up a friendship with Rosalie, if needs be.

"Rosalie," said I, one evening.

"Sir?"

"You are not married?"

She started slightly.

"Oh, I can find plenty of men, when the fancy takes me to be made miserable," she said, laughing.

She soon recovered from the effects of her emotion, for all women, from the great lady to the maid of the inn, possess a composure that is peculiar to them.

"You are too good-looking and well favored to be short of lovers. But tell me, Rosalie, why did you take service in an inn after leaving Madame de Merret? Did she leave you nothing to live on?"

"Oh, yes! But, sir, my place is the best in all Vendôme."

The reply was one of those that judges and lawyers would call evasive. Rosalie appeared to me to be situated in this romantic history like the square in the midst of a chessboard. She was at the heart of the truth and chief interest; she seemed to me to be bound in the very knot of it. The conquest of Rosalie was no longer to be an ordinary siege—in this girl was centred the last chapter of a novel; therefore from this moment Rosalie became the object of my preference.

One morning I said to Rosalie: "Tell me all you know about Madame de Merret."

"Oh!" she replied in terror, "do not ask that of me, Monsieur Horace."

Her pretty face fell—her clear, bright color faded—and her eyes lost their innocent brightness.

"Well, then," she said, at last, "if you must have it so, I will tell you about it; but promise to keep my secret!"

"Done! my dear girl, I must keep your secret with the honor of a thief, which is the most loyal in the world."

Were I to transcribe Rosalie's diffuse eloquence faithfully, an entire volume would scarcely contain it; so I shall abridge.

The room occupied by Madame de Merret at the Bretêche was on the ground floor. A little closet about four feet deep, built in the thickness of the wall, served as her wardrobe. Three months before the eventful evening of which I am about to speak, Madame de Merret had been so seriously indisposed that her husband had left her to herself in her own apartment, while he occupied another on the first floor. By one of those chances that it is impossible to foresee, he returned home from the club (where he was accustomed to read the papers and discuss politics with the inhabitants of the place) two hours later than usual. His wife supposed him to be at home, in bed and asleep. But the invasion of France had been the subject of a most animated discussion; the billiard-match had been exciting, he had lost forty francs, an enormous sum for Vendôme, where every one hoards, and where manners are restricted within the limits of a praiseworthy modesty, which perhaps is the source of the true happiness that no Parisian covets. For some time past Monsieur de Merret had been satisfied to ask Rosalie if his wife had gone to bed; and on her reply, which was always in the affirmative, had immediately gained his own room with the good temper engendered by habit and confidence. On entering his house, he took it into his head to go and tell his wife of his misadventure, perhaps by way of consolation. At dinner he found Madame de Merret most coquettishly attired. On his way to the club it had occurred to him that his wife was restored to health, and that her convalescence had added to her beauty. He was, as husbands are wont to be, somewhat slow in making this discovery. Instead of calling Rosalie, who was occupied just then in watching the cook and coachman play a difficult hand at brisque,* Monsieur de Merret went to his wife's room by the light of a lantern that he deposited on the first step of the staircase. His unmistakable step resounded under the vaulted corridor. At the moment that the Count turned the handle of his wife's door, he fancied he could hear the door of the closet I spoke of close; but when he entered Madame de Merret was alone before the fireplace. The husband thought ingenuously that Rosalie was in the closet, yet a suspicion that jangled in his ear put him on his guard. He looked at his wife and saw in her eyes I know not what wild and hunted expression.

* A game of cards.

"You are very late," she said. Her habitually pure, sweet voice seemed changed to him.

Monsieur de Merret did not reply, for at that moment Rosalie entered. It was a thunderbolt for him. He strode about the room, passing from one window to the other, with mechanical motion and folded arms.

"Have you heard bad news, or are you unwell?" inquired his wife timidly, while Rosalie undressed her.

He kept silent.

"You can leave me," said Madame de Merret to her maid; "I will put my hair in curl papers myself."

From the expression of her husband's face she foresaw trouble, and wished to be alone with him. When Rosalie had gone, or was supposed to have gone (for she stayed in the corridor for a few minutes), Monsieur de Merret came and stood in front of his wife, and said coldly to her:

"Madame, there is some one in your closet!" She looked calmly at her husband and replied simply:

"No, sir."

This answer was heartrending to Monsieur de Merret; he did not believe in it. Yet his wife had never appeared to him purer or more saintly than at that moment. He rose to open the closet door; Madame de Merret took his hand, looked at him with an expression of melancholy, and said in a voice that betrayed singular emotion:

"If you find no one there, remember this, all will be over between us!" The extraordinary dignity of his wife's manner restored the Count's profound esteem for her, and inspired him with one of those resolutions that only lack a vaster stage to become immortal.

"No," said he, "Josephine, I will not go there. In either case it would separate us forever. Hear me, I know how pure you are at heart, and that your life is a holy one. You would not commit a mortal sin to save your life."

At these words Madame de Merret turned a haggard gaze upon her husband.

"Here, take your crucifix," he added. "Swear to me before God that there is no one in there; I will believe you, I will never open that door."

Madame de Merret took the crucifix and said:

"I swear."

"Louder," said the husband, "and repeat 'I swear before God that there is no one in that closet.'"

She repeated the sentence calmly.

"That will do," said Monsieur de Merret, coldly.

After a moment of silence:

"I never saw this pretty toy before," he said, examining the ebony crucifix inlaid with silver, and most artistically chiseled.

"I found it at Duvivier's, who bought it of a Spanish monk when the prisoners passed through Vendôme last year."

"Ah!" said Monsieur de Merret, as he replaced the crucifix on the nail, and he rang. Rosalie did not keep him waiting. Monsieur de Merret went quickly to meet her, led her to the bay window that opened on to the garden and whispered to her:

"Listen! I know that Gorenflot wishes to marry you, poverty is the only drawback, and you told him that you would be his wife if he found the means to establish himself as a master mason. Well! go and fetch him, tell him to come here with his trowel and tools. Manage not to awaken any one in his house but himself; his fortune will be more than your desires. Above

all, leave this room without babbling, otherwise—" He frowned. Rosalie went away, he recalled her.

"Here, take my latch-key," he said. "Jean!" then cried Monsieur de Merret, in tones of thunder in the corridor. Jean, who was at the same time his coachman and his confidential servant, left his game of cards and came.

"Go to bed, all of you," said his master, signing to him to approach; and the Count added, under his breath: "When they are all asleep—*asleep*, d'ye hear?—you will come down and tell me." Monsieur de Merret, who had not lost sight of his wife all the time he was giving his orders, returned quietly to her at the fireside and began to tell her of the game of billiards and the talk of the club. When Rosalie returned she found Monsieur and Madame de Merret conversing very amicably.

The Count had lately had all the ceilings of his reception rooms on the ground floor repaired. Plaster of Paris is difficult to obtain in Vendôme; the carriage raises its price. The Count had therefore bought a good deal, being well aware that he could find plenty of purchasers for whatever might remain over. This circumstance inspired him with the design he was about to execute.

"Sir, Gorenflot has arrived," said Rosalie in low tones.

"Show him in," replied the Count in loud tones.

Madame de Merret turned rather pale when she saw the mason.

"Gorenflot," said her husband, "go and fetch bricks from the coach-house, and bring sufficient to wall up the door of this closet; you will use the plaster I have over to coat the wall with." Then calling Rosalie and the workman aside:

"Listen, Gorenflot," he said in an undertone, "you will sleep here to-night. But to-morrow you will have a passport to a foreign country, to a town to which I will direct you. I shall give you six thousand francs for your journey. You will stay ten years in that town; if you do not like it, you may establish yourself in another, provided it be in the same country. You will pass through Paris, where you will await me. There I will insure you an additional six thousand francs by contract, which will be paid to you on your return, provided you have fulfilled the conditions of our bargain. This is the price for your absolute silence as to what you are about to do to-night. As to you, Rosalie, I will give you ten thousand francs on the day of your wedding, on condition of your marrying Gorenflot; but if you wish to marry, you must hold your tongues; or—no dowry."

"Rosalie," said Madame de Merret, "do my hair."

The husband walked calmly up and down, watching the door, the mason, and his wife, but without betraying any insulting doubts. Madame de Merret chose a moment when the workman was unloading bricks and her husband was at the other end of the room to say to Rosalie: "A thousand francs a year for you, my child, if you can tell Gorenflot to leave a chink at the bottom." Then out loud, she added coolly:

"Go and help him!"

Monsieur and Madame de Merret were silent all the time that Gorenflot took to brick up the door. This silence, on the part of the husband, who did not choose to furnish his wife with a pretext for saying things of a double meaning, had its purpose; on the part of Madame de Merret it was either pride or prudence. When the wall was about half-way up, the sly workman took advantage of a moment when the Count's back was turned, to strike a blow with his trowel in one of the glass panes of the closet-door. This act informed Madame de Merret that Rosalie had spoken to Gorenflot.

All three then saw a man's face; it was dark and gloomy with black hair and eyes of flame. Before her husband turned, the poor woman had time to make a sign to the stranger that signified: Hope!

At four o'clock, toward dawn, for it was the month of September, the construction was finished. The mason was handed over to the care of Jean, and Monsieur de Merret went to bed in his wife's room.

On rising the following morning, he said carelessly:

"The deuce! I must go to the Maine for the passport." He put his hat on his head, advanced three steps toward the door, altered his mind and took the crucifix.

His wife trembled for joy. "He is going to Duvivier," she thought. As soon as the Count had left, Madame de Merret rang for Rosalie; then in a terrible voice:

"The trowel, the trowel!" she cried, "and quick to work! I saw how Gorenflot did it; we shall have time to make a hole and to mend it again."

In the twinkling of an eye, Rosalie brought a sort of mattock to her mistress, who with unparalleled ardor set about demolishing the wall. She had already knocked out several bricks and was preparing to strike a more decisive blow when she perceived Monsieur de Merret behind her. She fainted.

"Lay Madame on her bed," said the Count coldly. He had foreseen what would happen in his absence and had set a trap for his wife; he had simply written to the mayor, and had sent for Duvivier. The jeweler arrived just as the room had been put in order.

"Duvivier," inquired the Count, "did you buy crucifixes of the Spaniards who passed through here?"

"No, sir."

"That will do, thank you," he said, looking at his wife like a tiger. "Jean," he added, "you will see that my meals are served in the Countess's room; she is ill, and I shall not leave her until she has recovered."

The cruel gentleman stayed with his wife for twenty days. In the beginning, when there were sounds in the walled closet, and Josephine attempted to implore his pity for the dying stranger, he replied, without permitting her to say a word:

"You have sworn on the cross that there is no one there."

A TERRIBLY STRANGE BED

BY WILKIE COLLINS

This is known as "The Traveler's Story," and is the first in a capital series of stories somewhat similar in character that were published in 1856 in a volume entitled "After Dark." The story first appeared in "Household Words," of which Charles Dickens (the author's friend and great admirer) was editor. The author has stated that he was indebted to Mr. W. S. Herrick for the facts on which the story is founded.

A TERRIBLY STRANGE BED

By WILKIE COLLINS

Shortly after my education at college was finished, I happened to be staying at Paris with an English friend. We were both young men then, and lived, I am afraid, rather a wild life, in

the delightful city of our sojourn. One night we were idling about the neighborhood of the Palais Royal, doubtful to what amusement we should next betake ourselves. My friend proposed a visit to Frascati's; but his suggestion was not to my taste. I knew Frascati's, as the French saying is, by heart; had lost and won plenty of five-franc pieces there, merely for amusement's sake, until it was amusement no longer, and was thoroughly tired, in fact, of all the ghastly respectabilities of such a social anomaly as a respectable gambling-house.

"For Heaven's sake," said I to my friend, "let us go somewhere where we can see a little genuine, blackguard, poverty-stricken gaming, with no false gingerbread glitter thrown over it at all. Let us get away from fashionable Frascati's, to a house where they don't mind letting in a man with a ragged coat, or a man with no coat, ragged or otherwise."

"Very well," said my friend, "we needn't go out of the Palais Royal to find the sort of company you want. Here's the place just before us; as blackguard a place, by all report, as you could possibly wish to see."

In another minute we arrived at the door, and entered the house.

When we got upstairs, and had left our hats and sticks with the doorkeeper, we were admitted into the chief gambling-room. We did not find many people assembled there. But, few as the men were who looked up at us on our entrance, they were all types—lamentably true types—of their respective classes.

We had come to see blackguards; but these men were something worse. There is a comic side, more or less appreciable, in all blackguardism: here there was nothing but tragedy—mute, weird tragedy. The quiet in the room was horrible. The thin, haggard, long-haired young man, whose sunken eyes fiercely watched the turning up of the cards, never spoke; the flabby, fat-faced, pimply player, who pricked his piece of pasteboard perseveringly, to register how often black won, and how often red, never spoke; the dirty, wrinkled old man, with the vulture eyes and the darned greatcoat, who had lost his last sou, and still looked on desperately after he could play no longer, never spoke. Even the voice of the croupier sounded as if it were strangely dulled and thickened in the atmosphere of the room. I had entered the place to laugh, but the spectacle before me was something to weep over. I soon found it necessary to take refuge in excitement from the depression of spirits which was fast stealing on me. Unfortunately I sought the nearest excitement, by going to the table and beginning to play. Still more unfortunately, as the event will show, I won—won prodigiously; won incredibly; won at such a rate that the regular players at the table crowded round me; and staring at my stakes with hungry, superstitious eyes, whispered to one another that the English stranger was going to break the bank.

The game was Rouge et Noir. I had played at it in every city in Europe, without, however, the care or the wish to study the Theory of Chances—that philosopher's stone of all gamblers! And a gambler, in the strict sense of the word, I had never been. I was heart-whole from the corroding passion for play. My gaming was a mere idle amusement. I never resorted to it by necessity, because I never knew what it was to want money. I never practised it so incessantly as to lose more than I could afford, or to gain more. than I could coolly pocket without being thrown off my balance by my good luck. In short, I had hitherto frequented gambling-tables—just as I frequented ball-rooms and opera-houses—because they amused me, and because I had nothing better to do with my leisure hours.

But on this occasion it was very different—now, for the first time in my life, I felt what the passion for play really was. My successes first bewildered, and then, in the most literal meaning of the word, intoxicated me. Incredible as it may appear, it is nevertheless true, that I only lost when I attempted to estimate chances, and played according to previous calculation. If I left everything to luck, and staked without any care or consideration, I was sure to win—to win in the face of every recognized probability in favor of the bank. At first some of the men present ventured their money safely enough on my color; but I speedily increased my stakes to sums which they dared not risk. One after another they left off playing, and breathlessly looked on at my game.

Still, time after time, I staked higher and higher, and still won. The excitement in the room rose to fever pitch. The silence was interrupted by a deep-muttered chorus of oaths and

exclamations in different languages, every time the gold was shoveled across to my side of the table—even the imperturbable croupier dashed his rake on the floor in a (French) fury of astonishment at my success. But one man present preserved his self-possession, and that man was my friend. He came to my side, and whispering in English, begged me to leave the place, satisfied with what I had already gained. I must do him the justice to say that he repeated his warnings and entreaties several times, and only left me and went away, after I had rejected his advice (I was to all intents and purposes gambling drunk) in terms which rendered it impossible for him to address me again that night.

Shortly after he had gone, a hoarse voice behind me cried, "Permit me, my dear sir—permit me to restore to their proper place two napoleons which you have dropped. Wonderful luck, sir! I pledge you my word of honor, as an old soldier, in the course of my long experience in this sort of thing, I never saw such luck as yours—never! Go on, sir—*Sucre mille bombes*! Go on boldly, and break the bank!"

I turned round and saw, nodding and smiling at me with inveterate civility, a tall man, dressed in a frogged and braided surtout.

If I had been in my senses, I should have considered him, personally, as being rather a suspicious specimen of an old soldier. He had goggling, bloodshot eyes, mangy mustaches, and a broken nose. His voice betrayed a barrack-room intonation of the worst order, and he had the dirtiest pair of hands I ever saw—even in France. These little personal peculiarities exercised, however, no repelling influence on me. In the mad excitement, the reckless triumph of that moment, I was ready to "fraternize" with anybody who encouraged me in my game. I accepted the old soldier's offered pinch of snuff; clapped him on the back, and swore he was the honestest fellow in the world—the most glorious relic of the Grand Army that I had ever met with. "Go on!" cried my military friend, snapping his fingers in ecstasy—"Go on, and win! Break the bank—*Mille tonnerres!* my gallant English comrade, break the bank!"

And I *did* go on—went on at such a rate, that in another quarter of an hour the croupier called out, "Gentlemen, the bank has discontinued for to-night." All the notes, and all the gold in that "bank," now lay in a heap under my hands; the whole floating capital of the gambling-house was waiting to pour into my pockets!

"Tie up the money in your pocket-handkerchief, my worthy sir," said the old soldier, as I wildly plunged my hands into my heap of gold. "Tie it up, as we used to tie up a bit of dinner in the Grand Army; your winnings are too heavy for any breeches-pockets that ever were sewed. There! that's it—shovel them in, notes and all! *Credie!* what luck! Stop! another napoleon on the floor. *Ah! sacre petit polisson de Napoleon!* have I found thee at last? Now then, sir—two tight double knots each way with your honorable permission, and the money's safe. Feel it! feel it, fortunate sir! hard and round as a cannon-ball— *A bas* if they had only fired such cannon-balls at us at Austerlitz—*nom d'une pipe*! if they only had! And now, as an ancient grenadier, as an ex-brave of the French army, what remains for me to do? I ask what? Simply this, to entreat my valued English friend to drink a bottle of champagne with me, and toast the goddess Fortune in foaming goblets before we part!"

"Excellent ex-brave! Convivial ancient grenadier! Champagne by all means! An English cheer for an old soldier! Hurrah! hurrah! Another English cheer for the goddess Fortune! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

"Bravo! the Englishman; the amiable, gracious Englishman, in whose veins circulates the vivacious blood of France! Another glass? *A bas!*—the bottle is empty! Never mind! *Vive le vin!* I, the old soldier, order another bottle, and half a pound of *bonbons* with it!"

"No, no, ex-brave; never—ancient grenadier! *Your* bottle last time; my bottle this! Behold it! Toast away! The French Army! the great Napoleon! the present company! the croupier! the honest croupier's wife and daughters—if he has any! the ladies generally! everybody in the world!"

By the time the second bottle of champagne was emptied, I felt as if I had been drinking liquid fire—my brain seemed all aflame. No excess in wine had ever had this effect on me before in my life. Was it the result of a stimulant acting upon my system when I was in a

highly excited state? Was my stomach in a particularly disordered condition? Or was the champagne amazingly strong?

"Ex-brave of the French Army!" cried I, in a mad state of exhilaration, "*I* am on fire! how are you? You have set me on fire! Do you hear, my hero of Austerlitz? Let us have a third bottle of champagne to put the flame out!"

The old soldier wagged his head, rolled his goggle-eyes, until I expected to see them slip out of their sockets; placed his dirty forefinger by the side of his broken nose; solemnly ejaculated "Coffee!" and immediately ran off into an inner room.

The word pronounced by the eccentric veteran seemed to have a magical effect on the rest of the company present. With one accord they all rose to depart. Probably they had expected to profit by my intoxication; but finding that my new friend was benevolently bent on preventing me from getting dead drunk, had now abandoned all hope of thriving pleasantly on my winnings. Whatever their motive might be, at any rate they went away in a body. When the old soldier returned, and sat down again opposite to me at the table, we had the room to ourselves. I could see the croupier, in a sort of vestibule which opened out of it, eating his supper in solitude. The silence was now deeper than ever.

A sudden change, too, had come over the "ex-brave." He assumed a portentously solemn look; and when he spoke to me again, his speech was ornamented by no oaths, enforced by no finger-snapping, enlivened by no apostrophes or exclamations.

"Listen, my dear sir," said he, in mysteriously confidential tones—"listen to an old soldier's advice. I have been to the mistress of the house (a very charming woman, with a genius for cookery!) to impress on her the necessity of making us some particularly strong and good coffee. You must drink this coffee in order to get rid of your little amiable exaltation of spirits before you think of going home—you must, my good and gracious friend! With all that money to take home to-night, it is a sacred duty to yourself to have your wits about you. You are known to be a winner to an enormous extent by several gentlemen present to-night, who, in a certain point of view, are very worthy and excellent fellows; but they are mortal men, my dear sir, and they have their amiable weaknesses! Need I say more? Ah, no, no! you understand me! Now, this is what you must do—send for a cabriolet when you feel quite well again—draw up all the windows when you get into it—and tell the driver to take you home only through the large and well-lighted thoroughfares. Do this; and you and your money will be safe. Do this; and to-morrow you will thank an old soldier for giving you a word of honest advice."

Just as the ex-brave ended his oration in very lachrymose tones, the coffee came in, ready poured out in two cups. My attentive friend handed me one of the cups with a bow. I was parched with thirst, and drank it off at a draft. Almost instantly afterward I was seized with a fit of giddiness, and felt more completely intoxicated than ever. The room whirled round and round furiously; the old soldier seemed to be regularly bobbing up and down before me like the piston of a steam-engine. I was half deafened by a violent singing in my ears; a feeling of utter bewilderment, helplessness, idiocy, overcame me. I rose from my chair, holding on by the table to keep my balance; and stammered out that I felt dreadfully unwell—so unwell that I did not know how I was to get home.

"My dear friend," answered the old soldier—and even his voice seemed to be bobbing up and down as he spoke—"my dear friend, it would be madness to go home in *your* state; you would be sure to lose your money; you might be robbed and murdered with the greatest ease. *I* am going to sleep here: *do* you sleep here, too—they make up capital beds in this house—take one; sleep off the effects of the wine, and go home safely with your winnings to-morrow—to-morrow, in broad daylight."

I had but two ideas left: one, that I must never let go hold of my handkerchief full of money; the other, that I must lie down somewhere immediately, and fall off into a comfortable sleep. So I agreed to the proposal about the bed, and took the offered arm of the old soldier, carrying my money with my disengaged hand. Preceded by the croupier, we passed along some passages and up a flight of stairs into the bedroom which I was to occupy.

The ex-brave shook me warmly by the hand, proposed that we should breakfast together, and then, followed by the croupier, left me for the night.

I ran to the wash-hand stand; drank some of the water in my jug; poured the rest out, and plunged my face into it; then sat down in a chair and tried to compose myself. I soon felt better. The change for my lungs, from the fetid atmosphere of the gambling-room to the cool air of the apartment I now occupied, the almost equally refreshing change for my eyes, from the glaring gaslights of the "salon" to the dim, quiet flicker of one bedroom-candle, aided wonderfully the restorative effects of cold water. The giddiness left me, and I began to feel a little like a reasonable being again. My first thought was of the risk of sleeping all night in a gambling-house; my second, of the still greater risk of trying to get out after the house was closed, and of going home alone at night through the streets of Paris with a large sum of money about me. I had slept in worse places than this on my travels; so I determined to lock, bolt, and barricade my door, and take my chance till the next morning.

Accordingly, I secured myself against all intrusion; looked under the bed, and into the cupboard; tried the fastening of the window: and then, satisfied that I had taken every proper precaution, pulled off my upper clothing, put my light, which was a dim one, on the hearth among a feathery litter of wood-ashes, and got into bed, with the handkerchief full of money under my pillow.

I soon felt not only that I could not go to sleep, but that I could not even close my eyes. I was wide awake, and in a high fever. Every nerve in my body trembled—every one of my senses seemed to be preternaturally sharpened. I tossed and rolled, and tried every kind of position, and perseveringly sought out the cold corners of the bed, and all to no purpose. Now I thrust my arms over the clothes; now I poked them under the clothes; now I violently shot my legs straight out down to the bottom of the bed; now I convulsively coiled them up as near my chin as they would go; now I shook out my crumpled pillow, changed it to the cool side, patted it flat and lay down quietly on my back; now I fiercely doubled it in two, set it up on end, thrust it against the board of the bed, and tried a sitting posture. Every effort was in vain; I groaned with vexation as I felt that I was in for a sleepless night.

What could I do? I had no book to read. And yet, unless I found out some method of diverting my mind, I felt certain that I was in the condition to imagine all sorts of horrors; to rack my brain with forebodings of every possible and impossible danger; in short, to pass the night in suffering all conceivable varieties of nervous terror.

I raised myself on my elbow, and looked about the room—which was brightened by a lovely moonlight pouring straight through the window—to see if it contained any pictures or ornaments that I could at all clearly distinguish. While my eyes wandered from wall to wall, a remembrance of Le Maistre's delightful little book, "Voyage autour de ma Chambre," occurred to me. I resolved to imitate the French author, and find occupation and amusement enough to relieve the tedium of my wakefulness, by making a mental inventory of every article of furniture I could see, and by following up to their sources the multitude of associations which even a chair, a table, or a wash-hand stand may be made to call forth.

In the nervous, unsettled state of my mind at that moment, I found it much easier to make my inventory than to make my reflections, and thereupon soon gave up all hope of thinking in Le Maistre's fanciful track—or, indeed, of thinking at all. I looked about the room at the different articles of furniture, and did nothing more.

There was, first, the bed I was lying in; a four-post bed, of all things in the world to meet with in Paris—yes, a thorough clumsy British four-poster, with a regular top lined with chintz —the regular fringed valance all round—the regular stifling, unwholesome curtains, which I remembered having mechanically drawn back against the posts without particularly noticing the bed when I first got into the room. Then there was the marble-topped wash-hand stand, from which the water I had spilled, in my hurry to pour it out, was still dripping, slowly and more slowly, on to the brick floor. Then two small chairs, with my coat, waistcoat, and trousers flung on them. Then a large elbow-chair covered with dirty white dimity, with my cravat and shirt collar thrown over the back. Then a chest of drawers with two of the brass handles off, and a tawdry, broken china inkstand placed on it by way of ornament for the top.

Then the dressing-table, adorned by a very small looking-glass, and a very large pincushion. Then the window—an unusually large window. Then a dark old picture, which the feeble candle dimly showed me. It was the picture of a fellow in a high Spanish hat, crowned with a plume of towering feathers. A swarthy, sinister ruffian, looking upward, shading his eyes with his hand, and looking intently upward—it might be at some tall gallows on which he was going to be hanged. At any rate, he had the appearance of thoroughly deserving it.

This picture put a kind of constraint upon me to look upward too—at the top of the bed. It was a gloomy and not an interesting object, and I looked back at the picture. I counted the feathers in the man's hat—they stood out in relief—three white, two green. I observed the crown of his hat, which was of a conical shape, according to the fashion supposed to have been favored by Guido Fawkes. I wondered what he was looking up at. It couldn't be at the stars; such a desperado was neither astrologer nor astronomer. It must be at the high gallows, and he was going to be hanged presently. Would the executioner come into possession of his conical crowned hat and plume of feathers? I counted the feathers again—three white, two green.

While I still lingered over this very improving and intellectual employment, my thoughts insensibly began to wander. The moonlight shining into the room reminded me of a certain moonlight night in England—the night after a picnic party in a Welsh valley. Every incident of the drive homeward, through lovely scenery, which the moonlight made lovelier than ever, came back to my remembrance, though I had never given the picnic a thought for years; though, if I had *tried* to recollect it, I could certainly have recalled little or nothing of that scene long past. Of all the wonderful faculties that help to tell us we are immortal, which speaks the sublime truth more eloquently than memory? Here was I, in a strange house of the most suspicious character, in a situation of uncertainty, and even of peril, which might seem to make the cool exercise of my recollection almost out of the question; nevertheless, remembering, quite involuntarily, places, people, conversations, minute circumstances of every kind, which I had thought forgotten forever; which I could not possibly have recalled at will, even under the most favorable auspices. And what cause had produced in a moment the whole of this strange, complicated, mysterious effect? Nothing but some rays of moonlight shining in at my bedroom window.

I was still thinking of the picnic—of our merriment on the drive home—of the sentimental young lady who *would* quote "Childe Harold" because it was moonlight. I was absorbed by these past scenes and past amusements, when, in an instant, the thread on which my memories hung snapped asunder; my attention immediately came back to present things more vividly than ever, and I found myself, I neither knew why nor wherefore, looking hard at the picture again.

Looking for what?

Good God! the man had pulled his hat down on his brows! No! the hat itself was gone! Where was the conical crown? Where the feathers—three white, two green? Not there! In place of the hat and feathers, what dusky object was it that now hid his forehead, his eyes, his shading hand?

Was the bed moving?

I turned on my back and looked up. Was I mad? drunk? dreaming? giddy again? or was the top of the bed really moving down—sinking slowly, regularly, silently, horribly, right down throughout the whole of its length and breadth—right down upon me, as I lay underneath?

My blood seemed to stand still. A deadly, paralyzing coldness stole all over me as I turned my head round on the pillow and determined to test whether the bed-top was really moving or not, by keeping my eye on the man in the picture.

The next look in that direction was enough. The dull, black, frowzy outline of the valance above me was within an inch of being parallel with his waist. I still looked breathlessly. And steadily and slowly—very slowly—I saw the figure, and the line of frame below the figure, vanish, as the valance moved down before it.

I am, constitutionally, anything but timid. I have been on more than one occasion in peril of my life, and have not lost my self-possession for an instant; but when the conviction first settled on my mind that the bed-top was really moving, was steadily and continuously sinking down upon me, I looked up shuddering, helpless, panic-stricken, beneath the hideous machinery for murder, which was advancing closer and closer to suffocate me where I lay.

I looked up, motionless, speechless, breathless. The candle, fully spent, went out; but the moonlight still brightened the room. Down and down, without pausing and without sounding, came the bed-top, and still my panic terror seemed to bind me faster and faster to the mattress on which I lay—down and down it sank, till the dusty odor from the lining of the canopy came stealing into my nostrils.

At that final moment the instinct of self-preservation startled me out of my trance, and I moved at last. There was just room for me to roll myself sidewise off the bed. As I dropped noiselessly to the floor, the edge of the murderous canopy touched me on the shoulder.

Without stopping to draw my breath, without wiping the cold sweat from my face, I rose instantly on my knees to watch the bed-top. I was literally spellbound by it. If I had heard footsteps behind me, I could not have turned round; if a means of escape had been miraculously provided for me, I could not have moved to take advantage of it. The whole life in me was, at that moment, concentrated in my eyes.

It descended—the whole canopy, with the fringe round it, came down—down—close down; so close that there was not room now to squeeze my finger between the bed-top and the bed. I felt at the sides, and discovered that what had appeared to me from beneath to be the ordinary light canopy of a four-post bed was in reality a thick, broad mattress, the substance of which was concealed by the valance and its fringe. I looked up and saw the four posts rising hideously bare. In the middle of the bed-top was a huge wooden screw that had evidently worked it down through a hole in the ceiling, just as ordinary presses are worked down on the substance selected for compression. The frightful apparatus moved without making the faintest noise. There had been no creaking as it came down; there was now not the faintest sound from the room above. Amidst a dead and awful silence I beheld before me—in the nineteenth century, and in the civilized capital of France—such a machine for secret murder by suffocation as might have existed in the worst days of the Inquisition, in the lonely inns among the Hartz Mountains, in the mysterious tribunals of Westphalia! Still, as I looked on it, I could not move, I could hardly breathe, but I began to recover the power of thinking, and in a moment I discovered the murderous conspiracy framed against me in all its horror.

My cup of coffee had been drugged, and drugged too strongly. I had been saved from being smothered by having taken an overdose of some narcotic. How I had chafed and fretted at the fever fit which had preserved my life by keeping me awake! How recklessly I had confided myself to the two wretches who had led me into this room, determined, for the sake of my winnings, to kill me in my sleep by the surest and most horrible contrivance for secretly accomplishing my destruction! How many men, winners like me, had slept, as I had proposed to sleep, in that bed, and had never been seen or heard of more! I shuddered at the bare idea of it.

But ere long all thought was again suspended by the sight of the murderous canopy moving once more. After it had remained on the bed—as nearly as I could guess—about ten minutes, it began to move up again. The villains who worked it from above evidently believed that their purpose was now accomplished. Slowly and silently, as it had descended, that horrible bed-top rose toward its former place. When it reached the upper extremities of the four posts, it reached the ceiling too. Neither hole nor screw could be seen; the bed became in appearance an ordinary bed again—the canopy an ordinary canopy—even to the most suspicious eyes.

Now, for the first time, I was able to move—to rise from my knees—to dress myself in my upper clothing—and to consider of how I should escape. If I betrayed by the smallest noise that the attempt to suffocate me had failed, I was certain to be murdered. Had I made any noise already? I listened intently, looking toward the door.

No! no footsteps in the passage outside—no sound of a tread, light or heavy, in the room above—absolute silence everywhere. Besides locking and bolting my door, I had moved an old wooden chest against it, which I had found under the bed. To remove this chest (my blood ran cold as I thought of what its contents *might* be!) without making some disturbance was impossible; and, moreover, to think of escaping through the house, now barred up for the night, was sheer insanity. Only one chance was left me—the window. I stole to it on tiptoe.

My bedroom was on the first floor, above an entresol, and looked into the back street. I raised my hand to open the window, knowing that on that action hung, by the merest hair-breadth, my chance of safety. They keep vigilant watch in a House of Murder. If any part of the frame cracked, if the hinge creaked, I was a lost man! It must have occupied me at least five minutes, reckoning by time—five hours reckoning by suspense—to open that window. I succeeded in doing it silently—in doing it with all the dexterity of a house-breaker—and then looked down into the street. To leap the distance beneath me would be almost certain destruction! Next, I looked round at the sides of the house. Down the left side ran a thick water-pipe—it passed close by the outer edge of the window. The moment I saw the pipe, I knew I was saved. My breath came and went freely for the first time since I had seen the canopy of the bed moving down upon me!

To some men the means of escape which I had discovered might have seemed difficult and dangerous enough—to me the prospect of slipping down the pipe into the street did not suggest even a thought of peril. I had always been accustomed, by the practise of gymnastics, to keep up my schoolboy powers as a daring and expert climber; and knew that my head, hands, and feet would serve me faithfully in any hazards of ascent or descent. I had already got one leg over the window-sill, when I remembered the handkerchief filled with money under my pillow. I could well have afforded to leave it behind me, but I was revengefully determined that the miscreants of the gambling-house should miss their plunder as well as their victim. So I went back to the bed and tied the heavy handkerchief at my back by my cravat.

Just as I had made it tight and fixed it in a comfortable place, I thought I heard a sound of breathing outside the door. The chill feeling of horror ran through me again as I listened. No! dead silence still in the passage—I had only heard the night air blowing softly into the room. The next moment I was on the window-sill—and the next I had a firm grip on the water-pipe with my hands and knees.

I slid down into the street easily and quietly, as I thought I should, and immediately set off at the top of my speed to a branch "Prefecture" of Police, which I knew was situated in the immediate neighborhood. A "Sub-prefect," and several picked men among his subordinates, happened to be up, maturing, I believe, some scheme for discovering the perpetrator of a mysterious murder which all Paris was talking of just then. When I began my story, in a breathless hurry and in very bad French, I could see that the Sub-prefect suspected me of being a drunken Englishman who had robbed somebody; but he soon altered his opinion as I went on, and before I had anything like concluded, he shoved all the papers before him into a drawer, put on his hat, supplied me with another (for I was bareheaded), ordered a file of soldiers, desired his expert followers to get ready all sorts of tools for breaking open doors and ripping up brick flooring, and took my arm, in the most friendly and familiar manner possible, to lead me with him out of the house. I will venture to say that when the Sub-prefect was a little boy, and was taken for the first time to the play, he was not half as much pleased as he was now at the job in prospect for him at the gambling-house!

Away we went through the streets, the Sub-prefect cross-examining and congratulating me in the same breath as we marched at the head of our formidable *posse comitatus*. Sentinels were placed at the back and front of the house the moment we got to it, a tremendous battery of knocks was directed against the door; a light appeared at a window; I was told to conceal myself behind the police—then came more knocks, and a cry of "Open in the name of the law!" At that terrible summons bolts and locks gave way before an invisible hand, and the moment after the Sub-prefect was in the passage, confronting a waiter half dressed and ghastly pale. This was the short dialogue which immediately took place:

"We want to see the Englishman who is sleeping in this house?"

"He went away hours ago."

"He did no such thing. His friend went away; *he* remained. Show us to his bedroom!"

"I swear to you, Monsieur le Sous-prefect, he is not here! he—"

"I swear to you, Monsieur le Garçon, he is. He slept here—he didn't find your bed comfortable—he came to us to complain of it—here he is among my men—and here am I ready to look for a flea or two in his bedstead. Renaudin! (calling to one of the subordinates, and pointing to the waiter), collar that man, and tie his hands behind him. Now, then, gentlemen, let us walk upstairs!"

Every man and woman in the house was secured—the "Old Soldier" the first. Then I identified the bed in which I had slept, and then we went into the room above.

No object that was at all extraordinary appeared in any part of it. The Sub-prefect looked round the place, commanded everybody to be silent, stamped twice on the floor, called for a candle, looked attentively at the spot he had stamped on, and ordered the flooring there to be carefully taken up. This was done in no time. Lights were produced, and we saw a deep raftered cavity between the floor of this room and the ceiling of the room beneath. Through this cavity there ran perpendicularly a sort of case of iron thickly greased; and inside the case appeared the screw, which communicated with the bed-top below. Extra lengths of screw, freshly oiled; levers covered with felt; all the complete upper works of a heavy press—constructed with infernal ingenuity so as to join the fixtures below, and when taken to pieces again to go into the smallest possible compass—were next discovered and pulled out on the floor. After some little difficulty the Sub-prefect succeeded in putting the machinery together, and, leaving his men to work it, descended with me to the bedroom. The smothering canopy was then lowered, but not so noiselessly as I had seen it lowered. When I mentioned this to the Sub-prefect, his answer, simple as it was, had a terrible significance. "My men," said he, "are working down the bed-top for the first time—the men whose money you won were in better practise."

We left the house in the sole possession of two police agents—every one of the inmates being removed to prison on the spot. The Sub-prefect, after taking down my "procès verbal" in his office, returned with me to my hotel to get my passport. "Do you think," I asked, as I gave it to him, "that any men have really been smothered in that bed, as they tried to smother *me*?"

"I have seen dozens of drowned men laid out at the Morgue," answered the Sub-prefect, "in whose pocketbooks were found letters stating that they had committed suicide in the Seine, because they had lost everything at the gaming-table. Do I know how many of those men entered the same gambling-house that *you* entered? won as *you* won? took that bed as *you* took it? slept in it? were smothered in it? and were privately thrown into the river, with a letter of explanation written by the murderers and placed in their pocketbooks? No man can say how many or how few have suffered the fate from which you have escaped. The people of the gambling-house kept their bedstead machinery a secret from us—even from the police! The dead kept the rest of the secret for them. Good-night, or rather good-morning, Monsieur Faulkner! Be at my office again at nine o'clock—in the meantime, au revoir!"

The rest of my story is soon told. I was examined and reexamined; the gambling-house was strictly searched all through from top to bottom; the prisoners were separately interrogated; and two of the less guilty among them made a confession. I discovered that the Old Soldier was the master of the gambling-house—*justice* discovered that he had been drummed out of the army as a vagabond years ago; that he had been guilty of all sorts of villainies since; that he was in possession of stolen property, which the owners identified; and that he, the croupier, another accomplice, and the woman who had made my cup of coffee, were all in the secret of the bedstead. There appeared some reason to doubt whether the inferior persons attached to the house knew anything of the suffocating machinery; and they received the benefit of that doubt, by being treated simply as thieves and vagabonds. As for the Old Soldier and his two head myrmidons, they went to the galleys; the woman who had drugged my coffee was imprisoned for I forget how many years; the regular attendants at the gambling-house were considered "suspicious," and placed under "surveillance"; and I

became, for one whole week (which is a long time), the head "lion" in Parisian society. My adventure was dramatized by three illustrious play-makers, but never saw theatrical daylight; for the censorship forbade the introduction on the stage of a correct copy of the gambling-house bedstead.

One good result was produced by my adventure, which any censorship must have approved: it cured me of ever again trying "Rouge et Noir" as an amusement. The sight of a green cloth, with packs of cards and heaps of money on it, will henceforth be forever associated in my mind with the sight of a bed canopy descending to suffocate me in the silence and darkness of the night.

THE CAPTURE OF BILL SIKES

BY CHARLES DICKENS

With such reality and vividness has Dickens drawn the character of Bill Sikes that he stands to the world a typical example of the bully and ruffian. "Oliver Twist," from which the story is taken, is a picture of vice and crime, though containing touches of great pathos and tenderness. Dickens, in his writings, drew popular attention to public wrongs and abuses suffered by the lower classes of London and was one of the most potent influences of the Nineteenth Century toward social reform in England.

THE CAPTURE OF BILL SIKES

By CHARLES DICKENS

It was nearly two hours before daybreak; that time which, in the autumn of the year, may be truly called the dead of night; when the streets are silent and deserted; when even sound appears to slumber, and profligacy and riot have staggered home to dream; it was at this still and silent hour that the Jew sat watching in his old lair, with face so distorted and pale, and eyes so red and bloodshot, that he looked less like a man than like some hideous phantom: moist from the grave, and worried by an evil spirit.

He sat crouching over a cold hearth, wrapped in an old torn coverlet, with his face turned toward a wasting candle that stood upon a table by his side. His right hand was raised to his lips, and as, absorbed in thought, he bit his long black nails, he disclosed among his toothless gums a few such fangs as should have been a dog's or rat's.

Stretched upon a mattress on the floor lay Noah Claypole, fast asleep. Toward him the old man sometimes directed his eyes for an instant, and then brought them back again to the candle; which, with long-burned wick drooping almost double, and hot grease falling down in clots upon the table, plainly showed that his thoughts were busy elsewhere.

Indeed they were. Mortification at the overthrow of his notable scheme; hatred of the girl who had dared to palter with strangers; an utter distrust of the sincerity of her refusal to yield him up; bitter disappointment at the loss of his revenge on Sikes; the fear of detection, and ruin, and death; and a fierce and deadly rage kindled by all; these were the passionate considerations which, following close upon each other with rapid and ceaseless whirl, shot through the brain of Fagin, as every evil thought and blackest purpose lay working at his heart.

He sat without changing his attitude in the least, or appearing to take the smallest heed of time, until his quick ear seemed to be attracted by a footstep in the street.

"At last," muttered the Jew, wiping his dry and fevered mouth. "At last!"

The bell rang gently as he spoke. He crept upstairs to the door, and presently returned accompanied by a man muffled to the chin, who carried a bundle under one arm. Sitting down and throwing back his outer coat, the man displayed the burly frame of Sikes.

"There!" he said, laying the bundle on the table. "Take care of that, and do the most you can with it. It's been trouble enough to get; I thought I should have been here three hours ago."

Fagin laid his hand upon the bundle, and locking it in the cupboard, sat down again without speaking. But he did not take his eyes off the robber for an instant during this action; and now that they sat over against each other, face to face, he looked fixedly at him, with his lips quivering so violently, and his face so altered by the emotions which had mastered him, that the housebreaker involuntarily drew back his chair and surveyed him with a look of real affright.

"Wot now?" cried Sikes. "Wot do you look at a man so for?"

The Jew raised his right hand and shook his trembling forefinger in the air; but his passion was so great that the power of speech was for the moment gone.

"Damme!" said Sikes, feeling in his breast with a look of alarm. "He's gone mad. I must look to myself here."

"No, no," rejoined Fagin, finding his voice. "It's not—you're not the person, Bill. I've no—no fault to find with you."

"Oh, you haven't, haven't you?" said Sikes, looking sternly at him, and ostentatiously passing a pistol into a more convenient pocket. "That's lucky—for one of us. Which one that is, don't matter."

"I've got that to tell you, Bill," said the Jew, drawing his chair nearer, "will make you worse than me."

"Ay?" returned the robber, with an incredulous air. "Tell away. Look sharp, or Nance will think I'm lost."

"Lost!" cried Fagin. "She has pretty well settled that, in her own mind, already."

Sikes looked with an aspect of great perplexity into the Jew's face, and reading no satisfactory explanation of the riddle there, clinched his coat-collar in his huge hand and shook him soundly.

"Speak, will you!" he said; "or if you don't, it shall be for want of breath. Open your mouth and say wot you've got to say in plain words. Out with it, you thundering old cur—out with it!"

"Suppose that lad that's lying there—" Fagin began.

Sikes turned round to where Noah was sleeping, as if he had not previously observed him. "Well?" he said, resuming his former position.

"Suppose that lad," pursued the Jew, "was to peach—to blow upon us all—first seeking out the right folks for the purpose, and then having a meeting with 'em in the street to paint our likenesses, describe every mark that they might know us by, and the crib where we might be most easily taken. Suppose he was to do all this, and besides to blow upon a plant we've all been in, more or less—of his own fancy; not grabbed, trapped, tried, earwigged by the parson and brought to it on bread and water—but of his own fancy; to please his own taste; stealing out at nights to find those most interested against us, and peaching to them. Do you hear me?" cried the Jew, his eyes flashing with rage. "Suppose he did all this, what then?"

"What then!" replied Sikes, with a tremendous oath. "If he was left alive till I came, I'd grind his skull under the iron heel of my boot into as many grains as there are hairs upon his head."

"What if *I* did it?" cried the Jew, almost in a yell. "*I* that know so much, and could hang so many besides myself!"

"I don't know," replied Sikes, clenching his teeth and turning white at the mere suggestion. "I'd do something in the jail that 'ud get me put in irons; and if I was tried along with you, I'd fall upon you with them in the open court, and beat your brains out afore the people. I should have such strength," muttered the robber, poising his brawny arm, "that I could smash your head as if a loaded wagon had gone over it."

"You would?"

"Would I!" said the housebreaker. "Try me."

"If it was Charley, or the Dodger, or Bet, or—"

"I don't care who," replied Sikes, impatiently. "Whoever it was, I'd serve them the same."

Fagin looked hard at the robber; and, motioning him to be silent, stooped over the bed upon the floor, and shook the sleeper to rouse him. Sikes leaned forward in his chair, looking on with his hands upon his knees, as if wondering much what all this questioning and preparation was to end in.

"Bolter, Bolter! Poor lad!" said Fagin, looking up with an expression of devilish anticipation, and speaking slowly and with marked emphasis. "He's tired—tired with watching for *her* so long—watching for *her*, Bill."

"Wot d'ye mean?" asked Sikes, drawing back.

The Jew made no answer, but bending over the sleeper again, hauled him into a sitting posture. When his assumed name had been repeated several times, Noah rubbed his eyes, and, giving a heavy yawn, looked sleepily about him.

"Tell me that again—once again, just for him to hear," said the Jew, pointing to Sikes as he spoke.

"Tell yer what?" asked the sleepy Noah, shaking himself pettishly.

"That about—NANCY," said the Jew, clutching Sikes by the wrist, as if to prevent his leaving the house before he had heard enough. "You followed her?"

"Yes."

"To London Bridge?"

"Yes."

"Where she met two people?"

"So she did."

"A gentleman and a lady that she had gone to of her own accord before, who asked her to give up all her pals, and Monks first, which she did—and to describe him, which she did—and to tell her what house it was that we meet at, and go to, which she did—and where it could be best watched from, which she did—and what time the people went there, which she did. She did all this. She told it all every word without a threat, without a murmur—she did—did she not?" cried the Jew, half mad with fury.

"All right," replied Noah, scratching his head. "That's just what it was!"

"What did they say about last Sunday?" demanded the Jew.

"About last Sunday!" replied Noah, considering. "Why, I told yer that before."

"Again. Tell it again!" cried Fagin, tightening his grasp on Sikes, and brandishing his other hand aloft, as the foam flew from his lips.

"They asked her," said Noah, who, as he grew more wakeful, seemed to have a dawning perception who Sikes was, "they asked her why she didn't come, last Sunday, as she promised. She said she couldn't."

"Why—why?" interrupted the Jew, triumphantly. "Tell him that."

"Because she was forcibly kept at home by Bill, the man she had told them of before," replied Noah.

"What more of him?" cried the Jew. "What more of the man she had told them of before? Tell him that, tell him that."

"Why, that she couldn't very easily get out-of-doors unless he knew where she was going to," said Noah; "and so the first time she went to see the lady, she—ha! ha! ha! it made me laugh when she said it, that it did—she gave him a drink of laudanum."

"Hell's fire!" cried Sikes, breaking fiercely from the Jew. "Let me go!"

Flinging the old man from him, he rushed from the room, and darted, wildly and furiously, up the stairs.

"Bill, Bill!" cried the Jew, following him hastily. "A word. Only a word."

The word would not have been exchanged, but that the housebreaker was unable to open the door, on which he was expending fruitless oaths and violence when the Jew came panting up.

"Let me out," said Sikes. "Don't speak to me; it's not safe. Let me out, I say."

"Hear me speak a word," rejoined the Jew, laying his hand upon the lock. "You won't be __"

"Well?" replied the other.

"You won't be—too—violent, Bill?" whined the Jew.

The day was breaking, and there was light enough for the men to see each other's faces. They exchanged one brief glance; there was a fire in the eyes of both which could not be mistaken.

"I mean," said Fagin, showing that he felt all disguise was now useless, "not too violent for safety. Be crafty, Bill, and not too bold."

Sikes made no reply; but pulling open the door, of which the Jew had turned the lock, dashed into the silent streets.

Without one pause, or moment's consideration; without once turning his head to the right or left, or raising his eyes to the sky or lowering them to the ground, but looking straight before him with savage resolution: his teeth so tightly compressed that the strained jaw seemed starting through his skin, the robber held on his headlong course, nor muttered a word, nor relaxed a muscle, until he reached his own door. He opened it, softly, with a key; strode lightly up the stairs; and entering his own room, double-locked the door, and lifting the heavy table against it, drew back the curtain of the bed.

The girl was lying, half dressed, upon it. He had roused her from her sleep, for she raised herself with a hurried and startled look.

"Get up!" said the man.

"It is you, Bill!" said the girl, with an expression of pleasure at his return.

"It is," was the reply. "Get up."

There was a candle burning, but the man hastily drew it from the candlestick and hurled it under the grate. Seeing the faint light of early day, without, the girl rose to undraw the curtain.

"Let it be," said Sikes, thrusting his hand before her. "There's light enough for wot I've got to do."

"Bill," said the girl, in a low voice of alarm, "why do you look like that at me?"

The robber sat regarding her, for a few seconds, with dilated nostrils and heaving breast; and then, grasping her by the head and throat, dragged her into the middle of the room, and looking once toward the door, placed his heavy hand upon her mouth.

"Bill, Bill!" gasped the girl, wrestling with the strength of mortal fear—"I—I won't scream or cry—not once—hear me—speak to me—tell me what I have done?"

"You know, you she-devil!" returned the robber, suppressing his breath. "You were watched to-night; every word you said was heard."

"Then spare my life for the love of Heaven, as I spared yours," rejoined the girl, clinging to him. "Bill, dear Bill, you can not have the heart to kill me. Oh! think of all I have given up, only this one night, for you. You shall have time to think, and save yourself this crime; I will not loose my hold, you can not throw me off. Bill, Bill, for dear God's sake, for your own, for mine, stop before you spill my blood! I have been true to you, upon my guilty soul I have!"

The man struggled violently to release his arms; but those of the girl were clasped round his, and tear her as he would, he could not tear them away.

"Bill," cried the girl, striving to lay her head upon his breast, "the gentleman, and that dear lady, told me to-night of a home in some foreign country where I could end my days in solitude and peace. Let me see them again, and beg them, on my knees, to show the same mercy and goodness to you; and let us both leave this dreadful place, and far apart lead better lives, and forget how we have lived, except in prayers, and never see each other more. It is never too late to repent. They told me so—I feel it now—but we must have time—a little, little time!"

The housebreaker freed one arm, and grasped his pistol. The certainty of immediate detection if he fired flashed across his mind even in the midst of his fury, and he beat it twice with all the force he could summon upon the upturned face that almost touched his own.

She staggered and fell, nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead; but raising herself, with difficulty, on her knees, drew from her bosom a white handkerchief—Rose Maylie's own—and holding it up, in her folded hands, as high toward Heaven as her feeble strength would allow, breathed one prayer for mercy to her Maker.

It was a ghastly figure to look upon. The murderer, staggering backward to the wall, and shutting out the sight with his hand, seized a heavy club and struck her down.

Of all bad deeds that under cover of the darkness had been committed within wide London's bounds since night hung over it, that was the worst. Of all the horrors that rose with an ill scent upon the morning air, that was the foulest and most cruel.

The sun—the bright sun, that brings back, not light alone, but new life, and hope, and freshness to man—burst upon the crowded city in clear and radiant glory. Through costly colored glass and paper-mended window, though cathedral dome and rotten crevice, it shed its equal ray. It lighted up the room where the murdered woman lay. It did. He tried to shut it

out, but it would stream in. If the sight had been a ghastly one in the dull morning, what was it, now, in all that brilliant light!

He had not moved; he had been afraid to stir. There had been a moan and motion of the hand; and with terror added to rage, he had struck and struck again. Once he threw a rug over it; but it was worse to fancy the eyes, and imagine them moving toward him, than to see them glaring upward, as if watching the reflection of the pool of gore that quivered and danced in the sunlight on the ceiling. He had plucked it off again. And there was the body—mere flesh and blood, no more—but such flesh, and so much blood!

He struck a light, kindled a fire, and thrust the club into it. There was hair upon the end, which blazed and shrunk into a light cinder, and, caught by the air, whirled up the chimney. Even that frightened him, sturdy as he was; but he held the weapon till it broke; and then piled it on the coals to burn away and smolder into ashes. He washed himself, and rubbed his clothes; there were spots that would not be removed, but he cut the pieces out, and burned them. How those stains were dispersed about the room! The very feet of the dog were bloody.

All this time he had never once turned his back upon the corpse; no, not for a moment. Such preparations completed, he moved, backward, toward the door, dragging the dog with him, lest he should soil his feet anew and carry out new evidences of the crime into the streets. He shut the door softly, locked it, took the key, and left the house.

He crossed over, and glanced up at the window, to be sure that nothing was visible from the outside. There was the curtain still drawn, which she would have opened to admit the light she never saw again. It lay nearly under there. *He* knew that. God, how the sun poured down upon the very spot!

The glance was instantaneous. It was a relief to have got free of the room. He whistled on the dog, and walked rapidly away.

He went through Islington; strode up the hill at Highgate on which stands the stone in honor of Whittington; turned down to Highgate Hill, unsteady of purpose, and uncertain where to go; struck off to the right again, almost as soon as he began to descend it; and taking the footpath across the fields, skirted Caen Wood, and so came out on Hampstead Heath. Traversing the hollow by the Vale of Health, he mounted the opposite bank, and crossing the road which joins the villages of Hampstead and Highgate, made along the remaining portion of the Heath to the fields at North End, in one of which he laid himself down under a hedge, and slept.

Soon he was up again, and away—not far into the country, but back toward London by the high-road—then back again—then over another part of the same ground as he had already traversed—then wandering up and down in fields, and lying on ditches' brinks to rest, and starting up to make for some other spot, and do the same, and ramble on again.

Where could he go, that was near and not too public, to get some meat and drink? Hendon. That was a good place, not far off, and out of most people's way. Thither he directed his steps—running sometimes, and sometimes, with a strange perversity, loitering at a snail's pace, or stopping altogether and idly breaking the hedges with his stick. But when he got there, all the people he met—the very children at the doors—seemed to view him with suspicion. Back he turned again, without the courage to purchase bit or drop, though he had tasted no food for many hours; and once more he lingered on the Heath, uncertain where to go.

He wandered over miles and miles of ground, and still came back to the old place. Morning and noon had passed, and the day was on the wane, and still he rambled to and fro, and up and down, and round and round, and still lingered about the same spot.

At last he got away, and shaped his course for Hatfield.

It was nine o'clock at night, when the man, quite tired out, and the dog, limping and lame from the unaccustomed exercise, turned down the hill by the church of the quiet village, and plodding along the little street, crept into a small public-house, whose scanty light had guided

them to the spot. There was a fire in the tap-room, and some country laborers were drinking before it. They made room for the stranger, but he sat down in the furthest corner, and ate and drank alone, or rather with his dog, to whom he cast a morsel of food from time to time.

The conversation of the men assembled here turned upon the neighboring land and farmers; and when those topics were exhausted, upon the age of some old man who had been buried on the previous Sunday; the young men present considering him very old, and the old men present declaring him to have been quite young—not older, one white-haired grandfather said, than he was—with ten or fifteen years of life in him at least—if he had taken care; if he had taken care.

There was nothing to attract attention, or excite alarm, in this. The robber, after paying his reckoning, sat silent and unnoticed in his corner, and had almost dropped asleep, when he was half awakened by the noisy entrance of a new-comer.

This was an antic-fellow, half pedler and half mountebank, who traveled about the country on foot, to vend hones, strops, razors, washballs, harness paste, medicine for dogs and horses, cheap perfumery, cosmetics, and such-like wares, which he carried in a case slung to his back. His entrance was the signal for various homely jokes with the countrymen, which slackened not until he had made his supper, and opened his box of treasures, when he ingeniously contrived to unite business with amusement.

"And what be that stoof? Good to eat, Harry?" asked a grinning countryman, pointing to some composition-cakes in one corner.

"This," said the fellow, producing one—"this is the infallible and invaluable composition for removing all sorts of stain, rust, dirt, mildew, spick, speck, spot, or spatter, from silk, satin, linen, cambric, cloth, crape, stuff, carpet, merino, muslin, bombazeen, or woolen stuff. Wine-stains, fruit-stains, beer-stains, water-stains, paint-stains, pitch-stains, any stains, all come out at one rub with the infallible and invaluable composition. If a lady stains her honor, she has only need to swallow one cake and she's cured at once—for it's poison. If a gentleman wants to prove his, he has only need to bolt one little square, and he has put it beyond question—for it's quite as satisfactory as a pistol-bullet, and a great deal nastier in the flavor, consequently the more credit in taking it. One penny a square. With all these virtues, one penny a square!"

There were two buyers directly, and more of the listeners plainly hesitated. The vender observing this, increased in loquacity.

"It's all bought up as fast as it can be made," said the fellow. "There are fourteen water-mills, six steam-engines, and a galvanic battery, always a-working upon it, and they can't make it fast enough, though the men work so hard that they die off, and the widows is pensioned directly, with twenty pound a year for each of the children, and a premium of fifty for twins. One penny a square! Two halfpence is all the same, and four farthings is received with joy. One penny a square! Wine-stains, fruit-stains, beer-stains, water-stains, paint-stains, pitch-stains, mud-stains, blood-stains. Here is a stain upon the hat of a gentleman in the company that I'll take clean out before he can order me a pint of ale."

"Hah!" cried Sikes, starting up. "Give that back."

"I'll take it clean out, sir," replied the man, winking to the company, "before you can come across the room to get it. Gentlemen, all observe the dark stain upon this gentleman's hat, no wider than a shilling, but thicker than a half-crown. Whether it is a wine-stain, fruit-stain, beer-stain, water-stain, paint-stain, pitch-stain, mud-stain, or blood-stain—"

The man got no further, for Sikes, with a hideous imprecation, overthrew the table, and tearing the hat from him, burst out of the house.

With the same perversity of feeling and irresolution that had fastened upon him, despite himself, all day, the murderer, finding that he was not followed, and that they most probably considered him some drunken sullen fellow, turned back up the town, and getting out of the glare of the lamps of a stage-coach that was standing in the street, was walking past, when he

recognized the mail from London, and saw that it was standing at the little post-office. He almost knew what was to come; but he crossed over, and listened.

The guard was standing at the door, waiting for the letter-bag. A man, dressed like a gamekeeper, came up at the moment, and he handed him a basket which lay ready on the pavement.

"That's for your people," said the guard. "Now, look alive in there, will you. Damn that 'ere bag, it warn't ready night afore last; this won't do, you know!"

"Anything new up in town, Ben?" asked the gamekeeper, drawing back to the window-shutters, the better to admire the horses.

"No, nothing that I knows on," replied the man, pulling on his gloves. "Corn's up a little. I heerd talk of a murder, too, down Spitalfields way, but I don't reckon much upon it."

"Oh, that's quite true," said a gentleman inside who was looking out of the window. "And a dreadful murder it was."

"Was it, sir?" rejoined the guard, touching his hat. "Man or woman, pray, sir?"

"A woman," replied the gentleman. "It is supposed—"

"Now, Ben," cried the coachman, impatiently.

"Damn that 'ere bag," cried the guard; "are you gone to sleep in there?"

"Coming!" cried the office-keeper, running out.

"Coming," growled the guard. "Ah, and so's the young 'ooman of property that's going to take a fancy to me, but I don't know when. Here, give hold. All ri—ight!"

The horn sounded a few cheerful notes, and the coach was gone.

Sikes remained standing in the street, apparently unmoved by what he had just heard, and agitated by no stronger feeling than a doubt where to go. At length he went back again, and took the road which leads from Hatfield to St. Albans.

He went on, doggedly; but as he left the town behind him and plunged into the solitude and darkness of the road, he felt a dread and awe creeping upon him which shook him to the core. Every object before him, substance or shadow, still or moving, took the semblance of some fearful thing; but these fears were nothing compared to the sense that haunted him of that morning's ghastly figure following at his heels. He could trace its shadow in the gloom, supply the smallest item of the outline, and note how stiff and solemn it seemed to stalk along. He could hear its garments rustling in the leaves; and every breath of wind came laden with that last low cry. If he stopped, it did the same. If he ran, it followed—not running too: that would have been a relief; but like a corpse endowed with the mere machinery of life, and borne on one slow melancholy wind that never rose or fell.

At times, he turned, with desperate determination, resolved to beat this phantom off, though it should look him dead; but the hair rose on his head, and his blood stood still, for it had turned with him and was behind him then. He had kept it before him that morning, but it was behind him now—always. He leaned his back against a bank, and felt that it stood above him, visibly out against the cold night sky. He threw himself upon the road—on his back upon the road. At his head it stood, silent, erect, and still—a living gravestone, with its epitaph in blood.

Let no man talk of murderers escaping justice, and hint that Providence must sleep. There were twenty score of violent deaths in one long minute of that agony of fear.

There was a shed in a field he passed that offered shelter for the night. Before the door were three tall poplar trees, which made it very dark within; and the wind moaned through

them with a dismal wail. He *could not* walk on till daylight came again; and here he stretched himself close to the wall—to undergo new torture.

For now a vision came before him, as constant and more terrible than that from which he had escaped. Those widely staring eyes, so lustreless and so glassy that he had better borne to see them than think upon them, appeared in the midst of the darkness: light in themselves, but giving light to nothing. There were but two, but they were everywhere. If he shut out the sight, there came the room with every well-known object—some, indeed, that he would have forgotten, if he had gone over its contents from memory—each in its accustomed place. The body was in *its* place, and its eyes were as he saw them when he stole away. He got up, and rushed into the field without. The figure was behind him. He reentered the shed, and shrank down once more. The eyes were there, before he had laid himself along.

And here he remained, in such terror as none but he can know, trembling in every limb, and the cold sweat starting from every pore, when suddenly there arose upon the night wind the noise of distant shouting and the roar of voices mingled in alarm and wonder. Any sound of men in that lonely place, even though it conveyed a real cause of alarm, was something to him. He regained his strength and energy at the prospect of personal danger; and, springing to his feet, rushed into the open air.

The broad sky seemed on fire. Rising into the air with showers of sparks, and rolling one above the other, were sheets of flame, lighting the atmosphere for miles round, and driving clouds of smoke in the direction where he stood. The shouts grew louder as new voices swelled the roar, and he could hear the cry of "Fire!" mingled with the ringing of an alarm-bell, the fall of heavy bodies, and the crackling of flames as they twined round some new obstacle, and shot aloft as though refreshed by food. The noise increased as he looked. There were people there—men and women—light, bustle. It was like new life to him. He darted onward—straight, headlong—dashing through brier and brake, and leaping gate and fence as madly as the dog, who careered with loud and sounding bark before him.

He came upon the spot. There were half-dressed figures tearing to and fro, some endeavoring to drag the frightened horses from the stables, others driving the cattle from the yard and outhouses, and others coming laden from the burning pile, amid a shower of falling sparks and the tumbling down of red-hot beams. The apertures, where doors and windows stood an hour ago, disclosed a mass of raging fire: walls rocked and crumbled into the burning well; the molten lead and iron poured down, white-hot, upon the ground. Women and children shrieked, and men encouraged each other with noisy shouts and cheers. The clanking of the engine-pumps, and the spurting and hissing of the water as it fell upon the blazing wood, added to the tremendous roar. He shouted, too, till he was hoarse; and, flying from memory and himself, plunged into the thickest of the throng.

Hither and thither he dived that night: now working at the pumps, and now hurrying through the smoke and flame, but never ceasing to engage himself wherever noise and men were thickest. Up and down the ladders, upon the roofs of buildings, over floors that quaked and trembled with his weight, under the lee of falling bricks and stones, in every part of that great fire was he; but he bore a charmed life, and had neither scratch nor bruise, nor weariness nor thought, till morning dawned again, and only smoke and blackened ruins remained.

This mad excitement over, there returned, with tenfold force, the dreadful consciousness of his crime. He looked suspiciously about him, for the men were conversing in groups, and he feared to be the subject of their talk. The dog obeyed the significant beck of his finger, and they drew off, stealthily, together. He passed near an engine where some men were seated, and they called to him to share in their refreshment. He took some bread and meat; and as he drank a draft of beer, heard the firemen, who were from London, talking about the murder. "He has gone to Birmingham, they say," said one; "but they'll have him yet, for the scouts are out, and by to-morrow night there'll be a cry all through the country."

He hurried off, and walked till he almost dropped upon the ground; then lay down in a lane, and had a long but broken and uneasy sleep. He wandered on again, irresolute and undecided, and oppressed with the fear of another solitary night.

Suddenly he took the desperate resolution of going back to London.

"There's somebody to speak to there, at all events," he thought. "A good hiding-place, too. They'll never expect to nab me there, after this country scent. Why can't I lay by for a week or so, and, forcing blunt from Fagin, get abroad to France? Damme, I'll risk it."

He acted upon this impulse without delay, and choosing the least frequented roads, began his journey back, resolved to lie concealed within a short distance of the metropolis, and, entering it at dusk by a circuitous route, to proceed straight to that part of it which he had fixed on for his destination.

The dog, though—if any descriptions of him were out, it would not be forgotten that the dog was missing, and had probably gone with him. This might lead to his apprehension as he passed along the streets. He resolved to drown him, and walked on, looking about for a pond, picking up a heavy stone and tying it to his handkerchief as he went.

The animal looked up into his master's face while these preparations were making; and, whether his instinct apprehended something of their purpose, or the robber's sidelong look at him was sterner than ordinary, skulked a little further in the rear than usual, and cowered as he came more slowly along. When his master halted at the brink of a pool, and looked round to call him, he stopped outright.

"Do you hear me call? Come here!" cried Sikes.

The animal came up from the very force of habit; but as Sikes stooped to attach the handkerchief to his throat, he uttered a low growl and started back.

"Come back!" said the robber, stamping on the ground.

The dog wagged his tail, but moved not. Sikes made a running noose and called him again.

The dog advanced, retreated, paused an instant, turned, and scoured away at his hardest speed.

The man whistled again and again, and sat down and waited in the expectation that he would return. But no dog appeared, and at length he resumed his journey.

Near to that part of the Thames on which the church at Rotherhithe abuts, where the buildings on the banks are dirtiest and the vessels on the river blackest with the dust of colliers and the smoke of close-built, low-roofed houses, there exists, at the present day, the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of its inhabitants.

To reach this place, the visitor has to penetrate through a maze of close, narrow, and muddy streets, thronged by the roughest and poorest of waterside people, and devoted to the traffic they may be supposed to occasion. The cheapest and least delicate provisions are heaped in the shops; the coarsest and commonest articles of wearing apparel dangle at the salesman's door, and stream from the house-parapet and windows. Jostling with unemployed laborers of the lowest class, ballast-heavers, coal-whippers, brazen women, ragged children, and the very raff and refuse of the river, he makes his way with difficulty along, assailed by offensive sights and smells from the narrow alleys which branch off on the right and left, and deafened by the clash of ponderous wagons that bear great piles of merchandise from the stacks of warehouses that rise from every corner. Arriving, at length, in streets remoter and less frequented than those through which he has passed, he walks beneath tottering house-fronts projecting over the pavement, dismantled walls that seem to totter as he passes, chimneys half crushed, half hesitating to fall, windows guarded by rusty iron bars that time and dirt have almost eaten away, and every imaginable sign of desolation and neglect.

In such a neighborhood, beyond Dockhead in the borough of Southwark, stands Jacob's Island, surrounded by a muddy ditch, six or eight feet deep, and fifteen or twenty wide when the tide is in, once called Mill Pond, but known in these days as Folly Ditch. It is a creek or inlet from the Thames, and can always be filled at high water by opening the sluices at the Lead Mills from which it took its old name. At such times a stranger, looking from one of the

wooden bridges thrown across it at Mill Lane, will see the inhabitants of the houses on either side lowering from their back doors and windows buckets, pails, domestic utensils of all kinds, in which to haul the water up; and when his eye is turned from these operations to the houses themselves, his utmost astonishment will be excited by the scene before him. Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half a dozen houses, with holes from which to look upon the slime beneath; windows, broken and patched, with poles thrust out on which to dry the linen that is never there; rooms so small, so filthy, so confined, that the air would seem too tainted even for the dirt and squalor which they shelter; wooden chambers thrusting themselves out above the mud and threatening to fall into it—as some have done; dirt-besmeared walls and decaying foundations; every repulsive lineament of poverty, every loathsome indication of filth, rot, and garbage; all these ornament the banks of Folly Ditch.

In Jacob's Island, the warehouses are roofless and empty; the walls are crumbling down; the windows are windows no more; the doors are falling into the streets; the chimneys are blackened, but they yield no smoke. Thirty or forty years ago, before losses and chancery suits came upon it, it was a thriving place; but now it is a desolate island indeed. The houses have no owners; they are broken open and entered upon by those who have the courage; and there they live and there they die. They must have powerful motives for a secret residence, or be reduced to a destitute condition indeed, who seek a refuge in Jacob's Island.

In an upper room of one of these houses—a detached house of fair size, ruinous in other respects, but strongly defended at door and window, of which house the back commanded the ditch in manner already described—there were assembled three men, who, regarding each other every now and then with looks expressive of perplexity and expectation, sat for some time in profound and gloomy silence. One of these was Toby Crackit, another Mr. Chitling, and the third a robber of fifty years, whose nose had been almost beaten in in some old scuffle, and whose face bore a frightful scar which might probably be traced to the same occasion. This man was a returned transport, and his name was Kags.

"I wish," said Toby, turning to Mr. Chitling, "that you had picked out some other crib when the two old ones got too warm, and had not come here, my fine feller."

"Why didn't you, blunderhead?" said Kags.

"Well, I thought you'd have been a little more glad to see me than this," replied Mr. Chitling, with a melancholy air.

"Why, look'e, young gentleman," said Toby, "when a man keeps himself so very exclusive as I have done, and by that means has a snug house over his head, with nobody prying and smelling about it, it's rather a startling thing to have the honor of a visit from a young gentleman (however respectable and pleasant a person he may be to play cards with at conweniency) circumstanced as you are."

"Especially when the exclusive young man has got a friend stopping with him that's arrived sooner than was expected from foreign parts, and is too modest to want to be presented to the Judges on his return," added Mr. Kags.

There was a short silence, after which Toby Crackit, seeming to abandon as hopeless any further effort to maintain his usual devil-may-care swagger, turned to Chitling and said:

"When was Fagin took, then?"

"Just at dinner-time—two o'clock this afternoon. Charley and I made our lucky up the wash'us chimney, and Bolter got into the empty water-butt, head downward; but his legs were so precious long that they stuck out at the top, and so they took him too."

"And Bet?"

"Poor Bet! She went to see the body, to speak to who it was," replied Chitling, his countenance falling more and more, "and went off mad, screaming and raving, and beating her head against the boards; so they put a strait weskut on her and took her to the hospital—and there she is."

"Wot's come of young Bates?" demanded Kags.

"He hung about, not to come over here afore dark, but he'll be here soon," replied Chitling. "There's nowhere else to go to now, for the people at the Cripples are all in custody, and the bar of the ken—I went up there and see it with my own eyes—is filled with traps."

"This is a smash," observed Toby, biting his lips. "There's more than one will go with this."

"The sessions are on," said Kags: "if they get the inquest over, and Bolter turns King's evidence, as of course he will, from what he's said already, they can prove Fagin an accessory before the fact, and get the trial on on Friday, and he'll swing in six days from this, by G—!"

"You should have heard the people groan," said Chitling; "the officers fought like devils, or they'd have torn him away. He was down once, but they made a ring round him, and fought their way along. You should have seen how he looked about him, all muddy and bleeding, and clung to them as if they were his dearest friends. I can see 'em now not able to stand upright with the pressing of the mob, and dragging him along amongst 'em; I can see the people jumping up, one behind another, and snarling with their teeth and making at him like wild beasts; I can see the blood upon his hair and beard, and hear the cries with which the women worked themselves into the centre of the crowd at the street corner, and swore they'd tear his heart out!"

The horror-stricken witness of this scene pressed his hands upon his ears, and with his eyes closed, got up and paced violently to and fro, like one distracted.

While he was thus engaged, and the two men sat by in silence with their eyes fixed upon the floor, a pattering noise was heard upon the stairs, and Sikes's dog bounded into the room. They ran to the window, downstairs, and into the street. The dog had jumped in at an open window; he made no attempt to follow them, nor was his master to be seen.

"What's the meaning of this?" said Toby, when they had returned. "He can't be coming here. I—I—hope not."

"If he was coming here, he'd have come with the dog," said Kags, stooping down to examine the animal, who lay panting on the floor. "Here! Give us some water for him; he has run himself faint."

"He's drunk it all up, every drop," said Chitting, after watching the dog some time in silence. "Covered with mud—lame—half blind—he must have come a long way."

"Where can he have come from!" exclaimed Toby. "He's been to the other kens, of course, and, finding them filled with strangers, come on here where he's been many a time and often. But where can he have come from first, and how comes he here alone without the other!"

"He" (none of them called the murderer by his old name)—"he can't have made away with himself. What do you think?" said Chitling.

Toby shook his head.

"If he had," said Kags, "the dog 'ud want to lead us away to where he did it. No. I think he's got out of the country and left the dog behind. He must have given him the slip somehow, or he wouldn't be so easy."

This solution, appearing the most probable one, was adopted as the right; and the dog, creeping under a chair, coiled himself up to sleep, without more notice from anybody.

It being now dark, the shutter was closed, and a candle lighted and placed upon the table. The terrible events of the last two days had made a deep impression on all three, increased by the danger and uncertainty of their own position. They drew their chairs closer together, starting at every sound. They spoke little, and that in whispers, and were as silent and awe-stricken as if the remains of the murdered woman lay in the next room.

They had sat thus some time, when suddenly was heard a hurried knocking at the door below.

"Young Bates," said Kags, looking angrily round, to check the fear he felt himself.

The knocking came again. No, it wasn't he. He never knocked like that.

Crackit went to the window, and, shaking all over, drew in his head. There was no need to tell them who it was; his pale face was enough. The dog, too, was on the alert in an instant, and ran whining to the door.

"We must let him in," he said, taking up the candle.

"Isn't there any help for it?" asked the other man, in a hoarse voice.

"None. He must come in."

"Don't leave us in the dark," said Kags, taking down a candle from the chimney-piece, and lighting it with such a trembling hand that the knocking was twice repeated before he had finished.

Crackit went down to the door, and returned, followed by a man with the lower part of his face buried in a handkerchief, and another tied over his head under his hat. He drew them slowly off. Blanched face, sunken eyes, hollow cheeks, beard of three days' growth, wasted flesh, short, thick breath; it was the very ghost of Sikes.

He laid his hand upon a chair which stood in the middle of the room, but shuddering as he was about to drop into it, and seeming to glance over his shoulder, dragged it back close to the wall—as close as it would go—ground it against it—and sat down.

Not a word had been exchanged. He looked from one to another in silence. If an eye were furtively raised and met his, it was instantly averted. When his hollow voice broke silence, they all three started. They seemed never to have heard its tones before.

"How came that dog here?" he asked.

"Alone. Three hours ago."

"To-night's paper says that Fagin's taken. Is it true, or a lie?"

"True."

They were silent again.

"Damn you all," said Sikes, passing his hand across his forehead. "Have you nothing to say to me?"

There was an uneasy movement among them, but nobody spoke.

"You that keep this house," said Sikes, turning his face to Crackit, "do you mean to sell me, or to let me lie here till this hunt is over?"

"You may stop here, if you think it safe," returned the person addressed, after some hesitation.

Sikes carried his eyes slowly up the wall behind him, rather trying to turn his head than actually doing it, and said: "Is—it—the body—is it buried?"

They shook their heads.

"Why isn't it?" he retorted, with the same glance behind him. "Wot do they keep such ugly things above the ground for?—Who's that knocking?"

Crackit intimated, by a motion of his hand as he left the room, that there was nothing to fear; and directly came back with Charley Bates behind him. Sikes sat opposite the door, so that the moment the boy entered the room he encountered his figure.

"Toby," said the boy, falling back, as Sikes turned his eyes toward him, "why didn't you tell me this downstairs?"

There had been something so tremendous in the shrinking off of the three that the wretched man was willing to propitiate even this lad. Accordingly, he nodded, and made as though he would shake hands with him.

"Let me go into some other room," said the boy, retreating still further.

"Charley!" said Sikes, stepping forward, "don't you—don't you know me?"

"Don't come nearer me," answered the boy, still retreating and looking, with horror in his eyes, upon the murderer's face. "You monster!"

The man stopped half-way, and they looked at each other, but Sikes's eyes sank gradually to the ground.

"Witness you three," cried the boy, shaking his clenched fist and becoming more and more excited as he spoke. "Witness you three—I'm not afraid of him—if they come here after him, I'll give him up; I will. I tell you out at once. He may kill me for it if he likes, or if he dares, but if I'm here, I'll give him up. I'd give him up if he was to be boiled alive. Murder! Help! If there's the pluck of a man among you three, you'll help me. Murder! Help! Down with him!"

Pouring out these cries, and accompanying them with violent gesticulation, the boy actually threw himself, single-handed, upon the strong man, and in the intensity of his energy, and the suddenness of his surprise, brought him heavily to the ground.

The three spectators seemed quite stupefied. They offered no interference, and the boy and man rolled on the ground together; the former, heedless of the blows that showered upon him, wrenching his hands tighter and tighter in the garments about the murderer's breast, and never ceasing to call for help with all his might.

The contest, however, was too unequal to last long. Sikes had him down, and his knee was on his throat, when Crackit pulled him back with a look of alarm, and pointed to the window. There were lights gleaming below, voices in loud and earnest conversation, the tramp of hurried footsteps—endless they seemed in number—crossing the nearest wooden bridge. One man on horseback seemed to be among the crowd, for there was the noise of hoofs rattling on the uneven pavement. The gleam of lights increased; the footsteps came more thickly and noisily on. Then came a loud knocking at the door, and then a hoarse murmur from such a multitude of angry voices as would have made the boldest quail.

"Help!" shrieked the boy, in a voice that rent the air. "He's here! Break down the door!"

"In the King's name," cried the voices without, and the hoarse cry rose again, but louder.

"Break down the door!" screamed the boy. "I tell you they'll never open it. Run straight to the room where the light is. Break down the door!"

Strokes, thick and heavy, rattled upon the door and lower window-shutters as he ceased to speak, and a loud huzza burst from the crowd, giving the listener for the first time some adequate idea of its immense extent.

"Open the door of some place where I can lock this screeching hell-babe," cried Sikes, fiercely, running to and fro, and dragging the boy now as easily as if he were an empty sack. "That door. Quick!" He flung him in, bolted it, and turned the key. "Is the downstairs door fast?"

"Double-locked and chained," replied Crackit, who, with the other two men, still remained quite helpless and bewildered.

"The panels—are they strong?"

"Lined with sheet-iron."

"And the windows too?"

"Yes, and the windows."

"Damn you!" cried the desperate ruffian, throwing up the sash and menacing the crowd. "Do your worst! I'll cheat you yet!"

Of all the terrific yells that ever fell on mortal ears, none could exceed the cry of the infuriated throng. Some shouted to those who were nearest to set the house on fire; others roared to the officers to shoot him dead. Among them all, none showed such fury as the man on horseback, who, throwing himself out of the saddle, and bursting through the crowd as if he were parting water, cried, beneath the window, in a voice that rose above all others: "Twenty guineas to the man who brings a ladder!"

The nearest voices took up the cry, and hundreds echoed it. Some called for ladders, some for sledge-hammers; some ran with torches to and fro as if to seek them, and still came back and roared again; some spent their breath in impotent curses and execrations; some pressed forward with the ecstasy of madmen, and thus impeded the progress of those below; some among the boldest attempted to climb up by the waterspout and crevices in the wall; and all waved to and fro, in the darkness beneath, like a field of corn moved by an angry wind, and joined from time to time in one loud furious roar.

"The tide," cried the murderer, as he staggered back into the room and shut the faces out —"the tide was in as I came up. Give me a rope, a long rope. They're all in front. I may drop into the Folly Ditch, and clear off that way. Give me a rope, or I shall do three more murders and kill myself."

The panic-stricken men pointed to where such articles were kept; the murderer, hastily selecting the longest and strongest cord, hurried up to the house-top.

All the windows in the rear of the house had been long ago bricked up, except one small trap in the room where the boy was locked, and that was too small even for the passage of his body. But, from this aperture, he had never ceased to call on those without to guard the back; and thus when the murderer emerged at last on the house-top by the door in the roof, a loud shout proclaimed the fact to those in front, who immediately began to pour round, pressing upon each other in one unbroken stream.

He planted a board which he had carried up with him for the purpose so firmly against the door that it must be matter of great difficulty to open it from the inside; and creeping over the tiles, looked over the low parapet.

The water was out, and the ditch a bed of mud.

The crowd had been hushed during these few moments, watching his motions and doubtful of his purpose, but the instant they perceived it and knew it was defeated, they raised a cry of triumphant execration to which all their previous shouting had been whispers. Again and again it rose. Those who were at too great a distance to know its meaning took up the sound: it echoed and reechoed; it seemed as though the whole city had poured its population out to curse him.

On pressed the people from the front—on, on, on, in a strong struggling current of angry faces, with here and there a glaring torch to light them up, and show them out in all their wrath and passion. The houses on the opposite side of the ditch had been entered by the mob; sashes were thrown up, or torn bodily out; there were tiers and tiers of faces in every window, and cluster upon cluster of people clinging to every house-top. Each little bridge (and there

were three in sight) bent beneath the weight of the crowd upon it. Still the current poured on to find some nook or hole from which to vent their shouts, and only for an instant see the wretch.

"They have him now," cried a man on the nearest bridge. "Hurrah!"

The crowd grew light with uncovered heads; and again the shout uprose.

"I will give fifty pounds," cried an old gentleman from the same quarter, "to the man who takes him alive. I will remain here till he comes to ask me for it."

There was another roar. At this moment the word was passed among the crowd that the door was forced at last, and that he who had first called for the ladder had mounted into the room. The stream abruptly turned, as this intelligence ran from mouth to mouth; and the people at the windows, seeing those upon the bridges pouring back, quitted their stations, and running into the street, joined the concourse that now thronged pell-mell to the spot they had left; each man crushing and striving with his neighbor, and all panting with impatience to get near the door and look upon the criminal as the officers brought him out. The cries and shrieks of those who were pressed almost to suffocation, or trampled down and trodden underfoot in the confusion, were dreadful; the narrow ways were completely blocked up; and at this time, between the rush of some to regain the space in front of the house and the unavailing struggles of others to extricate themselves from the mass, the immediate attention was distracted from the murderer, although the eagerness for his capture was increased.

The man had shrunk down, thoroughly quelled by the ferocity of the crowd and the impossibility of escape; but seeing this sudden change with no less rapidity than it had occurred, he sprang upon his feet, determined to make an effort for his life by dropping into the ditch.

Roused into new strength and energy, and stimulated by the noise within the house, which announced that an entrance had really been effected, he set his foot against the stack of chimneys, fastened one end of the rope tightly and firmly round it, and with the other made a strong running noose by the aid of his hands and teeth almost in a second. He could let himself down by the cord to within a less distance of the ground than his own height, and had his knife ready in his hand to cut it then and drop.

At the very instant when he brought the loop over his head previous to slipping it beneath his arm-pits, and when the old gentleman before mentioned (who had clung so tight to the railing of the bridge as to resist the force of the crowd and retain his position) earnestly warned those about him that the man was about to lower himself down—at that very instant the murderer, looking behind him on the roof, threw his arms above his head, and uttered a yell of terror.

"The eyes again!" he cried, in an unearthly screech.

Staggering as if struck by lightning, he lost his balance and tumbled over the parapet. The noose was at his neck. It ran up with his weight, tight as a bowstring, and swift as the arrow it speeds. He fell for five-and-thirty feet. There was a sudden jerk, a terrific convulsion of the limbs; and there he hung, with the open knife clenched in his stiffening hand.

The old chimney quivered with the shock, but stood it bravely. The murderer swung lifeless against the wall; and the boy, thrusting aside the dangling body which obscured his view, called to the people to come and take him out, for God's sake.

A dog which had lain concealed till now ran backward and forward on the parapet with a dismal howl, and, collecting himself for a spring, jumped for the dead man's shoulders. Missing his aim, he fell into the ditch, turning completely over as he went, and, striking his head against a stone, dashed out his brains.

THE POSTMISTRESS OF LAUREL RUN

BY BRET HARTE

Francis Bret Harte, born in 1839 at Albany, N. Y., left his home at the age of fifteen for California, in which pioneer State he accumulated, in seventeen years' experience as school-teacher, gold miner, printer, journalist, and editor, so much and so rich literary material that he spent the remaining thirty years of his life in working it up into "copy." He won an international reputation by the "Luck of Roaring Camp," published in 1868, and the "Outcasts of Poker Flat," published in 1869. He lived abroad from 1878 to the time of his death (1902), publishing many volumes of California stories, all distinguished by the charm which won him his early fame.

THE POSTMISTRESS OF LAUREL RUN

By BRET HARTE

I

The mail stage had just passed Laurel Run—so rapidly that the whirling cloud of dust dragged with it down the steep grade from the summit hung over the level long after the stage had vanished, and then, drifting away, slowly sifted a red precipitate over the hot platform of the Laurel Run Post-Office.

Out of this cloud presently emerged the neat figure of the Postmistress with the mail bag which had been dexterously flung at her feet from the top of the passing vehicle. A dozen loungers eagerly stretched out their hands to assist her, but the warning: "It's agin the rules, boys, for any but her to touch it," from a bystander, and a coquettish shake of the head from the Postmistress herself—much more effective than any official interdict—withheld them. The bag was not heavy—Laurel Run was too recent a settlement to have attracted much correspondence—and the young woman, having pounced upon her prey with a certain feline instinct, dragged it, not without difficulty, behind the partitioned enclosure in the office, and locked the door. Her pretty face, momentarily visible through the window, was slightly flushed with the exertion, and the loose ends of her fair hair, wet with perspiration, curled themselves over her forehead into tantalizing little rings. But the window shutter was quickly closed, and this momentary but charming vision withdrawn from the waiting public.

"Guv'ment oughter have more sense than to make a woman pick mail bags outer the road," said Jo Simmons, sympathetically. "'Tain't in her day's work anyhow; Guv'ment oughter hand 'em over to her like a lady; it's rich enough and ugly enough."

"'Tain't Guv'ment; it's that Stage Company's airs and graces," interrupted a newcomer. "They think it mighty fine to go beltin' by, makin' everybody take their dust—just because stoppin' ain't in their contract. Why, if that express-man who chucked down the bag had any feelin's for a lady—" but he stopped here at the amused faces of his auditors.

"Guess you don't know much o' that expressman's feelin's, stranger," said Simmons grimly. "Why, you oughter see him just nussin' that bag like a baby as he comes tearin' down the grade, and then rise up and sorter heave it to Mrs. Baker ez if it was a five dollar bokay! His feelin's for her! Why, he's give himself so dead away to her that we're looking for him to forget what he's doin' next, and just come sailin' down hisself at her feet."

Meanwhile, on the other side of the partition, Mrs. Baker had brushed the red dust from the padlocked bag, and removed what seemed to be a supplementary package attached to it by a wire. Opening it she found a handsome scent-bottle, evidently a superadded gift from the devoted express-man. This she put aside with a slight smile and the murmured word, "Foolishness." But when she had unlocked the bag, even its sacred interior was also profaned by a covert parcel from the adjacent postmaster at Burnt Ridge, containing a gold "specimen"

brooch and some circus tickets. It was laid aside with the other. This also was vanity and—presumably—vexation of spirit.

There were seventeen letters in all, of which five were for herself—and yet the proportion was small that morning. Two of them were marked "Official Business," and were promptly put by with feminine discernment; but in another compartment than that holding the presents. Then the shutter was opened, and the task of delivery commenced.

It was accompanied with a social peculiarity that had in time become a habit of Laurel Run. As the young woman delivered the letters, in turn, to the men who were patiently drawn up in Indian file, she made that simple act a medium of privileged but limited conversation on special or general topics—gay or serious as the case might be—or the temperament of the man suggested. That it was almost always of a complimentary character on their part may be readily imagined; but it was invariably characterized by an element of refined restraint, and—whether from some implied understanding or individual sense of honor—it never passed the bounds of conventionality or a certain delicacy of respect. The delivery was consequently more or less protracted, but when each man had exchanged his three or four minutes' conversation with the fair Postmistress—a conversation at times impeded by bashfulness or timidity, on his part solely, or restricted often to vague smiling—he resignedly made way for the next. It was a formal levee, mitigated by the informality of rustic tact, great good humor, and infinite patience, and would have been amusing, had it not always been terribly in earnest and at times touching. For it was peculiar to the place and the epoch, and indeed implied the whole history of Mrs. Baker.

She was the wife of John Baker, foreman of "The Last Chance," now for a year lying dead under half a mile of crushed and beaten in tunnel at Burnt Ridge. There had been a sudden outcry from the depths at high hot noontide one day, and John had rushed from his cabin—his young, foolish, flirting wife clinging to him—to answer that despairing cry of his imprisoned men. There was one exit that he alone knew which might be yet held open, among falling walls and tottering timbers, long enough to set them free. For one moment only the strong man hesitated between her entreating arms and his brothers' despairing cry. But she rose suddenly with a pale face, and said, "Go, John; I will wait for you here." He went, the men were freed—but she had waited for him ever since!

Yet in the shock of the calamity and in the after struggles of that poverty which had come to the ruined camp, she had scarcely changed. But the men had. Although she was to all appearances the same giddy, pretty Betsy Baker, who had been so disturbing to the younger members, they seemed to be no longer disturbed by her. A certain subdued awe and respect, as if the martyred spirit of John Baker still held his arm around her, appeared to have come upon them all. They held their breath as this pretty woman, whose brief mourning had not seemed to affect her cheerfulness or even playfulness of spirit, passed before them. But she stood by her cabin and the camp—the only woman in a settlement of forty men—during the darkest hours of their fortune. Helping them to wash and cook, and ministering to their domestic needs; the sanctity of her cabin was, however, always kept as inviolable as if it had been his tomb. No one exactly knew why, for it was only a tacit instinct; but even one or two who had not scrupled to pay court to Betsy Baker during John Baker's life shrank from even a suggestion of familiarity toward the woman who had said that she would "wait for him there."

When brighter days came and the settlement had increased by one or two families, and laggard capital had been hurried up to relieve the still beleaguered and locked-up wealth of Burnt Ridge, the needs of the community and the claims of the widow of John Baker were so well told in political quarters that the post-office of Laurel Run was created expressly for her. Every man participated in the building of the pretty yet substantial edifice—the only public building of Laurel Run—that stood in the dust of the great highway, half a mile from the settlement. There she was installed for certain hours of the day, for she could not be prevailed upon to abandon John's cabin, and here, with all the added respect due to a public functionary, she was secure in her privacy.

But the blind devotion of Laurel Run to John Baker's relict did not stop here. In its zeal to assure the Government authorities of the necessity for a post-office, and to secure a permanent competency to the postmistress, there was much embarrassing extravagance.

During the first week the sale of stamps at Laurel Run Post-Office was unprecedented in the annals of the Department. Fancy prices were given for the first issue; then they were bought wildly, recklessly, unprofitably, and on all occasions. Complimentary congratulation at the little window invariably ended with "and a dollar's worth of stamps, Mrs. Baker." It was felt to be supremely delicate to buy only the highest priced stamps, without reference to their adequacy; then mere quantity was sought; then outgoing letters were all overpaid, and stamped in outrageous proportion to their weight and even size. The imbecility of this, and its probable effect on the reputation of Laurel Run at the General Post-Office, being pointed out by Mrs. Baker, stamps were adopted as local currency, and even for decorative purposes on mirrors and the walls of cabins. Everybody wrote letters, with the result, however, that those sent were ludicrously and suspiciously in excess of those received. To obviate this, select parties made forced journeys to Hickory Hill, the next post-office, with letters and circulars addressed to themselves at Laurel Run. How long the extravagance would have continued is not known, but it was not until it was rumored that, in consequence of this excessive flow of business, the Department had concluded that a post*master* would be better fitted for the place that it abated, and a compromise was effected with the General Office by a permanent salary to the Postmistress.

Such was the history of Mrs. Baker, who had just finished her afternoon levee, nodded a smiling "good-by" to her last customer, and closed her shutter again. Then she took up her own letters, but, before reading them, glanced, with a pretty impatience, at the two official envelopes addressed to herself, which she had shelved. They were generally a "lot of new rules," or notifications, or "absurd" questions which had nothing to do with Laurel Run, and only bothered her and "made her head ache," and she had usually referred them to her admiring neighbor at Hickory Hill for explanation, who had generally returned them to her with the brief endorsement, "Purp stuff, don't bother," or, "Hog wash, let it slide." She remembered now that he had not returned the two last. With knitted brows and a slight pout she put aside her private correspondence and tore open the first one. It referred with official curtness to an unanswered communication of the previous week, and was "compelled to remind her of rule 47." Again those horrid rules! She opened the other; the frown deepened on her brow, and became fixed.

It was a summary of certain valuable money letters that had miscarried on the route, and of which they had given her previous information. For a moment her cheeks blazed. How dare they; what did they mean! Her way-bills and register were always right; she knew the names of every man, woman, and child in her district; no such names as those borne by the missing letters had ever existed at Laurel Run; no such addresses had ever been sent from Laurel Run Post-Office. It was a mean insinuation! She would send in her resignation at once! She would get "the boys" to write an insulting letter to Senator Slocumb—Mrs. Baker had the feminine idea of Government as a purely personal institution—and she would find out who it was that had put them up to this prying, crawling impudence! It was probably that wall-eyed old wife of the postmaster at Heavy Tree Crossing, who was jealous of her. "Remind her of their previous unanswered communication," indeed! Where was that communication, anyway? She remembered she had sent it to her admirer at Hickory Hill. Odd that he hadn't answered it. Of course, he knew all about this meanness—could he, too, have dared to suspect her! The thought turned her crimson again. He, Stanton Green, was an old "Laurel Runner," a friend of John's, a little "triflin'" and "presoomin'," but still an old loyal pioneer of the camp! "Why hadn't he spoke up?"

There was the soft muffled fall of a horse's hoof in the thick dust of the highway, the jingle of dismounting spurs, and a firm tread on the platform. No doubt, one of the boys returning for a few supplemental remarks under the feeble pretense of forgotten stamps. It had been done before, and she had resented it as "cayotin' round"; but now she was eager to pour out her wrongs to the first comer. She had her hand impulsively on the door of the partition, when she stopped with a new sense of her impaired dignity. Could she confess this to her worshipers? But here the door opened in her very face and a stranger entered.

He was a man of fifty, compactly and strongly built. A squarely cut goatee, slightly streaked with gray, fell straight from his thin-lipped but handsome mouth; his eyes were dark, humorous, yet searching. But the distinctive quality that struck Mrs. Baker was the blending of urban ease with frontier frankness. He was evidently a man who had seen cities and knew

countries as well. And while he was dressed with the comfortable simplicity of a Californian mounted traveler, her inexperienced but feminine eye detected the keynote of his respectability in the carefully tied bow of his cravat. The Sierrean throat was apt to be open, free, and unfettered.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Baker," he said, pleasantly, with his hat already in his hand. "I'm Harry Home, of San Francisco." As he spoke his eye swept approvingly over the neat enclosure, the primly tied papers, and well-kept pigeon-holes; the pot of flowers on her desk; her china silk mantle, and killing little chip hat and ribbons hanging against the wall; thence to her own pink flushed face, bright blue eyes, tendriled clinging hair, and then—fell upon the leathern mail bag still lying across the table. Here it became fixed on the unfortunate wire of the amorous expressman that yet remained hanging from the brass wards of the lock, and he reached his hand toward it.

But little Mrs. Baker was before him, and had seized it in her arms. She had been too preoccupied and bewildered to resent his first intrusion behind the partition, but this last familiarity with her sacred official property—albeit empty—capped the climax of her wrongs.

"How dare you touch it!" she said indignantly. "How dare you come in here! Who are you, anyway? Go outside at once!"

The stranger fell back with an amused, deprecatory gesture, and a long, silent laugh. "I'm afraid you don't know me, after all!" he said, pleasantly. "I'm Harry Home, the Department Agent from the San Francisco office. My note of advice, No. 201, with my name on the envelope, seems to have miscarried too."

Even in her fright and astonishment it flashed upon Mrs. Baker that she had sent that notice, too, to Hickory Hill. But with it all the feminine secretive instinct within her was now thoroughly aroused, and she kept silent.

"I ought to have explained," he went on smilingly; "but you are quite right, Mrs. Baker," he added, nodding toward the bag. "As far as you knew, I had no business to go near it. Glad to see you know how to defend Uncle Sam's property so well. I was only a bit puzzled to know" (pointing to the wire) "if that thing was on the bag when it was delivered to you?"

Mrs. Baker saw no reason to conceal the truth. After all this official was a man like the others, and it was just as well that he should understand her power. "It's only the expressman's foolishness," she said, with a slightly coquettish toss of her head. "He thinks it smart to tie some nonsense on that bag with the wire when he flings it down."

Mr. Home, with his eyes on her pretty face, seemed to think it a not inhuman or unpardonable folly. "As long as he doesn't meddle with the inside of the bag, I suppose you must put up with it," he said, laughingly. A dreadful recollection that the Hickory Hill postmaster had used the inside of the bag to convey *his* foolishness came across her. It would never do to confess it now. Her face must have shown some agitation, for the official resumed with a half-paternal, half-reassuring air, "But enough of this. Now, Mrs. Baker, to come to my business here! Briefly, then, it doesn't concern you in the least, except so far as it may relieve you and some others whom the Department knows equally well from a certain responsibility, and, perhaps, anxiety. We are pretty well posted down there in all that concerns Laurel Run, and I think" (with a slight bow), "we've known all about you and John Baker. My only business here is to take your place to-night in receiving the 'Omnibus Way Bag,' that you know arrives here at 9.30, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Baker, hurriedly; "but it never has anything for us, except—" (she caught herself up quickly, with a stammer, as she remembered the sighing Green's occasional offerings), "except a notification from Hickory Hill Post-Office. It leaves there," she went on with an affectation of precision, "at half-past eight exactly, and it's about an hour's run—seven miles by road."

"Exactly," said Mr. Home. "Well, I will receive the bag, open it, and despatch it again. You can, if you choose, take a holiday."

"But," said Mrs. Baker, as she remembered that Laurel Run always made a point of attending her evening levee on account of the superior leisure it offered, "there are the people who come for letters, you know."

"I thought you said there were no letters at that time," said Mr. Home, quickly.

"No—but—but" (with a slight hysterical stammer) "the boys come all the same."

"Oh!" said Mr. Home, dryly.

"And—O Lord!—" But here the spectacle of the possible discomfiture of Laurel Run at meeting the bearded face of Mr. Home, instead of her own smooth cheeks, at the window, combined with her nervous excitement, overcame her so that, throwing her little frilled apron over her head, she gave way to a paroxysm of hysterical laughter. Mr. Home waited with amused toleration for it to stop, and, when she had recovered, resumed: "Now, I should like to refer an instant to my first communication to you. Have you got it handy?"

Mrs. Baker's face fell. "No; I sent it over to Mr. Green, of Hickory Hill, for information."

"What!"

Terrified at the sudden seriousness of the man's voice, she managed to gasp out, however, that, after her usual habit, she had not opened the official letters, but had sent them to her more experienced colleague for advice and information; that she never could understand them herself—they made her head ache, and interfered with her other duties—but he understood them, and sent her word what to do. Remembering, also, his usual style of endorsement, she grew red again.

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing; he didn't return them."

"Naturally," said Mr. Home, with a peculiar expression. After a few moments' silent stroking of his beard, he suddenly faced the frightened woman.

"You oblige me, Mrs. Baker, to speak more frankly to you than I had intended. You have—unwittingly, I believe—given information to a man whom the Government suspects of peculation. You have, without knowing it, warned the Postmaster at Hickory Hill that he is suspected; and, as you might have frustrated our plans for tracing a series of embezzlements to their proper source, you will see that you might have also done great wrong to yourself as his only neighbor and the next responsible person. In plain words, we have traced the disappearance of money letters to a point when it lies between these two offices. Now, I have not the least hesitation in telling you that we do not suspect Laurel Run, and never have suspected it. Even the result of your thoughtless act, although it warned him, confirms our suspicion of his guilt. As to the warning, it has failed, or he has grown reckless, for another letter has been missed since. To-night, however, will settle all doubt in the matter. When I open that bag in this office to-night, and do not find a certain decoy letter in it, which was last checked at Heavy Tree Crossing, I shall know that it remains in Green's possession at Hickory Hill."

She was sitting back in her chair, white and breathless. He glanced at her kindly, and then took up his hat. "Come, Mrs. Baker, don't let this worry you. As I told you at first, you have nothing to fear. Even your thoughtlessness and ignorance of rules has contributed to show your own innocence. Nobody will ever be the wiser for this; we do not advertise our affairs in the Department. Not a soul but yourself knows the real cause of my visit here. I will leave you here alone for a while, so as to divert any suspicion. You will come, as usual, this evening, and be seen by your friends; I will only be here when the bag arrives, to open it. Good-by, Mrs. Baker; it's a nasty bit of business, but it's all in the day's work. I've seen worse, and, thank God, you're out of it."

She heard his footsteps retreat into the outer office and die out of the platform; the jingle of his spurs, and the hollow beat of his horsehoofs that seemed to find a dull echo in her own

heart, and she was alone.

The room was very hot and very quiet; she could hear the warping and creaking of the shingles under the relaxing of the nearly level sunbeams. The office clock struck seven. In the breathless silence that followed, a woodpecker took up his interrupted work on the roof, and seemed to beat out monotonously in her ear the last words of the stranger: Stanton Green—a thief! Stanton Green, one of the "boys" John had helped out of the falling tunnel! Stanton Green, whose old mother in the States still wrote letters to him at Laurel Run, in a few hours to be a disgraced and ruined man forever! She remembered now, as a thoughtless woman remembers, tales of his extravagance and fast living, of which she had taken no heed, and, with a sense of shame, of presents sent her, that she now clearly saw must have been far beyond his means. What would the boys say? what would John have said? Ah! what would John have done!

She started suddenly to her feet, white and cold as on that day that she had parted from John Baker before the tunnel. She put on her hat and mantle, and going to that little iron safe that stood in the corner, unlocked it, and took out its entire contents of gold and silver. She had reached the door when another idea seized her, and opening her desk she collected her stamps to the last sheet, and hurriedly rolled them up under her cape. Then with a glance at the clock, and a rapid survey of the road from the platform, she slipped from it, and seemed to be swallowed up in the waiting woods beyond.

II

Once within the friendly shadows of the long belt of pines, Mrs. Baker kept them until she had left the limited settlement of Laurel Run far to the right, and came upon an open slope of Burnt Ridge, where she knew Jo Simmons's mustang, Blue Lightning, would be quietly feeding. She had often ridden him before, and when she had detached the fifty-foot riata from his headstall, he permitted her the further recognized familiarity of twining her fingers in his bluish mane and climbing on his back. The tool shed of Burnt Ridge Tunnel, where Jo's saddle and bridle always hung, was but a canter further on. She reached it unperceived, and—another trick of the old days—quickly extemporized a side saddle from Simmons's Mexican tree, with its high cantle and horn bow, and the aid of a blanket. Then leaping to her seat, she rapidly threw off her mantle, tied it by its sleeves around her waist, tucked it under one knee, and let it fall over her horse's flanks. By this time Blue Lightning was also struck with a flash of equine recollection, and pricked up his ears. Mrs. Baker uttered a little chirping cry which he remembered, and the next moment they were both careering over the Ridge.

The trail that she had taken, though precipitate, difficult, and dangerous in places, was a clear gain of two miles on the stage road. There was less chance of her being followed or meeting any one. The greater cañons were already in shadow; the pines on the further ridges were separating their masses, and showing individual silhouettes against the sky, but the air was still warm, and the cool breath of night, as she well knew it, had not yet begun to flow down the mountain. The lower range of Burnt Ridge was still uneclipsed by the creeping shadow of the mountain ahead of her. Without a watch, but with this familiar and slowly changing dial spread out before her, she knew the time to a minute. Heavy Tree Hill, a lesser height in the distance, was already wiped out by that shadowy index finger—half-past seven! The stage would be at Hickory Hill just before half-past eight; she ought to anticipate it, if possible—it would stay ten minutes to change horses—she must arrive before it left!

There was a good two-mile level before the rise of the next range. Now, Blue Lightning! all you know! And that was much—for with the little chip hat and fluttering ribbons well bent down over the bluish mane, and the streaming gauze of her mantle almost level with the horse's back, she swept down across the long table-land like a skimming blue jay. A few more bird-like dips up and down the undulations, and then came the long, cruel ascent of the Divide.

Acrid with perspiration, caking with dust, slithering in the slippery, impalpable powder of the road, groggily staggering in a red dusty dream, coughing, snorting, head-tossing;

becoming suddenly dejected, with slouching haunch and limp legs on easy slopes, or wildly spasmodic and agile on sharp acclivities, Blue Lightning began to have ideas and recollections! Ah! she was a devil for a lark—this lightly-clinging, caressing, blarneying, cooing creature—up there! He remembered her now. Ha! very well then. Hoop la! And suddenly leaping out like a rabbit, bucking, trotting hard, ambling lightly, "loping" on three legs, and recreating himself—as only a Californian mustang could—the invincible Blue Lightning at last stood triumphantly upon the summit. The evening star had just pricked itself through the golden mist of the horizon line—eight o'clock! She could do it now! But here, suddenly, her first hesitation seized her. She knew her horse, she knew the trail, she knew herself—but did she know the man to whom she was riding? A cold chill crept over her, and then she shivered in a sudden blast; it was Night at last swooping down from the now invisible Sierras, and possessing all it touched. But it was only one long descent to Hickory Hill now, and she swept down securely on its wings. Half-past eight! The lights of the settlement were just ahead of her—but so, too, were the two lamps of the waiting stage before the post-office and hotel.

Happily the lounging crowd were gathered around the hotel, and she slipped into the post-office from the rear, unperceived. As she stepped behind the partition, its only occupant—a good-looking young fellow with a reddish mustache—turned toward her with a flush of delighted surprise. But it changed at the sight of the white, determined face and the brilliant eyes that had never looked once toward him, but were fixed upon a large bag, whose yawning mouth was still open and propped up beside his desk.

"Where is the through money letter that came in that bag?" she said, quickly.

"What—do—you—mean?" he stammered, with a face that had suddenly grown whiter than her own.

"I mean that it's a decoy, checked at Heavy Tree Crossing, and that Mr. Home, of San Francisco is now waiting at my office to know if you have taken it!"

The laugh and lie that he had at first tried to summon to mouth and lips never reached them. For, under the spell of her rigid, truthful face, he turned almost mechanically to his desk, and took out a package.

"Good God! you've opened it already!" she cried, pointing to the broken seal.

The expression on her face, more than anything she had said, convinced him that she knew all. He stammered under the new alarm that her despairing tone suggested. "Yes!—I was owing some bills—the collector was waiting here for the money, and I took something from the packet. But I was going to make it up by next mail—I swear it."

"How much have you taken?"

"Only a trifle. I—"

"How much?"

"A hundred dollars!"

She dragged the money she had brought from Laurel Run from her pocket, and, counting out the sum, replaced it in the open package. He ran quickly to get the sealing wax, but she motioned him away as she dropped the package back into the mail bag.

"No; as long as the money is found in the bag the package may have been broken *accidentally*. Now burst open one or two of those other packages a little—so;" she took out a packet of letters and bruised their official wrappings under her little foot until the tape fastening was loosened. "Now give me something heavy." She caught up a brass two-pound weight, and in the same feverish but collected haste wrapped it in paper, sealed it, stamped it, and, addressing it in a large printed hand to herself at Laurel Hill, dropped it in the bag. Then she closed it and locked it; he would have assisted her, but she again waved him away. "Send for the expressman, and keep yourself out of the way for a moment," she said curtly.

An attitude of weak admiration and foolish passion had taken the place of his former tremulous fear. He obeyed excitedly, but without a word. Mrs. Baker wiped her moist forehead and parched lips, and shook out her skirt. Well might the young expressman start at the unexpected revelation of those sparkling eyes and that demurely smiling mouth at the little window.

"Mrs. Baker!"

She put her finger quickly to her lips, and threw a world of unutterable and enigmatical meaning into her mischievous face.

"There's a big San Francisco swell takin' my place at Laurel to-night, Charley."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And it's a pity that the Omnibus Waybag happened to get such a shaking up and banging round already, coming here."

"Eh?"

"I say," continued Mrs. Baker, with great gravity and dancing eyes, "that it would be just awful if that keerful city clerk found things kinder mixed up inside when he comes to open it. I wouldn't give him trouble for the world, Charley."

"No, ma'am, it ain't like you."

"So you'll be particularly careful on *my* account."

"Mrs. Baker," said Charley, with infinite gravity, "if that bag *should tumble off a dozen times* between this and Laurel Hill, I'll hop down and pick it up myself."

"Thank you! shake!"

They shook hands gravely across the window ledge.

"And you ain't goin' down with us, Mrs. Baker?"

"Of course not; it wouldn't do—for *I ain't here*—don't you see?"

"Of course!"

She handed him the bag through the door. He took it carefully, but in spite of his great precaution fell over it twice on his way to the road, where from certain exclamations and shouts it seemed that a like miserable mischance attended its elevation to the boot. Then Mrs. Baker came back into the office, and, as the wheels rolled away, threw herself into a chair, and inconsistently gave way for the first time to an outburst of tears. Then her hand was grasped suddenly, and she found Green on his knees before her. She started to her feet.

"Don't move," he said, with weak hysteric passion, "but listen to me, for God's sake! I am ruined, I know, even though you have just saved me from detection and disgrace. I have been mad!—a fool, to do what I have done, I know, but you do not know all—you do not know why I did it—you can not think of the temptation that has driven me to it. Listen, Mrs. Baker. I have been striving to get money, honestly, dishonestly—anyway, to look well in *your* eyes—to make myself worthy of you—to make myself rich, and to be able to offer you a home and take you away from Laurel Run. It was all for *you*—it was all for love of *you*, Betsy, my darling. Listen to me!"

In the fury, outraged sensibility, indignation, and infinite disgust that filled her little body at that moment, she should have been large, imperious, goddess-like, and commanding. But God is at times ironical with suffering womanhood. She could only writhe her hand from his grasp with childish contortions; she could only glare at him with eyes that were prettily and piquantly brilliant; she could only slap at his detaining hand with a plump and velvety palm,

and when she found her voice it was high falsetto. And all she could say was: "Leave me be, looney, or I'll scream!"

He rose, with a weak, confused laugh, half of miserable affectation and half of real anger and shame.

"What did you come riding over here for, then? What did you take all this risk for? Why did you rush over here to share my disgrace—for *you* are as much mixed up with this now as *I* am—if you didn't calculate to share *everything else* with me? What did you come here for, then, if not for *me*?"

"What did *I* come here for?" said Mrs. Baker, with every drop of red blood gone from her cheek and trembling lip. "What—did—I—come here for? Well!—I came here for *John Baker's* sake! John Baker, who stood between you and death at Burnt Ridge, as I stand between you and damnation at Laurel Run, Mr. Green! Yes, John Baker, lying under half of Burnt Ridge, but more to me this day than any living man crawling over it—in—in"—Oh, fatal climax!—"in a month o' Sundays! What did I come here for? I came here as John Baker's livin' wife to carry on dead John Baker's work. Yes, dirty work this time, maybe, Mr. Green! but his work, and for *him* only—precious! That's what I came here for; that's what I *live* for; that's what I'm waiting for—to be up to him and his work always! That's me—Betsy Baker!"

She walked up and down rapidly, tying her chip hat under her chin again. Then she stopped, and taking her chamois purse from her pocket, laid it sharply on the desk.

"Stanton Green, don't be a fool! Rise up out of this, and be a man again. Take enough out o' that bag to pay what you owe Gov'ment, send in your resignation, and keep the rest to start you in a honest life elsewhere. But light out o' Hickory Hill afore this time to-morrow."

She pulled her mantle from the wall and opened the door.

"You are going?" he said, bitterly.

"Yes." Either she could not hold seriousness long in her capricious little fancy, or, with feminine tact, she sought to make the parting less difficult for him, for she broke into a dazzling smile. "Yes, I'm goin' to run Blue Lightning agin Charley and that way-bag back to Laurel Run, and break the record."

It is said that she did! Perhaps owing to the fact that the grade of the return journey to Laurel Run was in her favor, and that she could avoid the long, circuitous ascent to the summit taken by the stage, or that, owing to the extraordinary difficulties in the carriage of the way-bag—which had to be twice rescued from under the wheels of the stage—she entered the Laurel Run post-office as the coach leaders came trotting up the hill. Mr. Home was already on the platform.

"You'll have to ballast your next way-bag, boss," said Charley, gravely, as it escaped his clutches once more in the dust of the road, "or you'll have to make a new contract with the company. We've lost ten minutes in five miles over that bucking thing."

Home did not reply, but quickly dragged his prize into the office, scarcely noticing Mrs. Baker, who stood beside him pale and breathless. As the bolt of the bag was drawn, revealing its chaotic interior, Mrs. Baker gave a little sigh. Home glanced quickly at her, emptied the bag upon the floor, and picked up the broken and half-filled money parcel. Then he collected the scattered coins and counted them. "It's all right, Mrs. Baker," he said gravely. "*He's* safe this time!"

"I'm so glad!" said little Mrs. Baker, with a hypocritical gasp.

"So am I," returned Home, with increasing gravity, as he took the coin, "for, from all I have gathered this after-noon, it seems he was an old prisoner of Laurel Run, a friend of your

husband's, and, I think, more fool than knave!" He was silent for a moment, clicking the coins against each other; then he said carelessly: "Did he get quite away, Mrs. Baker?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about," said Mrs. Baker, with a lofty air of dignity, but a somewhat debasing color. "I don't see why *I* should know anything about it, or why he should go away at all."

"Well," said Mr. Home, laying his hand gently on the widow's shoulder, "well, you see, it might have occurred to his friends that the *coins were marked*! That is, no doubt, the reason why he would take their good advice and go. But, as I said before, Mrs. Baker, *you're* all right, whatever happens—the Government stands by *you*!"

THE CAPTAIN'S VICES

BY FRANCOIS COPPEE

Francois Edouard Joachim Coppée (born 1842), poet and story-writer; has happily characterized himself as "a man of refinement who enjoys simple people, an aristocrat who loves the masses." The son of a clerk in the War Department, and himself a citizen-soldier during the Franco-Prussian War, he has made a close study of military character, as appears in the present selection.

Owing to his unusual sympathy with the trials, joys, and foibles of life among the middle and lower classes of Paris, Coppée has endeared himself to the general public as perhaps no other writer of this generation has succeeded in doing.

THE CAPTAIN'S VICES*

By FRANCOIS COPPEE

*Translated for Great Short Stories by Mrs. J. L. Meyer.

I

The name of the place where Captain Mercadier (thirty years in the service, twenty-two campaigns, and three wounds) settled when he was retired is of small importance. It was a place similar to all the little cities which strive to acquire, but do not acquire, a branch railway station. As there was no railway station there the natives had but one diversion: they all met on the Place de la Fontaine at the same hour every day to see the diligence roll in to the cracking of the long whip and the jingling of the little bells. The city numbered 3,000 inhabitants (ambitiously called by the statistics "souls"), and it fed its vanity on the fact that it was the county-seat. It possessed ramparts shaded by trees, a pretty river for fishing with the line, and a church of the charming epoch of the flamboyant Gothic, dishonored by a terrible "Stations of the Cross," sent down direct from Saint Sulpice.

Always on Monday the public square was mottled with the great blue and red umbrellas of the market; and the country people came in in carts and berlins. But the rest of the week the village fell back with drowsy delight into the silence and the solitude which endeared it to the sober bourgeoise who made up its 3,000 "souls."

The streets were paved in little patterns, and through the closed windows of the ground floors could be seen bouquets made of the hair of the departed—or of some other hair—and wreaths of orange blossoms on cushions under glass shades. And through the half-glass doors of the gardens passers-by could see statuettes of Napoleon formed of clam-shells. Of course,

the principal inn was named "*l'Ecu de France*." The town registrar was a poet; he rimed acrostics for the ladies of the best society of the place.

Captain Mercadier had chosen that particular village for the frivolous reason that it was his birthplace. In his boisterous youth he had mutilated the advertising signs and chipped splinters out of the porcelain bell-knobs. Despite these potent reasons, he had neither relations nor friends in the city, and his memories of his childhood held nothing but the indignant faces of the tradesmen, who showed him their clenched fists as they screamed and capered on their doorsills; the catechism, which menaced him with hell; a school where he was told that he should die upon the scaffold, and—last memory of all—his departure for the regiment, a departure hastened a trifle by the paternal malediction. For he was no saint, this captain! The record of his career was black with days passed in the guard-house (causes for punishment being absence from roll-call without leave, and orgies after taps). Time and time again he had been stripped of his chevrons (both as corporal and as sergeant), and it had been only by chance—thanks to the broad license of the campaign—that he had won his first epaulette. Stern and bold soldier, he had passed the greater part of his life in Algeria, having enlisted at the time when our men in the ranks wore the high kepi and white cross-belt and carried the heavy cartridge-box. He had had Lamoricière for commandant; the Duc de Nemours (who had been near him when he received his first wound) had decorated him; and while he was sergeant-major old Bugeaud had called him by his given name and pulled his ears. He had been a prisoner of Abd-el-Kadir; he bore the scars of a yataghan on his neck; carried one bullet in his shoulder and another in his leg; and, despite absinthe, duels, and gambling debts, and the almond-shaped black eyes of the Jewesses, he had forced victory at the point of the bayonet and the sabre, and so won his grade of Captain in the First Regiment of Cuirassiers. Captain Mercadier (thirty years of service, twenty-two campaigns, three wounds) had just been retired, and for the first time drawn his half-pay—not quite two hundred dollars, which, added to the fifty dollars accompanying his cross, placed him in the condition of honorable poverty reserved by the state for the men who have best served her.

The Captain's entrance in his native town was devoid of pomp. He arrived one morning in the imperial of the diligence, chewing the remains of an extinct cigar, and talking and laughing with the driver, to whom during the journey he had narrated the story of how he had passed the Iron Gates. His auditor had cut the narrative by oaths or by gross threats addressed to the straining mare upon the right, but Mercadier was indulgent, and he had told his history to its end.

When the diligence drew into the Place de la Fontaine he flung down an old valise covered by labels representing all the railroads that he had traveled when he changed garrison, and three minutes later the assembled citizens were stupefied by the spectacle of a man wearing the ribbon, standing at the zinc counter of the nearest wine-shop and drinking and cracking jokes with the driver. (The fact of his ribbon would have been exciting had there been nothing else!)

Mercadier, Captain of the First, installed himself, in soldier fashion, very summarily, in a house in the suburbs, where two captive cows were lowing, and where ducks and chickens waddled or strutted with uplifted claw, passing and repassing the open door of a wagon-house. Mercadier had seen a sign, "Furnished room to let," and, preceded by a lady as dragoon-like as himself, had mounted some stairs (guarded by a wooden railing and perfumed by the strong odors of a stable), and had entered a large room with a tiled floor, with walls gaily covered with paper representing (in bright blue on a white ground) Joseph Poniatowski, multiplied *ad infinitum* and leaping courageously into the Elster. It is probable that there was some subtle power for seduction in this bizarre decoration; for, without an instant's hesitation, without forebodings as to the almost inevitable discomfort presaged by the hard straw chairs, the stiff, neglected black walnut furniture, or the narrow bed with curtains yellowed by their years, he closed the bargain, and in a quarter of an hour he had emptied his trunk, hung his clothes, set his boots in a corner, and decorated the blue walls with a "trophy" composed of three pipes, a sabre, and a brace of pistols. That done, he sallied forth, visited the grocery and the wine-shop across the way, bought a pound of candles and a bottle of rum, returned to his room, set his purchases on the mantel-shelf, and looked around him with the air of a man well pleased. Then, according to a habit acquired in barracks and in the field, he shaved without a mirror, brushed his coat, pulled his hat over his ears, and went out in search of a café.

This visit to the café was a settled habit.

The Captain had three vices, equally balanced, and he satisfied all their claims. His vices were: Tobacco, Absinthe, and Cards. The greater part of his life had passed in cafés, and had any one denied it, he might have drawn a map of the countries where he had lived, and placed in that map all the cafés, just as they had stood when he had visited them. He was never at his ease unless seated on the smooth velvet of a café bench, before a square of green cloth, on which, as he played his games, glasses and saucers accumulated; and his cigars were never just right unless he could strike his matches on the rough underside of the marble table.

And he had never failed, having hung his sabre and his kepi on a peg, to settle down into his chair, unbutton some of the buttons of his vest, to heave a sigh and to cry out: "There, that is better!"

So now, his first care was to choose his café; and, having gone round the city, not finding just what he wished for, he fixed his critical eyes upon the café Prosper (at the angle of the Place du Marché and the rue de la Paroisse). It was not his ideal of a café. The exterior offered several details smacking too much of the province—for instance, that waiter in the black apron; the little yew trees in boxes painted green; the tables covered with white oilcloth! But the Captain liked the interior, so he took his place there. Immediately after his entrance he was rejoiced by the sound of the call-bell, pressed by the fat hand of the stout, florid cashier (dress of summer lightness; a red ribbon in her well-oiled hair). He saluted her with the gallantry of an officer (retired). He noticed that she held her place with majesty sufficient to the occasion, and that she was flanked by quaint pyramids of billiard balls. The café was bright and clean, and evenly carpeted with yellow sand. He sauntered around the room, looked into the mirrors and at the pictures, in which musketeers and ladies in riding-dress sipped champagne in landscapes full of hollyhocks. He ordered drinks. Flies were dying in his wine; but he was a soldier, habituated to witness death. As a man he was indulgent, and he ignored the very visible tragedies with a stoicism grounded by long experience in wild countries, where insects bathe in wine with a familiarity strictly provincial. Eight days later he was one of the pillars of the Café Prosper. His punctual habits were known there; the waiters anticipated his wishes. Soon he ate his meals with the proprietors of the café.

The Captain was a precious recruit for the café's habitual clients (people who were bored to death by the terrible inertia of the province); to them his arrival was a windfall. Here was a man who had seen the world—past master of all the games! He told, gaily enough, about his wars and his love affairs. He was enchanted to find people who were ignorant of his history. It would take six months to tell them of his raids, his skirmishes, his outpost duty of a dark night, his battles, his hunts, the retreat from Constantine, the capture of Bou-Mazâ, the officers' receptions, with their illimitible number of punches "*au kirsch*." Ah! human weakness! he was not sorry to be a little of an oracle somewhere, at least; he from whom the subs, just delivered from Saint-Cyr, had fled to escape his stories.

As a general thing his auditors were the master of the café (a fat beer-sack, silent and stupid; always in short-sleeves, and remarkable for nothing but his painted pipes), the constable, a dogged gentleman dressed like an undertaker—he was despised because he carried off the sugar that he could not use in his mazagran—the registrar, the man who wrote acrostics, truly a very sweet-tempered man, and a man of very weak constitution, who sent answers to the riddles in the illustrated journals; and, last of all, the veterinary of the county, who, in his quality of atheist and democrat, permitted himself to contradict the Captain now and then. This practitioner was a man with bushy whiskers and eyeglasses. He presided when the Radical Committee met toward election time. When the parish priest took up a little collection among the devotees of his congregation (to the end that he might decorate his church with some horrible gilded plaster statue), the veterinary wrote a letter to the "Siècle" denouncing "the cupidity of the sons of Loyola."

One evening the Captain left his cards and went out to get cigars. He had just had an animated political discussion with the veterinary. As soon as he was out of hearing the veterinary muttered some tirades, in which could be distinguished such phrases as "Sabre trailer!" "Braggart!" "Let him keep to facts!" "Smash his face for him!" etc. While the veterinary was grumbling, the Captain came back, whistling a march and twisting his cane as

he had twisted his sabre. The veterinary stopped as if struck by lightning; and the incident was closed.

But this was only an incident; on the whole, the little community of the Café Prosper had few discussions. The old residents yielded peaceably to the presidency of the stranger. Mercadier's martial head, the white beard trimmed after the fashion of the Bearnais, were imposing enough; and the little city, already so proud of many things, had one thing more to boast of—her most conspicuous representative:

MERCADIER

Captain of the First Cuirassiers
Army of France (Retired)

II

There is no such thing as perfect happiness, and Captain Mercadier, who had thought that he had found it (happiness) when he installed himself in his café, was forced to abjure his illusions. On market-day the café was not fit to turn a card in. From daybreak it swarmed with trucksters, farmers, men who sold hogs, eggs, and poultry; loud-mouthed people with thick, sunburnt necks, carrying mammoth rawhides, slouching about in blue blouses and otter-skin caps, who drank as they drove their bargains, thumped the tables with their fists, called the waiter "thou," cracked the billiard balls, and "raised hell" generally. When the Captain entered the café for his 11 a.m. breakfast, he found the room full of drunkards lying over the tables, staggering about or bolting their coarse dinners. His own place was taken. The cashier's bell rang incessantly; the proprietor and the waiter bustled about, napkins on arms; in short, it was a day of bad luck, and the days preceding it weighed on the Captain's spirits like presentiments of evil. One Monday morning his courage failed him and he decided to eat at home.

He knew that the café would swarm; that he could not eat or drink in peace; that the green table would be unfit for play. But a ray of the soft autumnal sunlight enticed him, and he went out and took his seat on the stone bench by the street door. He was sitting there, smoking his damp cigar, melancholy enough, when he saw, coming down the street, a little girl eight or ten years old, driving before her a flock of geese. In her hand she held a switch.

Looking fixedly at her as she drew nearer, the Captain saw that she had a wooden leg. There was nothing of the father in the heart of the old soldier; he was a hardened bachelor, impervious as a shellback to the feelings of a family-father; in the days of his service in Algeria, when the little Arabs had pursued him, imploring him with their soft eyes, he had chased them with a whip. On the few occasions of his visits to his married comrades he had gone home growling against their ill-kept and weeping "young ones," who had "pawed" his gold lace with unclean fingers. But the strange aspect of this child, the peculiarity of her infirmity, moved him with feelings that he had never known. His heart contracted at sight of the little creature. The wasted frame was barely covered by a ragged skirt and worn-out shirt. And then she followed her geese so bravely! The dust arose in clouds around her bare foot as she stumped along on her ill-made wooden leg.

Recognizing their residence, the geese entered the courtyard and the child was following them, when the old man stopped her.

"Eh! little girl!" he cried, "what is your name?"

"Pierrette, at your service, sir," answered the child, fixing great dark eyes upon him and putting back her disordered hair.

"Do you belong here? I have never seen you until now."

"Oh! yes, and I know you well. I sleep under the stairs, and you wake me up every night when you come home."

"Truly? Well, hereafter I will come on tiptoes. How old are you?"

"Nine years old, sir, next All Saints."

"Is the madame your mother?"

"No, sir. I am a servant."

"What do they pay you?"

"They give me my soup and my bed under the stairs."

"How did you get that arrangement?" (pointing to the wooden leg).

"A horse kicked me when I was six years old."

"Are your parents living?"

The pale face reddened, and she murmured, hesitating as if ashamed to confess it:

"I am a foundling."

Then with an awkward salute she limped away, passing under the porte-cochère; and the Captain heard the clicking of the wooden leg as it struck the pavement of the courtyard.

"Good heavens!" he said, mechanically taking the road to the café.

"This is not according to regulations! If a soldier loses his leg he goes to the hospital! They give him money for tobacco. This one has to work and they give her nothing! That is too much! Such an infirmity! Too bad! too bad!" He had reached the café, but when he saw the blue blouses, and when he heard the roars of coarse laughter, he turned away and retraced his steps. He was in very bad humor.

He had never been in his room so long when it was daylight. The room was sordid! The bed-curtains were the color of tanned meerschaum; the rug was littered with cigar stumps and with other things more appropriate for the cuspidor than for the carpet; the dust lay on everything, and so thick that a man might write his name in it.

He gazed at the blue walls, the pictured river, where the sublime lancer of Leipsic met his glorious death; then, to pass the time, he reviewed his wardrobe.

"I need a striker," he murmured. "As I am now I should not pass muster"; and suddenly his thoughts turned to the cripple.

"I have it! I will rent the adjoining room! Winter is coming; the little one would freeze under the stairs! she shall be my striker, caterer, sutler; *that* one is brave enough for a man! *Quoi!*"

Then his face clouded; quarter-day was coming, and he was deep in debt at the café.

"I am not rich enough," he said gloomily, "and yet they rob me down there! I could stake my pay on that! What do I have to eat? My board is too dear; and that devil of a horse-doctor cheats like old man Bezique himself. For eight days I have paid for his drinks. Who knows if I should not do better to take the little one! She could make soup for breakfast, *pot-au-feu* for dinner, and a stew for supper. The campaign grub! don't I remember it!"

Decidedly, the temptation was strong.

Going into the street that night, he met the mistress of the house, a fat, rosy-cheeked peasant.

The little girl was with her; they stood half-bent, picking up the droppings before the house with pitchforks.

"Can she sew, scrub, make soup?" he asked abruptly.

"Who, Pierrette? Why shouldn't she?"

"Does she know anything of all that?"

"Why not? She is a foundling; she came from the hospital; they teach them to take care of themselves."

"I say! little one, you are not afraid of me, are you? No, I would not hurt you! What do you think of it, madame? May I take her? I need a servant."

"You may take her if you will feed and clothe her."

"Agreed! Here are four dollars; buy her a dress and a shoe; let her put them on at once. To-morrow we will draw up papers."

Then, amiably tapping the child upon the cheek, he went away, twirling his cane—it was just such a *moulinet* as he had made with his sabre.

"I shall have to draw the line on my drinks—a few less absinthes, Captain Mercadier!" he thought merrily. "As for the horse-doctor, I must turn his flank! I can't play bezique any more. *This* thing is according to regulations!"

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"Captain, you are a deserter!" said the pillars of the Café Prosper, when he appeared among them after a long absence.

"Well, that's about it!" answered the Captain.

But the poor man had not foreseen all the consequences of his charity. By suppressing his beer and absinthes he had managed to clothe and feed the child of his adoption; but the modest price of her sustenance did not end it! Now the bachelor was housekeeping! and housekeeping costs money.

The heart of the child was full of gratitude and she proved it by her acts. The Captain's room was as fresh as a rose; the furniture was like new; the spiders no longer trailed their threads over the glorious death of Poniatowski. When the Captain set foot upon the stair he was saluted by the odor of cabbage soup and all the well-remembered dishes of the mess! All that set upon the coarse but snow-white cloth; and the painted plate and the sparkling cover! Sapristi! *this* was campaigning!

Pierrette always profited by the after-dinner humor to confess her wishes. She longed for brass andirons for the chimney; for now the Captain had a warm room every day; the little one kept the fire laid ready for his coming. The days were short and cold. And Pierrette longed for a pretty mold; for she made such cakes for the Captain!

"Yes, all that cost money. Where was it to come from?" But the Captain smiled at all her wishes. Home comforts had won the old war-dog; home was the best! and this home was a real home. "The andirons must be had—so must the mold! but how—where from?" He resisted the mellow seductions of his Loudrès—a demi-Loudrès must do for the present; then came another struggle and the demi-Loudrès was displaced by a 1-cent "Algérienne." Some one offered five points at écarté, and a stare that froze the marrow in his bones answered him. Then came the last sacrifice. The third glass of beer was suppressed—so was the second glass of chartreuse. It was a struggle! They were on foot, breast to breast! Time and time again the green demon tugged at the strings of his memory. Sometimes it was too strong for him; he entered the wine-shop; then, summoning all his manhood, he triumphed over his tempters; and that night his *moulinet* was like a whirlwind on a whirlpool. Sometimes, in dreams, he

turned the king and cried out *à tout*! Then, springing from his bed, he stood at attention, and saluted with the gesture of a conqueror.

"Drink, play, tobacco! Ho, ho! Not according to regulations!" He was not superhuman; *but he had been a soldier*! Mercadier, First Cuirassiers, Army of France (retired).

He loved his little adopted daughter all the better for the sacrifices made for her; and each time that he controlled his vices he kissed her more tenderly. *For he kissed her*. She was no longer a servant; that was past! Once, when she had stood silent and respectful on her wooden leg, his pent-up feelings had burst their bounds; he had seized the thin hands and cried out furiously:

"Come here and kiss me! then take your place at the table and talk to me. Give me the pleasure of hearing you say '*thou*' to me! *Mille tonnerres!*"

So *that* was settled—she was his daughter. The child had saved him from an inglorious old age. He had cast aside the vices of the Egotist and to fill their place he had taken a passion for all eternity—the love of a father for his child! He adored the little infirm creature who limped around him in the coquettish, well-ordered room.

He had taught Pierrette to read, and now, recalling his own early lessons, he had set her a copy in writing. And he was never happier than when he sat in his polished chair watching the child bending over her copy, or, with face close to the paper, lapping up an ink-spot, as a kitten laps up cream. She had copied all the letters of the most interminable of adverbs!

Now he had but one cause for anxiety; he had nothing to leave her. He had taken a mania for saving; he was almost a miser; he planned and theorized. He must give up his tobacco! Even the blue "National" was too dear for him. He was saving money from his allowance; he would buy out a little fancy store; and then he could die in peace. Pierrette would have her shop; and behind it there would be a little room. He pushed his pipe away, even when Pierrette filled and lighted it. If she had that shop she could live in the room back of it, obscure and tranquil, in spite of her wooden leg! She could live then; and so, when on the walls of her little room she would hang the cross hard won by gallant and meritorious conduct in the field, it would remind her of the Captain!

. . . . . .

He walked with her every day on the parapet of the ramparts, and now and then the peasants passing through the town turned to gaze after the strange pair. They wondered at them. The veteran, untouched by all his wars; the child crippled, though still so young!

And once the Captain wept for joy. He had heard what they said: "Poor old man! what tales he could tell! But his daughter, how pretty and how sweet!"

RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER

BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Should you ask me, "Who is Hawthorne?
Who this Hawthorne that you mention?"
I should answer, I should tell you,
"He's a Yankee, who had written
Many books you must have heard of;
For he wrote 'The Scarlet Letter'
And 'The House of Seven Gables,'
Wrote, too, 'Rappaccini's Daughter,'
And a lot of other stories;—
Some are long and some are shorter;

Some are good and some are better."
—Henry Bright in "Song of Consul Hawthorne," 1855.

RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER

By NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

A young man named Giovanni Guasconti came very long ago from the more southern region of Italy to pursue his studies at the University of Padua. Giovanni, who had but a scanty supply of gold ducats in his pocket, took lodgings in a high and gloomy chamber of an old edifice which looked not unworthy to have been the palace of a Paduan noble, and which, in fact, exhibited over its entrance the armorial bearings of a family long since extinct. The young stranger, who was not unstudied in the great poem of his country, recollected that one of the ancestors of this family, and perhaps an occupant of this very mansion, had been pictured by Dante as a partaker of the immortal agonies of his Inferno. These reminiscences and associations, together with the tendency to heartbreak natural to a young man for the first time out of his native sphere, caused Giovanni to sigh heavily as he looked around the desolate and ill-furnished apartment.

"Holy Virgin, signor!" cried old Dame Lisabetta, who, won by the youth's remarkable beauty of person, was kindly endeavoring to give the chamber a habitable air; "what a sigh was that to come out of a young man's heart! Do you find this old mansion gloomy? For the love of Heaven, then, put your head out of the window, and you will see as bright sunshine as you have left in Naples."

Guasconti mechanically did as the old woman advised, but could not quite agree with her that the Lombard sunshine was as cheerful as that of Southern Italy. Such as it was, however, it fell upon a garden beneath the window, and expended its fostering influences on a variety of plants which seemed to have been cultivated with exceeding care.

"Does this garden belong to the house?" asked Giovanni.

"Heaven forbid, signor, unless it were fruitful of better pot-herbs than any that grow there now," answered old Lisabetta. "No; that garden is cultivated by the own hands of Signor Giacomo Rappaccini, the famous doctor who, I warrant him, has been heard of as far as Naples. It is said that he distils these plants into medicines that are as potent as a charm. Oftentimes you may see the Signor Doctor at work, and perchance the signora his daughter, too, gathering the strange flowers that grow in the garden."

The old woman had now done what she could for the aspect of the chamber, and, commending the young man to the protection of the saints, took her departure.

Giovanni still found no better occupation than to look down into the garden beneath his window. From its appearance he judged it to be one of those botanic gardens which were of earlier date in Padua than elsewhere in Italy, or in the world. Or, not improbably, it might once have been the pleasure-place of an opulent family; for there was the ruin of a marble fountain in the centre, sculptured with rare art, but so wofully shattered that it was impossible to trace the original design from the chaos of remaining fragments. The water, however, continued to gush and sparkle into the sunbeams as cheerfully as ever. A little gurgling sound ascended to the young man's window and made him feel as if a fountain were an immortal spirit that sung its song unceasingly, and without heeding the vicissitudes around it, while one century embodied it in marble and another scattered the perishable garniture on the soil. All about the pool into which the water subsided grew various plants that seemed to require a plentiful supply of moisture for the nourishment of gigantic leaves, and in some instances flowers of gorgeous magnificence. There was one shrub in particular, set in a marble vase in the midst of the pool, that bore a profusion of purple blossoms, each of which had the lustre and richness of a gem; and the whole together made a show so resplendent that it seemed enough to illuminate the garden, even had there been no sunshine. Every portion of the soil was peopled with plants and herbs which, if less beautiful, still bore tokens of assiduous care,

as if all had their individual virtues, known to the scientific mind that fostered them. Some were placed in urns rich with old carving and others in common garden-pots; some crept serpent-like along the ground, or climbed on high, using whatever means of ascent was offered them. One plant had wreathed itself round a statue of Vertumnus, which was thus quite veiled and shrouded in a drapery of hanging foliage so happily arranged that it might have served a sculptor for a study.

While Giovanni stood at the window he heard a rustling behind a screen of leaves, and became aware that a person was at work in the garden. His figure soon emerged into view, and showed itself to be that of no common laborer, but a tall, emaciated, sallow and sickly-looking man dressed in a scholar's garb of black. He was beyond the middle term of life, with gray hair, and a thin gray beard, and a face singularly marked with intellect and cultivation, but which could never, even in his more youthful days, have expressed much warmth of heart.

Nothing could exceed the intentness with which this scientific gardener examined every shrub which grew in his path; it seemed as if he was looking into their inmost nature, making observations in regard to their creative essence, and discovering why one leaf grew in this shape and another in that, and wherefore such and such flowers differed among themselves in hue and perfume. Nevertheless, in spite of the deep intelligence on his part, there was no approach to intimacy between himself and these vegetable existences. On the contrary, he avoided their actual touch or the direct inhaling of their odors with a caution that impressed Giovanni most disagreeably; for the man's demeanor was that of one walking among malignant influences, such as savage beasts or deadly snakes or evil spirits which, should he allow them one moment of license, would wreak upon him some terrible fatality. It was strangely frightful to the young man's imagination to see this air of insecurity in a person cultivating a garden—that most simple and innocent of human toils, and which had been alike the joy and labor of the unfallen parents of the race. Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world? and this man with such a perception of harm in what his own hands caused to grow—was he the Adam?

The distrustful gardener, while plucking away the dead leaves or pruning the too luxuriant growth of the shrubs, defended his hands with a pair of thick gloves. Nor were these his only armor. When, in his walk through the garden, he came to the magnificent plant that hung its purple gems beside the marble fountain, he placed a kind of mask over his mouth and nostrils, as if all this beauty did but conceal a deadlier malice. But, finding his task still too dangerous, he drew back, removed the mask, and called loudly, but in the infirm voice of a person affected with inward disease:

"Beatrice! Beatrice!"

"Here am I, my father! What would you?" cried a rich and youthful voice from the window of the opposite house—a voice as rich as a tropical sunset, and which made Giovanni, though he knew not why, think of deep hues of purple or crimson and of perfumes heavily delectable. "Are you in the garden?"

"Yes, Beatrice," answered the gardener, "and I need your help."

Soon there emerged from under a sculptured portal the figure of a young girl arrayed with as much richness of taste as the most splendid of the flowers, beautiful as the day, and with a bloom so deep and vivid that one shade more would have been too much. She looked redundant with life, health, and energy; all of which attributes were bound down and compressed, as it were, and girdled tensely in their luxuriance by her virgin zone. Yet Giovanni's fancy must have grown morbid while he looked down into the garden, for the impression which the fair stranger made upon him was as if here were another flower, the human sister of those vegetable ones, as beautiful as they—more beautiful than the richest of them—but still to be touched only with a glove, nor to be approached without a mask. As Beatrice came down the garden path it was observable that she handled and inhaled the odor of several of the plants which her father had most sedulously avoided.

"Here, Beatrice," said the latter; "see how many needful offices require to be done to our chief treasure. Yet, shattered as I am, my life might pay the penalty of approaching it so

closely as circumstances demand. Henceforth, I fear, this plant must be consigned to your sole charge."

"And gladly will I undertake it," cried again the rich tones of the young lady as she bent toward the magnificent plant and opened her arms as if to embrace it. "Yes, my sister, my splendor, it shall be Beatrice's task to nurse and serve thee, and thou shalt reward her with thy kisses and perfume-breath, which to her is as the breath of life."

Then, with all the tenderness in her manner that was so strikingly expressed in her words, she busied herself with such attentions as the plant seemed to require; and Giovanni, at his lofty window, rubbed his eyes, and almost doubted whether it were a girl tending her favorite flower or one sister performing the duties of affection to another.

The scene soon terminated. Whether Doctor Rappaccini had finished his labors in the garden or that his watchful eye had caught the stranger's face, he now took his daughter's arm and retired. Night was already closing in; oppressive exhalations seemed to proceed from the plants and steal upward past the open window, and Giovanni, closing the lattice, went to his couch and dreamed of a rich flower and beautiful girl. Flower and maiden were different, and yet the same, and fraught with some strange peril in either shape.

But there is an influence in the light of morning that tends to rectify whatever errors of fancy, or even of judgment, we may have incurred during the sun's decline, or among the shadows of the night, or in the less wholesome glow of moonshine. Giovanni's first movement on starting from sleep was to throw open the window and gaze down into the garden which his dreams had made so fertile of mysteries. He was surprised, and a little ashamed, to find how real and matter-of-fact an affair it proved to be in the first rays of the sun, which gilded the dewdrops that hung upon leaf and blossom, and, while giving a brighter beauty to each rare flower, brought everything within the limits of ordinary experience. The young man rejoiced that in the heart of the barren city he had the privilege of overlooking this spot of lovely and luxuriant vegetation. It would serve, he said to himself, as a symbolic language to keep him in communion with Nature. Neither the sickly and thought-worn Doctor Giacomo Rappaccini, it is true, nor his brilliant daughter, was now visible; so that Giovanni could not determine how much of the singularity which he attributed to both was due to their own qualities, and how much to his wonder-working fancy. But he was inclined to take a most rational view of the whole matter.

In the course of the day he paid his respects to Signor Pietro Baglioni, professor of medicine in the university, a physician of eminent repute to whom Giovanni had brought a letter of introduction. The professor was an elderly personage, apparently of genial nature and habits that might almost be called jovial; he kept the young man to dinner and made himself very agreeable by the freedom and liveliness of his conversation, especially when warmed by a flask or two of Tuscan wine. Giovanni, conceiving that men of science, inhabitants of the same city, must needs be on familiar terms with one another, took an opportunity to mention the name of Doctor Rappaccini. But the professor did not respond with so much cordiality as he had anticipated.

"Ill would it become a teacher of the divine art of medicine," said Professor Pietro Baglioni, in answer to a question of Giovanni, "to withhold due and well-considered praise of a physician so eminently skilled as Rappaccini. But, on the other hand, I should answer it but scantily to my conscience were I to permit a worthy youth like yourself, Signor Giovanni, the son of an ancient friend, to imbibe erroneous ideas respecting a man who might hereafter chance to hold your life and death in his hands. The truth is, our worshipful Doctor Rappaccini has as much science as any member of the faculty—with perhaps one single exception—in Padua or all Italy, but there are certain grave objections to his professional character."

"And what are they?" asked the young man.

"Has my friend Giovanni any disease of body or heart, that he is so inquisitive about physicians?" said the professor, with a smile. "But, as for Rappaccini, it is said of him—and I, who know the man well, can answer for its truth—that he cares infinitely more for science than for mankind. His patients are interesting to him only as subjects for some new

experiment. He would sacrifice human life—his own among the rest—or whatever else was dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a grain of mustard-seed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge."

"Methinks he is an awful man indeed," remarked Guasconti, mentally recalling the cold and purely intellectual aspect of Rappaccini. "And yet, worshipful professor, is it not a noble spirit? Are there many men capable of so spiritual a love of science?"

"God forbid!" answered the professor somewhat testily—"at least, unless they take sounder views of the healing art than those adopted by Rappaccini. It is his theory that all medicinal virtues are comprised within those substances which we term vegetable poisons. These he cultivates with his own hands, and is said even to have produced new varieties of poison more horribly deleterious than Nature, without the assistance of this learned person, would ever have plagued the world with. That the Signor Doctor does less mischief than might be expected with such dangerous substances is undeniable. Now and then, it must be owned, he has effected—or seemed to effect—a marvelous cure. But, to tell you my private mind, Signor Giovanni, he should receive little credit for such instances of success—they being probably the work of chance—but should be held strictly accountable for his failures, which may justly be considered his own work."

The youth might have taken Baglioni's opinions with many grains of allowance had he known that there was a professional warfare of long continuance between him and Doctor Rappaccini, in which the latter was generally thought to have gained the advantage. If the reader be inclined to judge for himself, we refer him to certain black-letter tracts on both sides preserved in the medical department of the University of Padua.

"I know not, most learned professor," returned Giovanni, after musing on what had been said of Rappaccini's exclusive zeal for science—"I know not how dearly this physician may love his art, but surely there is one object more dear to him. He has a daughter."

"Aha!" cried the professor, with a laugh. "So now our friend Giovanni's secret is out! You have heard of this daughter, whom all the young men in Padua are wild about, though not half a dozen have ever had the good hap to see her face. I know little of the Signora Beatrice save that Rappaccini is said to have instructed her deeply in his science, and that, young and beautiful as fame reports her, she is already qualified to fill a professor's chair. Perchance her father destines her for mine. Other absurd rumors there be, not worth talking about or listening to. So now, Signor Giovanni, drink off your glass of Lacryma."

Guasconti returned to his lodgings somewhat heated with the wine he had quaffed, and which caused his brain to swim with strange fantasies in reference to Doctor Rappaccini and the beautiful Beatrice. On his way, happening to pass by a florist's, he bought a fresh bouquet of flowers.

Ascending to his chamber, he seated himself near the window, but within the shadow thrown by the depth of the wall, so that he could look down into the garden with little risk of being discovered. All beneath his eye was a solitude. The strange plants were basking in the sunshine, and now and then nodding gently to one another, as if in acknowledgment of sympathy and kindred. In the midst, by the shattered fountain, grew the magnificent shrub, with its purple gems clustering all over it; they glowed in the air and gleamed back again out of the depths of the pool, which thus seemed to overflow with colored radiance from the rich reflection that was steeped in it. At first, as we have said, the garden was a solitude. Soon, however, as Giovanni had half hoped, half feared, would be the case, a figure appeared beneath the antique sculptured portal and came down between the rows of plants, inhaling their various perfumes as if she were one of those beings of old classic fable that lived upon sweet odors. On again beholding Beatrice the young man was even startled to perceive how much her beauty exceeded his recollection of it—so brilliant, so vivid in its character, that she glowed amid the sunlight, and, as Giovanni whispered to himself, positively illuminated the more shadowy intervals of the garden path. Her face being now more revealed than on the former occasion, he was struck by its expression of simplicity and sweetness—qualities that had not entered into his idea of her character, and which made him ask anew what manner of mortal she might be. Nor did he fail again to observe or imagine an analogy between the

beautiful girl and the gorgeous shrub that hung its gem-like flowers over the fountain—a resemblance which Beatrice seemed to have indulged a fantastic humor in heightening both by the arrangement of her dress and the selection of its hues.

Approaching the shrub, she threw open her arms as with a passionate ardor, and drew its branches into an intimate embrace—so intimate that her features were hidden in its leafy bosom and her glistening ringlets all intermingled with the flowers.

"Give me thy breath, my sister," exclaimed Beatrice, "for I am faint with common air. And give me this flower of thine, which I separate with gentlest fingers from the stem, and place it close beside my heart."

With these words the beautiful daughter of Rappaccini plucked one of the richest blossoms of the shrub, and was about to fasten it in her bosom. But now, unless Giovanni's drafts of wine had bewildered his senses, a singular incident occurred. A small orange-colored reptile of the lizard or chameleon species chanced to be creeping along the path just at the feet of Beatrice. It appeared to Giovanni, but at the distance from which he gazed he could scarcely have seen anything so minute—it appeared to him, however, that a drop or two of moisture from the broken stem of the flower descended upon the lizard's head. For an instant the reptile contorted itself violently, and then lay motionless in the sunshine. Beatrice observed this remarkable phenomenon and crossed herself sadly, but without surprise; nor did she therefore hesitate to arrange the fatal flower in her bosom. There it blushed, and almost glimmered with the dazzling effect of a precious stone, adding to her dress and aspect the one appropriate charm which nothing else in the world could have supplied. But Giovanni, out of the shadow of his window, bent forward and shrank back, and murmured and trembled.

"Am I awake? Have I my senses?" said he to himself. "What is this being? Beautiful shall I call her, or inexpressibly terrible?"

Beatrice now strayed carelessly through the garden, approaching closer beneath Giovanni's window; so that he was compelled to thrust his head quite out of its concealment in order to gratify the intense and painful curiosity which she excited. At this moment there came a beautiful insect over the garden wall; it had perhaps wandered through the city and found no flowers nor verdure among those antique haunts of men until the heavy perfumes of Doctor Rappaccini's shrubs had lured it from afar. Without alighting on the flowers this winged brightness seemed to be attracted by Beatrice, and lingered in the air and fluttered about her head. Now, here it could not be but that Giovanni Guasconti's eyes deceived him. Be that as it might, he fancied that while Beatrice was gazing at the insect with childish delight it grew faint and fell at her feet. Its bright wings shivered; it was dead—from no cause that he could discern, unless it were the atmosphere of her breath. Again Beatrice crossed herself and sighed heavily as she bent over the dead insect.

An impulsive movement of Giovanni drew her eyes to the window. There she beheld the beautiful head of the young man—rather a Grecian than an Italian head, with fair, regular features and a glistening of gold among his ringlets—gazing down upon her like a being that hovered in midair. Scarcely knowing what he did, Giovanni threw down the bouquet which he had hitherto held in his hand.

"Signora," said he, "there are pure and healthful flowers: wear them for the sake of Giovanni Guasconti."

"Thanks, signor!" replied Beatrice, with her rich voice, that came forth as it were like a gush of music, and with a mirthful expression, half childish and half woman-like. "I accept your gift, and would fain recompense it with this precious purple flower; but if I toss it into the air, it will not reach you. So Signor Guasconti must even content himself with my thanks."

She lifted the bouquet from the ground, and then, as if inwardly ashamed at having stepped aside from her maidenly reserve to respond to a stranger's greeting, passed swiftly homeward through the garden. But, few as the moments were, it seemed to Giovanni, when she was on the point of vanishing beneath the sculptured portal, that his beautiful bouquet was already beginning to wither in her grasp. It was an idle thought: there could be no possibility of distinguishing a faded flower from a fresh one at so great a distance.

For many days after this incident the young man avoided the window that looked into Doctor Rappaccini's garden as if something ugly and monstrous would have blasted his eyesight had he been betrayed into a glance. He felt conscious of having put himself, to a certain extent, within the influence of an unintelligible power by the communication which he had opened with Beatrice. The wisest course would have been, if his heart were in any real danger, to quit his lodgings, and Padua itself, at once; the next wiser, to have accustomed himself as far as possible to the familiar and daylight view of Beatrice, thus bringing her rigidly and systematically within the limits of ordinary experience. Least of all, while avoiding her sight, should Giovanni have remained so near this extraordinary being that the proximity, and possibility even of intercourse, should give a kind of substance and reality to the wild vagaries which his imagination ran riot continually in producing. Guasconti had not a deep heart—or, at all events, its depths were not sounded now—but he had a quick fancy and an ardent southern temperament which rose every instant to a higher fever-pitch. Whether or no Beatrice possessed those terrible attributes—that fatal breath, the affinity with those so beautiful and deadly flowers—which were indicated by what Giovanni had witnessed, she had at least instilled a fierce and subtle poison into his system. It was not love, although her rich beauty was a madness to him, nor horror, even while he fancied her spirit to be imbued with the same baneful essence that seemed to pervade her physical frame, but a wild offspring of both love and horror that had each parent in it and burned like one and shivered like the other. Giovanni knew not what to dread; still less did he know what to hope; yet hope and dread kept a continual warfare in his breast, alternately vanquishing one another and starting up afresh to renew the contest. Blessed are all simple emotions, be they dark or bright! It is the lurid intermixture of the two that produces the illuminating blaze of the infernal regions.

Sometimes he endeavored to assuage the fever of his spirit by a rapid walk through the streets of Padua or beyond its gates; his footsteps kept time with the throbbings of his brain, so that the walk was apt to accelerate itself to a race. One day he found himself arrested; his arm was seized by a portly personage who had turned back on recognizing the young man and expended much breath in overtaking him.

"Signor Giovanni! Stay, my young friend!" cried he. "Have you forgotten me? That might well be the case if I were as much altered as yourself."

It was Baglioni, whom Giovanni had avoided ever since their first meeting, from a doubt that the professor's sagacity would look too deeply into his secrets. Endeavoring to recover himself, he stared forth wildly from his inner world into the outer one, and spoke like a man in a dream:

"Yes; I am Giovanni Guasconti. You are Professor Pietro Baglioni. Now let me pass."

"Not yet—not yet, Signor Giovanni Guasconti," said the professor, smiling, but at the same time scrutinizing the youth with an earnest glance. "What! Did I grow up side by side with your father, and shall his son pass me like a stranger in these old streets of Padua? Stand still, Signor Giovanni, for we must have a word or two before we part."

"Speedily, then, most worshipful professor—speedily!" said Giovanni, with feverish impatience. "Does not Your Worship see that I am in haste?"

Now, while he was speaking, there came a man in black along the street, stooping and moving feebly like a person in inferior health. His face was all overspread with a most sickly and sallow hue, but yet so pervaded with an expression of piercing and active intellect that an observer might have easily overlooked the merely physical attributes, and have seen only this wonderful energy. As he passed, this person exchanged a cold and distant salutation with Baglioni, but fixed his eyes upon Giovanni with an intentness that seemed to bring out whatever was within him worthy of notice. Nevertheless, there was a peculiar quietness in the look, as if taking merely a speculative, not a human, interest in the young man.

"It is Doctor Rappaccini," whispered the professor, when the stranger had passed. "Has he ever seen your face before?"

"Not that I know," answered Giovanni, starting at the name.

"He *has* seen you! he must have seen you!" said Baglioni, hastily. "For some purpose or other, this man of science is making a study of you. I know that look of his: it is the same that coldly illuminates his face as he bends over a bird, a mouse or a butterfly which in pursuance of some experiment he has killed by the perfume of a flower—a look as deep as Nature itself, but without Nature's warmth of love. Signor Giovanni, I will stake my life upon it you are the subject of one of Rappaccini's experiments."

"Will you make a fool of me?" cried Giovanni, passionately. "That, Signor Professor, were an untoward experiment."

"Patience, patience!" replied the imperturbable professor. "I tell thee, my poor Giovanni, that Rappaccini has a scientific interest in thee. Thou hast fallen into fearful hands. And the Signora Beatrice—what part does she act in this mystery?"

But Guasconti, finding Baglioni's pertinacity intolerable, here broke away, and was gone before the professor could again seize his arm. He looked after the young man intently, and shook his head.

"This must not be," said Raglioni to himself. "The youth Is the son of my old friend, and shall not come to any harm from which the arcana of medical science can preserve him. Besides, it is too insufferable an impertinence in Rappaccini thus to snatch the lad out of my own hands, as I may say, and make use of him for his infernal experiments. This daughter of his! It shall be looked to. Perchance, most learned Rappaccini, I may foil you where you little dream of it!"

Meanwhile, Giovanni had pursued a circuitous route, and at length found himself at the door of his lodgings. As he crossed the threshold he was met by old Lisabetta, who smirked and smiled and was evidently desirous to attract his attention—vainly, however, as the ebullition of his feelings had momentarily subsided into a cold and dull vacuity. He turned his eyes full upon the withered face that was puckering itself into a smile, but seemed to behold it not. The old dame, therefore, laid her grasp upon his cloak.

"Signor, signor!" whispered she, still with a smile over the whole breadth of her visage, so that it looked not unlike a grotesque carving in wood, darkened by centuries. "Listen, signor! There is a private entrance into the garden."

"What do you say?" exclaimed Giovanni, turning quickly about, as if an inanimate thing should start into feverish life. "A private entrance into Doctor Rappaccini's garden?"

"Hush, hush! Not so loud!" whispered Lisabetta, putting her hand over his mouth. "Yes, into the worshipful doctor's garden, where you may see all his fine shrubbery. Many a young man in Padua would give gold to be admitted among those flowers."

Giovanni put a piece of gold into her hand.

"Show me the way," said he.

A surmise, probably excited by his conversation with Baglioni, crossed his mind that this interposition of old Lisabetta might perchance be connected with the intrigue, whatever were its nature, in which the professor seemed to suppose that Doctor Rappaccini was involving him. But such a suspicion, though it disturbed Giovanni, was inadequate to restrain him. The instant he was aware of the possibility of approaching Beatrice, it seemed an absolute necessity of his existence to do so. It mattered not whether she were angel or demon: he was irrevocably within her sphere, and must obey the law that whirled him onward in ever lessening circles toward a result which he did not attempt to foreshadow. And yet, strange to say, there came across him a sudden doubt whether this intense interest on his part were not delusory, whether it were really of so deep and positive a nature as to justify him in now thrusting himself into an incalculable position, whether it were not merely the fantasy of a young man's brain only slightly or not at all connected with his heart.

He paused, hesitated, turned half about, but again went on. His withered guide led him along several obscure passages, and finally undid a door through which, as it was opened,

there came the sight and sound of rustling leaves with the broken sunshine glimmering among them. Giovanni stepped forth, and, forcing himself through the entanglement of a shrub that wreathed its tendrils over the hidden entrance, he stood beneath his own window, in the open area of Doctor Rappaccini's garden.

How often is it the case that when impossibilities have come to pass, and dreams have condensed their misty substance into tangible realities, we find ourselves calm and even coldly self-possessed, amid circumstances which it would have been a delirium of joy or agony to anticipate! Fate delights to thwart us thus. Passion will choose his own time to rush upon the scene, and lingers sluggishly behind when an appropriate adjustment of events would seem to summon his appearance. So was it now with Giovanni. Day after day his pulses had throbbed with feverish blood at the improbable idea of an interview with Beatrice, and of standing with her face to face in this very garden, basking in the Oriental sunshine of her beauty and snatching from her full gaze the mystery which he deemed the riddle of his own existence. But now there was a singular and untimely equanimity within his breast. He threw a glance around the garden to discover if Beatrice or her father were present, and perceiving that he was alone, began a critical observation of the plants.

The aspect of one and all of them dissatisfied him: their gorgeousness seemed fierce, passionate, and even unnatural. There was hardly an individual shrub which a wanderer straying by himself through a forest would not have been startled to find growing wild, as if an unearthly face had glared at him out of the thicket. Several, also, would have shocked a delicate instinct by an appearance of artificialness, indicating that there had been such a commixture, and, as it were, adultery of various vegetable species that the production was no longer of God's making, but the monstrous offspring of man's depraved fancy, glowing with only an evil mockery of beauty. They were probably the result of experiment, which in one or two cases had succeeded in mingling plants individually lovely into a compound possessing the questionable and ominous character that distinguished the whole growth of the garden. In fine, Giovanni recognized but two or three plants in the collection, and those of a kind that he well knew to be poisonous. While busy with these contemplations he heard the rustling of a silken garment, and turning beheld Beatrice emerging from beneath the sculptured portal.

Giovanni had not considered with himself what should be his deportment—whether he should apologize for his intrusion into the garden or assume that he was there with the privity at least, if not by the desire, of Doctor Rappaccini or his daughter. But Beatrice's manner placed him at his ease, though leaving him still in doubt by what agency he had gained admittance. She came lightly along the path, and met him near the broken fountain. There was surprise in her face, but brightened by a simple and kind expression of pleasure.

"You are a connoisseur in flowers, signor," said Beatrice, with a smile, alluding to the bouquet which he had flung her from the window; "it is no marvel, therefore, if the sight of my father's rare collection has tempted you to take a nearer view. If he were here, he could tell you many strange and interesting facts as to the nature and habits of these shrubs, for he has spent a lifetime in such studies, and this garden is his world."

"And yourself, lady?" observed Giovanni. "If fame says true, you likewise are deeply skilled in the virtues indicated by these rich blossoms and these spicy perfumes. Would you deign to be my instructress, I should prove an apter scholar than under Signor Rappaccini himself."

"Are there such idle rumors?" asked Beatrice, with the music of a pleasant laugh. "Do people say that I am skilled in my father's science of plants? What a jest is there! No; though I have grown up among these flowers I know no more of them than their hues and perfume, and sometimes methinks I would fain rid myself of even that small knowledge. There are many flowers here—and those not the least brilliant—that shock and offend me when they meet my eye. But pray, signor, do not believe these stories about my science; believe nothing of me save what you see with your own eyes."

"And must I believe all that I have seen with my own eyes?" asked Giovanni, pointedly, while the recollection of former scenes made him shrink. "No, signora; you demand too little of me. Bid me believe nothing save what comes from your own lips."

It would appear that Beatrice understood him. There came a deep flush to her cheek, but she looked full into Giovanni's eyes and responded to his gaze of uneasy suspicion with a queenlike haughtiness:

"I do so bid you, signor," she replied. "Forget whatever you may have fancied in regard to me; if true to the outward senses, still it may be false in its essence. But the words of Beatrice Rappaccini's lips are true from the heart outward; those you may believe."

A fervor glowed in her whole aspect and beamed upon Giovanni's consciousness like the light of truth itself. But while she spoke there was a fragrance in the atmosphere around her, rich and delightful, though evanescent, yet which the young man, from an indefinable reluctance, scarcely dared to draw into his lungs. It might be the odor of the flowers. Could it be Beatrice's breath which thus embalmed her words with a strange richness, as if by steeping them in her heart. A faintness passed like a shadow over Giovanni, and flitted away; he seemed to gaze through the beautiful girl's eyes into her transparent soul, and felt no more doubt or fear.

The tinge of passion that had colored Beatrice's manner vanished: she became gay, and appeared to derive a pure delight from her communion with the youth, not unlike what the maiden of a lonely island might have felt conversing with a voyager from the civilized world. Evidently her experience of life had been confined within the limits of that garden. She talked now about matters as simple as the daylight or summer clouds, and now asked questions in reference to the city or Giovanni's distant home, his friends, his mother and his sisters—questions indicating such seclusion and such lack of familiarity with modes and forms that Giovanni responded as if to an infant. Her spirit gushed out before him like a fresh rill that was just catching its first glimpse of the sunlight and wondering at the reflections of earth and sky which were flung into its bosom. There came thoughts, too, from a deep source, and fantasies of a gemlike brilliancy, as if diamonds and rubies sparkled upward among the bubbles of the fountain. Ever and anon there gleamed across the young man's mind a sense of wonder that he should be walking side by side with the being who had so wrought upon his imagination, whom he had idealized in such hues of terror, in whom he had positively witnessed such manifestations of dreadful attributes—that he should be conversing with Beatrice like a brother, and should find her so human and so maiden-like. But such reflections were only momentary; the effect of her character was too real not to make itself familiar at once.

In this free intercourse they had strayed through the garden, and now, after many turns among its avenues, were come to the shattered fountain beside which grew the magnificent shrub with its treasury of glowing blossoms. A fragrance was diffused from it which Giovanni recognized as identical with that which he had attributed to Beatrice's breath, but incomparably more powerful. As her eyes fell upon it, Giovanni beheld her press her hand to her bosom, as if her heart were throbbing suddenly and painfully.

"For the first time in my life," murmured she, addressing the shrub, "I had forgotten thee."

"I remember, signora," said Giovanni, "that you once promised to reward me with one of those living gems for the bouquet which I had the happy boldness to fling to your feet. Permit me now to pluck it as a memorial of this interview."

He made a step toward the shrub with extended hand. But Beatrice darted forward, uttering a shriek that went through his heart like a dagger. She caught his hand and drew it back with the whole force of her slender figure. Giovanni felt her touch thrilling through his fibres.

"Touch it not," exclaimed she, in a voice of agony—"not for thy life! It is fatal."

Then, hiding her face, she fled from him and vanished beneath the sculptured portal. As Giovanni followed her with his eyes he beheld the emaciated figure and pale intelligence of Doctor Rappaccini, who had been watching the scene, he knew not how long, within the shadow of the entrance.

No sooner was Guasconti alone in his chamber than the image of Beatrice came back to his passionate musings invested with all the witchery that had been gathering around it ever since his first glimpse of her, and now likewise imbued with a tender warmth of girlish womanhood. She was human; her nature was endowed with all gentle and feminine qualities; she was worthiest to be worshiped; she was capable, surely, on her part, of the height and heroism of love. Those tokens which he had hitherto considered as proofs of a frightful peculiarity in her physical and moral system were now either forgotten or by the subtle sophistry of passion transmitted into a golden crown of enchantment; rendering Beatrice the more admirable by so much as she was the more unique. Whatever had looked ugly was now beautiful; or, if incapable of such a change, it stole away and hid itself among those shapeless half-ideas which throng the dim region beyond the daylight of our perfect consciousness.

Thus did Giovanni spend the night, nor fell asleep until the dawn had begun to awake the slumbering flowers in Doctor Rappaccini's garden, whither his dreams doubtless led him. Up rose the sun in his due season, and flinging his beams upon the young man's eyelids, awoke him to a sense of pain. When thoroughly aroused, he became sensible of a burning and tingling agony in his hand, in his right hand—the very hand which Beatrice had grasped in her own when he was on the point of plucking one of the gemlike flowers. On the back of that hand there was now a purple print like that of four small fingers, and the likeness of a slender thumb upon his wrist. Oh, how stubbornly does love, or even that cunning semblance of love which flourishes in the imagination, but strikes no depth of root into the heart—how stubbornly does it hold its faith until the moment comes when it is doomed to vanish into the mist! Giovanni wrapped a handkerchief about his hand, and wondered what evil thing had stung him, and soon forgot his pain in a reverie of Beatrice.

After the first interview, a second was in the inevitable course of what we call fate. A third, a fourth, and a meeting with Beatrice in the garden was no longer an incident in Giovanni's daily life, but the whole space in which he might be said to live, for the anticipation and memory of that ecstatic hour made up the remainder. Nor was it otherwise with the daughter of Rappaccini. She watched for the youth's appearance, and flew to his side with confidence as unreserved as if they had been playmates from early infancy—as if they were such playmates still. If by any unwonted chance he failed to come at the appointed moment, she stood beneath the window and sent up the rich sweetness of her tones to float around him in his chamber and echo and reverberate throughout his heart. "Giovanni, Giovanni! Why tarriest thou? Come down!" and down he hastened into that Eden of poisonous flowers.

But with all this intimate familiarity there was still a reserve in Beatrice's demeanor so rigidly and invariably sustained that the idea of infringing it scarcely occurred to his imagination. By all appreciable signs they loved—they had looked love with eyes that conveyed the holy secret from the depths of one soul into the depths of the other, as if it were too sacred to be whispered by the way; they had even spoken love in those gushes of passion when their spirits darted forth in articulated breath like tongues of long-hidden flame—and yet there had been no seal of lips, no clasp of hands, nor any slightest caress such as love claims and hallows. He had never touched one of the gleaming ringlets of her hair; her garment—so marked was the physical barrier between them—had never been waved against him by a breeze. On the few occasions when Giovanni had seemed tempted to overstep the limit, Beatrice grew so sad, so stern, and, withal, wore such a look of desolate separation shuddering at itself that not a spoken word was requisite to repel him. At such times he was startled at the horrible suspicions that rose monster-like out of the caverns of his heart and stared him in the face. His love grew thin and faint as the morning mist; his doubts alone had substance. But when Beatrice's face brightened again after the momentary shadow, she was transformed at once from the mysterious, questionable being whom he had watched with so much awe and horror; she was now the beautiful and unsophisticated girl whom he felt that his spirit knew with a certainty beyond all other knowledge.

A considerable time had now passed since Giovanni's last meeting with Baglioni. One morning, however, he was disagreeably surprised by a visit from the professor, whom he had scarcely thought of for whole weeks, and would willingly have forgotten still longer. Given up, as he had long been, to a pervading excitement, he could tolerate no companions except

upon condition of their perfect sympathy with his present state of feeling; such sympathy was not to be expected from Professor Baglioni.

The visitor chatted carelessly for a few moments about the gossip of the city and the university, and then took up another topic.

"I have been reading an old classic author lately," said he, "and met with a story that strangely interested me. Possibly you may remember it. It is of an Indian prince who sent a beautiful woman as a present to Alexander the Great. She was as lovely as the dawn and gorgeous as the sunset, but what especially distinguished her was a certain rich perfume in her breath richer than a garden of Persian roses. Alexander, as was natural to a youthful conqueror, fell in love at first sight with this magnificent stranger. But a certain sage physician, happening to be present, discovered a terrible secret in regard to her."

"And what was that?" asked Giovanni, turning his eyes downward to avoid those of the professor.

"That this lovely woman," continued Baglioni, with emphasis, "had been nourished with poisons from her birth upward, until her whole nature was so imbued with them that she herself had become the deadliest poison in existence. Poison was her element of life. With that rich perfume of her breath she blasted the very air. Her love would have been poison—her embrace, death. Is not this a marvelous tale?"

"A childish fable," answered Giovanni, nervously starting from his chair. "I marvel how Your Worship finds time to read such nonsense among your graver studies."

"By the by," said the professor, looking uneasily about him, "what singular fragrance is this in your apartment? Is it the perfume of your gloves? It is faint, but delicious, and yet, after all, by no means agreeable. Were I to breathe it long, methinks it would make me ill. It is like the breath of a flower, but I see no flowers in the chamber."

"Nor are there any," replied Giovanni, who had turned pale as the professor spoke; "nor, I think, is there any fragrance except in Your Worship's imagination. Odors, being a sort of element combined of the sensual and the spiritual, are apt to deceive us in this manner. The recollection of a perfume—the bare idea of it—may easily be mistaken for a present reality."

"Ay, but my sober imagination does not often play such tricks," said Baglioni; "and were I to fancy any kind of odor, it would be that of some vile apothecary-drug wherewith my fingers are likely enough to be imbued. Our worshipful friend Rappaccini, as I have heard, tinctures his medicaments with odors richer than those of Araby. Doubtless, likewise, the fair and learned Signora Beatrice would minister to her patients with drafts as sweet as a maiden's breath, but woe to him that sips them!"

Giovanni's face evinced many contending emotions. The tone in which the professor alluded to the pure and lovely daughter of Rappaccini was a torture to his soul, and yet the intimation of a view of her character opposite to his own gave instantaneous distinctness to a thousand dim suspicions which now grinned at him like so many demons. But he strove hard to quell them, and to respond to Baglioni with a true lover's perfect faith.

"Signor Professor," said he, "you were my father's friend; perchance, too, it is your purpose to act a friendly part toward his son. I would fain feel nothing toward you save respect and deference, but I pray you to observe, signor, that there is one subject on which we must not speak. You know not the Signora Beatrice; you can not, therefore, estimate the wrong—the blasphemy, I may even say—that is offered to her character by a light or injurious word."

"Giovanni! my poor Giovanni!" answered the professor, with a calm expression of pity. "I know this wretched girl far better than yourself. You shall hear the truth in respect to the poisoner Rappaccini and his poisonous daughter—yes, poisonous as she is beautiful. Listen, for even should you do violence to my gray hairs it shall not silence me. That old fable of the Indian woman has become a truth by the deep and deadly science of Rappaccini and in the person of the lovely Beatrice."

Giovanni groaned and hid his face.

"Her father," continued Baglioni, "was not restrained by natural affection from offering up his child in this horrible manner as the victim of his insane zeal for science. For—let us do him justice—he is as true a man of science as ever distilled his own heart in an alembic. What, then, will be your fate? Beyond a doubt, you are selected as the material of some new experiment. Perhaps the result is to be death—perhaps a fate more awful still. Rappaccini, with what he calls the interest of science before his eyes, will hesitate at nothing."

"It is a dream!" muttered Giovanni to himself. "Surely it is a dream!'

"But," resumed the professor, "be of good cheer, son of my friend! It is not yet too late for the rescue. Possibly we may even succeed in bringing back this miserable child within the limits of ordinary nature from which her father's madness has estranged her. Behold this little silver vase; it was wrought by the hands of the renowned Benvenuto Cellini, and is well worthy to be a love-gift to the fairest dame in Italy. But its contents are invaluable. One little sip of this antidote would have rendered the most virulent poisons of the Borgias innocuous; doubt not that it will be as efficacious against those of Rappaccini. Bestow the vase and the precious liquid within it on your Beatrice, and hopefully await the result."

Baglioni laid a small exquisitely-wrought silver phial on the table and withdrew, leaving what he had said to produce its effects upon the young man's mind.

"We will thwart Rappaccini yet," thought he, chuckling to himself, as he descended the stairs. "But let us confess the truth of him: he is a wonderful man—a wonderful man indeed—a vile empiric, however, in his practise, and therefore not to be tolerated by those who respect the good old rules of the medical profession."

Throughout Giovanni's whole acquaintance with Beatrice he had occasionally, as we have said, been haunted by dark surmises as to her character; yet so thoroughly had she made herself felt by him as a simple, natural, most affectionate and guileless creature that the image now held up by Professor Baglioni looked as strange and incredible as if it were not in accordance with his own original conception. True, there were ugly recollections connected with his first glimpses of the beautiful girl: he could not quite forget the bouquet that withered in her grasp, and the insect that perished amid the sunny air by no ostensible agency save the fragrance of her breath. These incidents, however, dissolving in the pure light of her character, had no longer the efficacy of facts, but were acknowledged as mistaken fantasies, by whatever testimony of the senses they might appear to be substantiated. There is something truer and more real than what we can see with the eyes and touch with the finger. On such better evidence had Giovanni founded his confidence in Beatrice, though rather by the necessary force of her high attributes than by any deep and generous faith on his part. But now his spirit was incapable of sustaining itself at the height to which the early enthusiasm of passion had exalted it; he fell down groveling among earthly doubts, and defiled therewith the pure whiteness of Beatrice's image. Not that he gave her up: he did but distrust. He resolved to institute some decisive test that should satisfy him once for all whether there were those dreadful peculiarities in her physical nature which could not be supposed to exist without some corresponding monstrosity of soul. His eyes, gazing down afar, might have deceived him as to the lizard, the insect, and the flowers; but if he could witness at the distance of a few paces the sudden blight of one fresh and healthful flower in Beatrice's hand, there would be room for no further question. With this idea he hastened to the florist's and purchased a bouquet that was still gemmed with the morning dewdrops.

It was now the customary hour of his daily interview with Beatrice. Before descending into the garden Giovanni failed not to look at his figure in the mirror—a vanity to be expected in a beautiful young man, yet, as displaying itself at that troubled and feverish moment, the token of a certain shallowness of feeling and insincerity of character. He did gaze, however, and said to himself that his features had never before possessed so rich a grace, nor his eyes such vivacity, nor his cheeks so warm a hue of superabundant life.

"At least," thought he, "her poison has not yet insinuated itself into my system. I am no flower, to perish in her grasp."

With that thought he turned his eyes on the bouquet, which he had never once laid aside from his hand. A thrill of indefinable horror shot through his frame on perceiving that those dewy flowers were already beginning to droop; they wore the aspect of things that had been fresh and lovely yesterday. Giovanni grew white as marble and stood motionless before the mirror, staring at his own reflection there as at the likeness of something frightful. He remembered Baglioni's remark about the fragrance that seemed to pervade the chamber: it must have been the poison in his breath. Then he shuddered—shuddered at himself. Recovering from his stupor, he began to watch with curious eye a spider that was busily at work hanging its web from the antique cornice of the apartment, crossing and recrossing the artful system of interwoven lines, as vigorous and active a spider as ever dangled from an old ceiling. Giovanni bent toward the insect and emitted a deep, long breath. The spider suddenly ceased its toil; the web vibrated with a tremor originating in the body of the small artisan. Again Giovanni sent forth a breath, deeper, longer and imbued with a venomous feeling out of his heart; he knew not whether he were wicked or only desperate. The spider made a convulsive grip with his limbs, and hung dead across the window.

"Accursed! accursed!" muttered Giovanni, addressing himself. "Hast thou grown so poisonous that this deadly insect perishes by thy breath?"

At that moment a rich, sweet voice came floating up from the garden:

"Giovanni, Giovanni! It is past the hour. Why tarriest thou? Come down!"

"Yes," muttered Giovanni, again: "she is the only being whom my breath may not slay. Would that it might!"

He rushed down, and in an instant was standing before the bright and loving eyes of Beatrice. A moment ago his wrath and despair had been so fierce that he could have desired nothing so much as to wither her by a glance, but with her actual presence there came influences which had too real an existence to be at once shaken off—recollections of the delicate and benign power of her feminine nature, which had so often enveloped him in a religious calm; recollections of many a holy and passionate outgush of her heart, when the pure fountain had been unsealed from its depths and made visible in its transparency to his mental eye; recollections which, had Giovanni known how to estimate them, would have assured him that all this ugly mystery was but an earthly illusion, and that, whatever mist of evil might seem to have gathered over her, the real Beatrice was a heavenly angel. Incapable as he was of such high faith, still her presence had not utterly lost its magic. Giovanni's rage was quelled into an aspect of sullen insensibility. Beatrice, with a quick spiritual sense, immediately felt that there was a gulf of blackness between them which neither he nor she could pass. They walked on together, sad and silent, and came thus to the marble fountain, and to its pool of water on the ground, in the midst of which grew the shrub that bore gemlike blossoms. Giovanni was affrighted at the eager enjoyment—the appetite, as it were—with which he found himself inhaling the fragrance of the flowers.

"Beatrice," asked he, abruptly, "whence came this shrub?"

"My father created it," answered she, with simplicity.

"Created it! created it!" repeated Giovanni. "What mean you, Beatrice?"

"He is a man fearfully acquainted with the secrets of nature," replied Beatrice, "and at the hour when I first drew breath this plant sprang from the soil, the offspring of his science, of his intellect, while I was but his earthly child. Approach it not," continued she, observing with terror that Giovanni was drawing nearer to the shrub; "it has qualities that you little dream of. But I, dearest Giovanni—I grew up and blossomed with the plant, and was nourished with its breath. It was my sister, and I loved it with a human affection; for—alas! hast thou not suspected it?—there was an awful doom."

Here Giovanni frowned so darkly upon her that Beatrice paused and trembled. But her faith in his tenderness reassured her and made her blush that she had doubted for an instant.

"There was an awful doom," she continued—"the effect of my father's fatal love of science—which estranged me from all society of my kind. Until Heaven sent thee, dearest Giovanni, oh, how lonely was thy poor Beatrice!"

"Was it a hard doom?" asked Giovanni, fixing his eyes upon her.

"Only of late have I known how hard it was," answered she, tenderly. "Oh, yes; but my heart was torpid, and therefore quiet."

Giovanni's rage broke forth from his sullen gloom like a lightning-flash out of a dark cloud.

"Accursed one!" cried he, with venomous scorn and anger. "And, finding thy solitude wearisome, thou hast severed me likewise from all the warmth of life and enticed me into thy region of unspeakable horror!"

"Giovanni!" exclaimed Beatrice, turning her large bright eyes upon his face. The force of his words had not found its way into her mind; she was merely thunderstruck.

"Yes, poisonous thing!" repeated Giovanni, beside himself with passion. "Thou hast done it! Thou hast blasted me! Thou hast filled my veins with poison! Thou hast made me as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself—a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity! Now—if our breath be, happily, as fatal to ourselves as to all others—let us join our lips in one kiss of unutterable hatred, and so die."

"What has befallen me?" murmured Beatrice, with a low moan out of her heart. "Holy Virgin, pity me—a poor heartbroken child!"

"Thou? Dost thou pray?" cried Giovanni, still with the same fiendish scorn. "Thy very prayers as they come from thy lips taint the atmosphere with death. Yes, yes, let us pray! Let us to church and dip our fingers in the holy water at the portal: they that come after us will perish as by a pestilence. Let us sign crosses in the air: it will be scattering curses abroad in the likeness of holy symbols."

"Giovanni," said Beatrice, calmly, for her grief was beyond passion, "why dost thou join thyself with me thus in those terrible words? I, it is true, am the horrible thing thou namest me, but thou—what hast thou to do save with one other shudder at my hideous misery to go forth out of the garden and mingle with thy race, and forget that there ever crawled on earth such a monster as poor Beatrice?"

"Dost thou pretend ignorance?" asked Giovanni, scowling upon her. "Behold! This power have I gained from the pure daughter of Rappaccini!"

There was a swarm of summer insects flitting through the air in search of the food promised by the flower-odors of the fatal garden. They circled round Giovanni's head, and were evidently attracted toward him by the same influence which had drawn them for an instant within the sphere of several of the shrubs. He sent forth a breath among them, and smiled bitterly at Beatrice, as at least a score of the insects fell dead upon the ground.

"I see it! I see it!" shrieked Beatrice. "It is my father's fatal science! No, no, Giovanni, it was not I! Never, never! I dreamed only to love thee and be with thee a little time, and so to let thee pass away, leaving but thine image in mine heart. For, Giovanni—believe it—though my body be nourished with poison, my spirit is God's creature and craves love as its daily food. But my father! he has united us in this fearful sympathy. Yes, spurn me! tread upon me! kill me! Oh, what is death, after such words as thine? But it was not I; not for a world of bliss would I have done it!"

Giovanni's passion had exhausted itself in its outburst from his lips. There now came across him a sense—mournful and not without tenderness—of the intimate and peculiar relationship between Beatrice and himself. They stood, as it were, in an utter solitude which would be made none the less solitary by the densest throng of human life. Ought not, then, the desert of humanity around them to press this insulated pair closer together? If they should be

cruel to one another, who was there to be kind to them? Besides, thought Giovanni, might there not still be a hope of his returning within the limits of ordinary nature, and leading Beatrice—the redeemed Beatrice—by the hand? Oh, weak and selfish and unworthy spirit, that could dream of an earthly union and earthly happiness as possible after such deep love had been so bitterly wronged as was Beatrice's love by Giovanni's blighting words! No, no! there could be no such hope. She must pass heavily with that broken heart across the borders; she must bathe her hurts in some font of Paradise and forget her grief in the light of immortality, and there be well.

But Giovanni did not know it.

"Dear Beatrice," said he, approaching her, while she shrank away, as always at his approach, but now with a different impulse—"dearest Beatrice, our fate is not yet so desperate. Behold! There is a medicine, potent, as a wise physician has assured me, and almost divine in its efficacy. It is composed of ingredients the most opposite to those by which thy awful father has brought this calamity upon thee and me. It is distilled of blessed herbs. Shall we not quaff it together, and thus be purified from evil?"

"Give it me," said Beatrice, extending her hand to receive the little silver phial which Giovanni took from his bosom. She added with a peculiar emphasis, "I will drink, but do thou await the result."

She put Baglioni's antidote to her lips, and at the same moment the figure of Rappaccini emerged from the portal and came slowly toward the marble fountain. As he drew near the pale man of science seemed to gaze with a triumphant expression at the beautiful youth and maiden, as might an artist who should spend his life in achieving a picture or a group of statuary, and finally be satisfied with his success. He paused; his bent form grew erect with conscious power; he spread out his hands over them in the attitude of a father Imploring a blessing upon his children. But those were the same hands that had thrown poison into the stream of their lives! Giovanni trembled. Beatrice shuddered very nervously, and pressed her hand upon her heart.

"My daughter," said Rappaccini, "thou art no longer lonely in the world. Pluck one of these precious gems from thy sister-shrub, and bid thy bridegroom wear it in his bosom. It will not harm him now. My science and the sympathy between thee and him have so wrought within his system that he now stands apart from common men, as thou dost, daughter of my pride and triumph, from ordinary women. Pass on, then, through the world, most dear to one another and dreadful to all besides."

"My father," said Beatrice, feebly—and still, as she spoke, she kept her hand upon her heart—"wherefore didst thou inflict this miserable doom upon thy child?"

"Miserable!" exclaimed Rappaccini. "What mean you, foolish girl? Dost thou deem it misery to be endowed with marvelous gifts against which no power nor strength could avail an enemy, misery to be able to quell the mightiest with a breath, misery to be as terrible as thou art beautiful? Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil and capable of none?"

"I would fain have been loved, not feared," murmured Beatrice, sinking down upon the ground. "But now it matters not. I am going, father, where the evil which thou hast striven to mingle with my being will pass away like a dream—like the fragrance of these poisonous flowers which will no longer taint my breath among the flowers of Eden. Farewell, Giovanni! Thy words of hatred are like lead within my heart, but they too will fall away as I ascend. Oh, was there not from the first more poison in thy nature than in mine?"

To Beatrice—so radically had her earthly part been wrought upon by Rappaccini's skill—as poison had been life, so the powerful antidote was death. And thus the poor victim of man's ingenuity and of thwarted nature, and of the fatality that attends all such efforts of perverted wisdom, perished there at the feet of her father and Giovanni.

Just at that moment Professor Pietro Baglioni looked forth from the window and called loudly, in a tone of triumph mixed with horror, to the thunder-stricken man of science:

"Rappaccini, Rappaccini! And is *this* the upshot of your experiment?"

ZODOMIRSKY'S DUEL

BY ALEXANDRE DUMAS

The elder Dumas was born in 1803 and died in 1870. His name appears as author on the title-pages of 257 volumes of stories and romances, and of 25 volumes of plays. He had ten collaborators or assistants who worked out details for him, the generals over whom he was a Napoleon—to quote his own phrase. He had to an extraordinary degree the ability to impart dramatic life and action to whatever he touched, and the whole modern school of historical writers is largely indebted to him for inspiration, from Stevenson down.

ZODOMIRSKY'S DUEL

By ALEXANDRE DUMAS

I

At the time of this story our regiment was stationed in the dirty little village of Valins, on the frontier of Austria.

It was the fourth of May in the year 182—, and I, with several other officers, had been breakfasting with the Aide-de-Camp in honor of his birthday, and discussing the various topics of the garrison.

"Can you tell us without being indiscreet," asked Sub-Lieutenant Stamm of Andrew Michaelovitch, the Aide-de-Camp, "what the Colonel was so eager to say to you this morning?"

"A new officer," he replied, "is to fill the vacancy of captain."

"His name?" demanded two or three voices.

"Lieutenant Zodomirsky, who is betrothed to the beautiful Mariana Ravensky."

"And when does he arrive?" asked Major Belayef.

"He has arrived. I have been presented to him at the Colonel's house. He is very anxious to make your acquaintance, gentlemen, and I have therefore invited him to dine with us. But that reminds me, Captain, you must know him," he continued, turning to me; "you were both in the same regiment at St. Petersburg."

"It is true," I replied. "We studied there together. He was then a brave, handsome youth, adored by his comrades, in every one's good graces, but of a fiery and irritable temper."

"Mademoiselle Ravensky informed me that he was a skilful duelist," said Stamm. "Well, he will do very well here; a duel is a family affair with us. You are welcome, Monsieur Zodomirsky. However quick your temper, you must be careful of it before me, or I shall take upon myself to cool it."

And Stamm pronounced these words with a visible sneer.

"How is it that he leaves the Guards? Is he ruined?" asked Cornet Naletoff.

"I have been informed," replied Stamm, "that he has just inherited from an old aunt about twenty thousand rubles. No, poor devil! he is consumptive."

"Come, gentlemen," said the Aide-de-Camp, rising, "let us pass to the saloon and have a game of cards. Koloff will serve dinner while we play."

We had been seated some time, and Stamm, who was far from rich, was in the act of losing sixty roubles, when Koloff announced:

"Captain Zodomirsky."

"Here you are, at last!" cried Michaelovitch, jumping from his chair. "You are welcome."

Then, turning to us, he continued: "These are your new comrades, Captain Zodomirsky; all good fellows and brave soldiers."

"Gentlemen," said Zodomirsky, "I am proud and happy to have joined your regiment. To do so has been my greatest desire for some time, and if I am welcome, as you courteously say, I shall be the happiest man in the world."

"Ah! good day, Captain," he continued, turning to me and holding out his hand. "We meet again. You have not forgotten an old friend, I hope?"

As he smilingly uttered these words, Stamm, to whom his back was turned, darted at him a glance full of bitter hatred. Stamm was not liked in the regiment; his cold and taciturn nature had formed no friendship with any of us. I could not understand his apparent hostility toward Zodomirsky, whom I believed he had never seen before.

Some one offered Zodomirsky a cigar. He accepted it, lit it at the cigar of an officer near him, and began to talk gaily to his new comrades.

"Do you stay here long?" asked Major Belayef.

"Yes, monsieur," replied Zodomirsky. "I wish to stay with you as long as possible," and as he pronounced these words he saluted us all round with a smile. He continued: "I have taken a house near that of my old friend Ravensky whom I knew at St. Petersburg. I have my horses there, an excellent cook, a passable library, a little garden, and a target; and there I shall be quiet as a hermit, and happy as a king. It is the life that suits me."

"Ha! you practise shooting!" said Stamm, in such a strange voice, accompanied by a smile so sardonic, that Zodomirsky regarded him in astonishment.

"It is my custom every morning to fire twelve balls," he replied.

"You are very fond of that amusement, then?" demanded Stamm, in a voice without any trace of emotion; adding, "I do not understand the use of shooting, unless it is to hunt with."

Zodomirsky's pale face was flushed with a sudden flame. He turned to Stamm, and replied in a quiet but firm voice: "I think, monsieur, that you are wrong in calling it lost time to learn to shoot with a pistol; in our garrison life an imprudent word often leads to a meeting between comrades, in which case he who is known for a good shot inspires respect among those indiscreet persons who amuse themselves in asking useless questions."

"Oh! that is not a reason, Captain. In duels, as in everything else, something should be left to chance. I maintain my first opinion, and say that an honorable man ought not to take too many precautions."

"And why?" asked Zodomirsky.

"I will explain to you," replied Stamm. "Do you play at cards, Captain?"

"Why do you ask that question?"

"I will try to render my explanation clear, so that all will understand it. Every one knows that there are certain players who have an enviable knack, while shuffling the pack, of adroitly making themselves master of the winning card. Now, I see no difference, myself, between the man who robs his neighbor of his money and the one who robs him of his life." Then he added, in a way to take nothing from the insolence of his observation, "I do not say this to you, in particular, Captain; I speak in general terms."

"It is too much as it is, monsieur!" cried Zodomirsky, "I beg Captain Alexis Stephanovitch to terminate this affair with you." Then, turning to me, he said: "You will not refuse me this request?"

"So be it, Captain," replied Stamm quickly. "You have told me yourself you practise shooting every day, while I practise only on the day I fight. We will equalize the chances. I will settle details with Monsieur Stephanovitch."

Then he rose and turned to our host.

"*Au revoir*, Michaelovitch," he said. "I will dine at the Colonel's." And with these words he left the room.

The most profound silence had been kept during this altercation; but, as soon as Stamm disappeared, Captain Pravdine, an old officer, addressed himself to us all.

"We can not let them fight, gentlemen," he said.

Zodomirsky touched him gently on his arm.

"Captain," he said, "I am a newcomer among you; none of you know me. I have yet, as it were, to win my spurs; it is impossible for me to let this quarrel pass without fighting. I do not know what I have done to annoy this gentleman, but it is evident that he has some spite against me."

"The truth of the matter is that Stamm is jealous of you, Zodomirsky," said Cornet Naletoff. "It is well known that he is in love with Mademoiselle Ravensky."

"That, indeed, explains all," he replied. "However, gentlemen, I thank you for your kind sympathy in this affair from the bottom of my heart."

"And now to dinner, gentlemen!" cried Michaelovitch. "Place yourselves as you choose. The soup, Koloff; the soup!"

Everybody was very animated. Stamm seemed forgotten; only Zodomirsky appeared a little sad. Zodomirsky's health was drunk; he seemed touched with this significant attention, and thanked the officers with a broken voice.

"Stephanovitch," said Zodomirsky to me, when dinner was over, and all had risen, "since M. Stamm knows you are my second and has accepted you as such, see him, and arrange everything with him; accept all his conditions; then meet Captain Pravdine and me at my rooms. The first who arrives will wait for the other. We are now going to Monsieur Ravensky's house."

"You will let us know the hour of combat?" said several voices.

"Certainly, gentlemen. Come and bid a last farewell to one of us."

We all parted at the Ravensky's door, each officer shaking hands with Zodomirsky as with an old friend.

II

Stamm was waiting for me when I arrived at his house. His conditions were these: Two sabres were to be planted at a distance of one pace apart; each opponent to extend his arm at full length and fire at the word "three." One pistol alone was to be loaded.

I endeavored in vain to obtain another mode of combat.

"It is not a victim I offer to M. Zodomirsky," said Stamm, "but an adversary. He will fight as I propose, or I will not fight at all; but in that case I shall prove that M. Zodomirsky is brave only when sure of his own safety."

Zodomirsky's orders were imperative. I accepted.

When I entered Zodomirsky's rooms, they were vacant; he had not arrived. I looked round with curiosity. They were furnished in a rich but simple manner, and with evident taste. I drew a chair near the balcony and looked out over the plain. A storm was brewing; some drops of rain fell already, and thunder moaned.

At this instant the door opened, and Zodomirsky and Pravdine entered. I advanced to meet them.

"We are late, Captain," said Zodomirsky, "but it was unavoidable."

"And what says Stamm?" he continued.

I gave him his adversary's conditions. When I had ended, a sad smile passed over his face; he drew his hand across his forehead and his eyes glittered with feverish lustre.

"I had foreseen this," he murmured. "You have accepted, I presume?"

"Did you not give me the order yourself?"

"Absolutely," he replied.

Zodomirsky threw himself in a chair by the table, in which position he faced the door. Pravdine placed himself near the window, and I near the fire. A presentiment weighed down our spirits. A mournful silence reigned.

Suddenly the door opened and a woman muffled in a mantle which streamed with water, and with the hood drawn over her face, pushed past the servant, and stood before us. She threw back the hood, and we recognized Mariana Ravensky!

Pravdine and I stood motionless with astonishment. Zodomirsky sprang toward her.

"Great heavens! what has happened, and why are you here?"

"Why am I here, George?" she cried. "Is it you who ask me, when this night is perhaps the last of your life? Why am I here? To say farewell to you. It is only two hours since I saw you, and not one word passed between us of to-morrow. Was that well, George?"

"But I am not alone here," said Zodomirsky in a low voice. "Think, Mariana. Your reputation—your fair fame—"

"Are you not all in all to me, George? And in such a time as this, what matters anything else?"

She threw her arm about his neck and pressed her head against his breast.

Pravdine and I made some steps to quit the room.

"Stay, gentlemen," she said lifting her head. "Since you have seen me here, I have nothing more to hide from you, and perhaps you may be able to help me in what I am about to say."

Then, suddenly flinging herself at his feet:

"I implore you, I command you, George," she cried, "not to fight this duel with Monsieur Stamm. You will not end two lives by such a useless act! Your life belongs to me; it is no longer yours. George, do you hear? You will not do this."

"Mariana! Mariana! in the name of Heaven do not torture me thus! Can I refuse to fight? I should be dishonored—lost! If I could do so cowardly an act, shame would kill me more surely than Stamm's pistol."

"Captain," she said to Pravdine, "you are esteemed in the regiment as a man of honor; you can, then, judge about affairs of honor. Have pity on me, Captain, and tell him he can refuse such a duel as this. Make him understand that it is not a duel, but an assassination; speak, speak, Captain, and if he will not listen to me, he will to you."

Pravdine was moved. His lips trembled and his eyes were dimmed with tears. He rose, and, approaching Mariana, respectfully kissed her hand, and said with a trembling voice:

"To spare you any sorrow, Mademoiselle, I would lay down my life; but to counsel M. Zodomirsky to be unworthy of his uniform by refusing this duel is impossible. Each adversary, your betrothed as well as Stamm, has a right to propose his conditions. But whatever be the conditions, the Captain is in circumstances which render this duel absolutely necessary. He is known as a skilful duelist; to refuse Stamm's conditions were to indicate that he counts upon his skill."

"Enough, Mariana, enough," cried George. "Unhappy girl! you do not know what you demand. Do you wish me, then, to fall so low that you yourself would be ashamed of me? I ask you, are you capable of loving a dishonored man?"

Mariana had let herself fall upon a chair. She rose, pale as a corpse, and began to put her mantle on.

"You are right, George, it is not I who would love you no more, but you who would hate me. We must resign ourselves to our fate. Give me your hand, George; perhaps we shall never see each other again. To-morrow! to-morrow! my love."

She threw herself upon his breast, without tears, without sobs, but with a profound despair.

She wished to depart alone, but Zodomirsky insisted on leading her home.

Midnight was striking when he returned.

"You had better both retire," said Zodomirsky as he entered. "I have several letters to write before sleeping. At five we must be at the rendezvous."

I felt so wearied that I did not want telling twice. Pravdine passed into the saloon, I into Zodomirsky's bedroom, and the master of the house into his study.

The cool air of the morning woke me. I cast my eyes upon the window, where the dawn commenced to appear. I heard Pravdine also stirring. I passed into the saloon, where Zodomirsky immediately joined us. His face was pale but serene.

"Are the horses ready?" he inquired.

I made a sign in the affirmative.

"Then, let us start," he said.

We mounted into the carriage and drove off.

III

"Ah," said Pravdine all at once, "there is Michaelovitch's carriage. Yes, yes, it is he with one of ours, and there is Naletoff, on his Circassian horse. Good! the others are coming behind. It is well we started so soon."

The carriage had to pass the house of the Ravenskys. I could not refrain from looking up; the poor girl was at her window, motionless as a statue. She did not even nod to us.

"Quicker! quicker!" cried Zodomirsky to the coachman. It was the only sign by which I knew that he had seen Mariana.

Soon we distanced the other carriages, and arrived upon the place of combat—a plain where two great pyramids rose, passing in this district by the name of the "Tomb of the Two Brothers." The first rays of the sun darting through the trees began to dissipate the mists of night.

Michaelovitch arrived immediately after us, and in a few minutes we formed a group of nearly twenty persons. Then we heard the crunch of other steps upon the gravel. They were those of our opponents. Stamm walked first, holding in his hand a box of pistols. He bowed to Zodomirsky and the officers.

"Who gives the word to fire, gentlemen?" he asked.

The two adversaries and the seconds turned toward the officers, who regarded them with perplexity.

No one offered. No one wished to pronounce that terrible "three," which would sign the fate of a comrade.

"Major," said Zodomirsky to Belayef, "will you render me this service?"

Thus asked, the Major could not refuse, and he made a sign that he accepted.

"Be good enough to indicate our places, gentlemen," continued Zodomirsky, giving me his sabre and taking off his coat; "then load, if you please."

"That is useless," said Stamm. "I have brought the pistols; one of the two is loaded, the other has only a gun-cap."

"Do you know which is which?" said Pravdine.

"What does it matter?" replied Stamm, "Monsieur Zodomirsky will choose."

"It is well," said Zodomirsky.

Belayef drew his sabre and thrust it in the ground midway between the two pyramids. Then he took another sabre and planted it before the first. One pace alone separated the two blades. Each adversary was to stand behind a sabre, extending his arm at full length. In this way each had the muzzle of his opponent's pistol at six inches from his heart. While Belayef made these preparations Stamm unbuckled his sabre and divested himself of his coat. His seconds opened his box of pistols, and Zodomirsky, approaching, took without hesitation the nearest to him. Then he placed himself behind one of the sabres.

Stamm regarded him closely; not a muscle of Zodomirsky's face moved, and there was not about him the least appearance of bravado, but of the calmness of courage.

"He is brave," murmured Stamm.

And taking the pistol left by Zodomirsky he took up his position behind the other sabre, in front of his adversary.

They were both pale, but while the eyes of Zodomirsky burned with implacable resolution, those of Stamm were uneasy and shifting. I felt my heart beat loudly.

Belayef advanced. All eyes were fixed on him.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" he asked.

"We are waiting, Major," replied Zodomirsky and Stamm together, and each lifted his pistol before the breast of the other.

A death-like silence reigned. Only the birds sang in the bushes near the place of combat. In the midst of this silence the Major's voice resounding made every one tremble.

"One."

"Two."

"*Three.*"

Then we heard the sound of the hammer falling on the cap of Zodomirsky's pistol. There was a flash, but no sound followed it.

Stamm had not fired, and continued to hold the mouth of his pistol against the breast of his adversary.

"Fire!" said Zodomirsky, in a voice perfectly calm.

"It is not for you to command, Monsieur," said Stamm; "it is I who must decide whether to fire or not, and that depends on how you answer what I am about to say."

"Speak, then; but in the name of Heaven speak quickly."

"Never fear, I will not abuse your patience."

We were all ears.

"I have not come to kill you, Monsieur," continued Stamm. "I have come with the carelessness of a man to whom life holds nothing, while it has kept none of the promises it has made to him. You, Monsieur, are rich, you are beloved, you have a promising future before you: life must be dear to you. But fate has decided against you: it is you who must die and not I. Well, Monsieur Zodomirsky, give me your word not to be so prompt in the future to fight duels, and I will not fire."

"I have not been prompt to call you out, Monsieur," replied Zodomirsky in the same calm voice; "you have wounded me by an outrageous comparison, and I have been compelled to challenge you. Fire, then; I have nothing to say to you."

"My conditions can not wound your honor," insisted Stamm. "Be our judge, Major," he added, turning to Belayef. "I will abide by your opinion; perhaps M. Zodomirsky will follow my example."

"M. Zodomirsky has conducted himself as bravely as possible; if he is not killed, it is not his fault." Then, turning to the officers round, he said:

"Can M. Zodomirsky accept the imposed condition?"

"He can! he can!" they cried, "and without staining his honor in the slightest."

Zodomirsky stood motionless.

"The Captain consents," said old Pravdine, advancing. "Yes, in the future he will be less prompt."

"It is you who speak, Captain, and not M. Zodomirsky," said Stamm.

"Will you affirm my words, Monsieur Zodomirsky?" asked Pravdine, almost supplicating in his eagerness.

"I consent," said Zodomirsky, in a voice scarcely intelligible.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried all the officers, enchanted with this termination. Two or three threw up their caps.

"I am more charmed than any one," said Stamm, "that all has ended as I desired. Now, Captain, I have shown you that before a resolute man the art of shooting is nothing in a duel, and that if the chances are equal a good shot is on the same level as a bad one. I did not wish in any case to kill you. Only I had a great desire to see how you would look death in the face. You are a man of courage; accept my compliments. The pistols were not loaded." Stamm, as he said these words, fired off his pistol. There was no report!

Zodomirsky uttered a cry which resembled the roar of a wounded lion.

"By my father's soul!" he cried, "this is a new offense, and more insulting than the first. Ah! it is ended, you say? No, Monsieur, it must recommence, and this time the pistols shall be loaded, if I have to load them myself."

"No, Captain," replied Stamm, tranquilly, "I have given you your life, I will not take it back. Insult me if you wish, I will not fight with you."

"Then it is with me whom you will fight, Monsieur Stamm," cried Pravdine, pulling off his coat. "You have acted like a scoundrel; you have deceived Zodomirsky and his seconds, and, in five minutes if your dead body is not lying at my feet, there is no such thing as justice."

Stamm was visibly confused. He had not bargained for this.

"And if the Captain does not kill you, I will!" said Naletoff.

"Or I!" "Or I!" cried with one voice all the officers.

"The devil! I can not fight with you all," replied Stamm. "Choose one among you, and I will fight with him, though it will not be a duel, but an assassination."

"Reassure yourself, Monsieur," replied Major Belayef; "we will do nothing that the most scrupulous honor can complain of. All our officers are insulted, for under their uniform you have conducted yourself like a rascal. You can not fight with all; it is even probable you will fight with none. Hold yourself in readiness, then. You are to be judged. Gentlemen, will you approach?"

We surrounded the Major, and the fiat went forth without discussion. Every one was of the same opinion.

Then the Major, who had played the role of president, approached Stamm, and said to him:

"Monsieur, you are lost to all the laws of honor. Your crime was premeditated in cold blood. You have made M. Zodomirsky pass through all the sensations of a man condemned to death, while you were perfectly at ease, you who knew that the pistols were not loaded. Finally, you have refused to fight with the man whom you have doubly insulted."

"Load the pistols! load them!" cried Stamm, exasperated. "I will fight with any one!"

But the Major shook his head with a smile of contempt.

"No, Monsieur Lieutenant," he said, "you will fight no more with your comrades. You have stained your uniform. We can no longer serve with you. The officers have charged me to

say that, not wishing to make your deficiencies known to the Government, they ask you to give in your resignation on the cause of bad health. The surgeon will sign all necessary certificates. To-day is the 3d of May: you have from now to the 3d of June to quit the regiment."

"I will quit it, certainly; not because it is your desire, but mine," said Stamm, picking up his sabre and putting on his coat.

Then he leaped upon his horse, and galloped off toward the village, casting a last malediction to us all.

We all pressed round Zodomirsky. He was sad; more than sad, gloomy.

"Why did you force me to consent to this scoundrel's conditions, gentlemen?" he said. "Without you, I should never have accepted them."

"My comrades and I," said the Major, "will take all the responsibility. You have acted nobly, and I must tell you in the name of us all, M. Zodomirsky, that you are a man of honor." Then, turning to the officers: "Let us go, gentlemen; we must inform the Colonel of what has passed."

We mounted into the carriages. As we did so we saw Stamm in the distance galloping up the mountainside from the village upon his horse. Zodomirsky's eyes followed him.

"I know not what presentiment torments me," he said, "but I wish his pistol had been loaded, and that he had fired."

He uttered a deep sigh, then shook his head, as if with that he could disperse his gloomy thoughts.

"Home," he called to the driver.

We took the same route that we had come by, and consequently again passed Mariana Ravensky's window. Each of us looked up, but Mariana was no longer there.

"Captain," said Zodomirsky, "will you do me a service?"

"Whatever you wish," I replied.

"I count upon you to tell my poor Mariana the result of this miserable affair."

"I will do so. And when?"

"Now. The sooner the better. Stop!" cried Zodomirsky to the coachman. He stopped, and I descended, and the carriage drove on.

. . . . . .

Zodomirsky had hardly entered when he saw me appear in the doorway of the saloon. Without doubt my face was pale, and wore a look of consternation, for Zodomirsky sprang toward me, crying:

"Great heavens, Captain! What has happened?"

I drew him from the saloon.

"My poor friend, haste, if you wish to see Mariana alive. She was at her window; she saw Stamm gallop past. Stamm being alive, it followed that you were dead. She uttered a cry, and fell. From that moment she has never opened her eyes."

"Oh, my presentiments!" cried Zodomirsky, "my presentiments!" and he rushed hatless and without his sabre, into the street.

On the staircase of Mlle. Ravensky's house he met the doctor, who was coming down.

"Doctor," he cried, stopping him, "she is better, is she not?"

"Yes," he answered, "better, because she suffers no more."

"Dead!" murmured Zodomirsky, growing white, and supporting himself against the wall. "Dead!"

"I always told her, poor girl! that, having a weak heart, she must avoid all emotion—"

But Zodomirsky had ceased to listen. He sprang up the steps, crossed the hall and the saloon, calling like a madman:

"Mariana! Mariana!"

At the door of the sleeping chamber stood Mariana's old nurse, who tried to bar his progress. He pushed by her, and entered the room.

Mariana was lying motionless and pale upon her bed. Her face was calm as if she slept. Zodomirsky threw himself upon his knees by the bedside, and seized her hand. It was cold, and in it was clenched a curl of black hair.

"My hair!" cried Zodomirsky, bursting into sobs. "Yes, yours," said the old nurse, "your hair that she cut off herself on quitting you at St. Petersburg. I have often told her it would bring misfortune to one of you."

If any one desires to learn what became of Zodomirsky, let him inquire for Brother Vassili, at the Monastery of Troitza.

The holy brothers will show the visitor his tomb. They know neither his real name nor the causes which, at twenty-six, had made him take the robe of a monk. Only they say, vaguely, that it was after a great sorrow, caused by the death of a woman whom he loved.

THE COURTING OF T'NOWHEAD'S BELL

BY JAMES MATTHEW BARRIE

James Matthew Barrie, born in 1860, is the most important figure in a group of recent writers who have taken for their subjects the pathetic and humorous side of village life in Scotland.

There is none among them who is quite so temperamental and sympathetic, certainly none who has so rare an appreciation of humor."

The story of "T'nowhead" is from "A Window in Thrums."

THE COURTING OF T'NOWHEAD'S BELL

By JAMES MATTHEW BARRIE

For two years it had been notorious in the square that Sam'l Dickie was thinking of courting T'nowhead's Bell, and that if little Sanders Elshioner (which is the Thrums pronunciation of Alexander Alexander) went in for her, he might prove a formidable rival. Sam'l was a weaver in the Tenements, and Sanders a coal-carter whose trade-mark was a bell on his horse's neck that told when coals were coming. Being something of a public man,

Sanders had not, perhaps, so high a social position as Sam'l, but he had succeeded his father on the coal-cart, while the weaver had already tried several trades. It had always been against Sam'l, too, that once when the kirk was vacant he had advised the selection of the third minister who preached for it, on the ground that it came expensive to pay a large number of candidates. The scandal of the thing was hushed up, out of respect for his father, who was a God-fearing man, but Sam'l was known by it in Lang Tammas's circle. The coal-carter was called Little Sanders, to distinguish him from his father, who was not much more than half his size. He had grown up with the name, and its inapplicability now came home to nobody. Sam'l's mother had been more far-seeing than Sanders'. Her man had been called Sammy all his life, because it was the name he got as a boy, so when their eldest son was born she spoke of him as Sam'l while still in his cradle. The neighbors imitated her, and thus the young man had a better start in life than had been granted to Sammy, his father.

It was Saturday evening—the night in the week when Auld Licht young men fell in love. Sam'l Dickie, wearing a blue Glengarry bonnet with a red ball on the top, came to the door of a one-story house in the Tenements, and stood there wriggling, for he was in a suit of tweed for the first time that week, and did not feel at one with them. When his feeling of being a stranger to himself wore off, he looked up and down the road, which straggles between houses and gardens, and then, picking his way over the puddles, crossed to his father's hen-house and sat down on it. He was now on his way to the square.

Eppie Fargus was sitting on an adjoining dike, knitting stockings, and Sam'l looked at her for a time.

"Is't yersel', Eppie?" he said at last.

"It's a' that," said Eppie.

"Hoo's a' wi' ye?" asked Sam'l.

"We're juist aff an' on," replied Eppie, cautiously.

There was not much more to say, but as Sam'l sidled off the hen-house, he murmured politely: "Ay, ay." In another minute he would have been fairly started, but Eppie resumed the conversation.

"Sam'l," she said, with a twinkle in her eye, "ye can tell Lisbeth Fargus I'll likely be drappin' in on her aboot Munday or Teisday."

Lisbeth was sister to Eppie, and wife of Tammas McQuhatty, better known as T'nowhead, which was the name of his farm. She was thus Bell's mistress.

Sam'l leaned against the hen-house, as if all his desire to depart had gone.

"Hoo'd 'ye kin I'll be at the T'nowhead the nicht?" he asked, grinning in anticipation.

"Ou, I'se warrant ye'll be after Bell," said Eppie.

"A'm no sae sure o' that," said Sam'l, trying to leer. He was enjoying himself now.

"A'm no sure o' that," he repeated, for Eppie seemed lost in stitches.

"Sam'l?"

"Ay."

"Ye'll be speirin' her sune noo, I dinna doot?"

This took Sam'l, who had only been courting Bell for a year or two, a little aback.

"Hoo d'ye mean, Eppie?" he asked.

"Maybe ye'll do't the nicht?"

"Na, there's nae hurry," said Sam'l.

"Weel, we're a' coontin' on't, Sam'l."

"Gae wa wi' ye."

"What for no?"

"Gae wa wi' ye," said Sam'l again.

"Bell's gei an' fond o' ye, Sam'l."

"Ay," said Sam'l.

"But am dootin' ye're a fellbilly wi' the lasses."

"Ay, oh, I d'na kin, moderate, moderate," said Sam'l, in high delight.

"I saw ye," said Eppie, speaking with a wire in her mouth, "gaen on terr'ble wi' Mysy Haggart at the pump last Saturday."

"We was juist amoosin' oorsels," said Sam'l.

"It'll be nae amoosement to Mysy," said Eppie, "gin ye brak her heart."

"Losh, Eppie," said Sam'l, "I didna think o' that."

"Ye maun kin weel, Sam'l, 'at there's mony a lass wid jump at ye."

"Ou, weel," said Sam'l, implying that a man must take these things as they come.

"For ye're a dainty chield to look at, Sam'l."

"Do ye think so, Eppie? Ay, ay; oh, I d'na kin A'm anything by the ordinar."

"Ye mayna be," said Eppie, "but lasses doesna do to be ower partikler."

Sam'l resented this, and prepared to depart again.

"Ye'll no tell Bell that?" he asked, anxiously.

"Tell her what?"

"Aboot me an' Mysy."

"We'll see hoo ye behave yerself, Sam'l."

"No 'at I care, Eppie; ye can tell her gin ye like. I widna think twice o' tellin' her mysel'."

"The Lord forgie ye for leein', Sam'l," said Eppie, as he disappeared down Tammy Tosh's close. Here he came upon Renders Webster.

"Ye're late, Sam'l," said Henders.

"What for?"

"Ou, I was thinkin' ye wid be gaen the length o' T'nowhead the nicht, an' I saw Sanders Elshioner makkin's wy there an oor syne."

"Did ye?" cried Sam'l, adding craftily; "but it's naething to me."

"Tod, lad," said Renders; "gin ye dinna buckle to, Sanders'll be carryin' her off!"

Sam'l flung back his head and passed on.

"Sam'l!" cried Renders after him.

"Ay," said Sam'l, wheeling round.

"Gie Bell a kiss frae me."

The full force of this joke struck neither all at once. Sam'l began to smile at it as he turned down the school-wynd, and it came upon Henders while he was in his garden feeding his ferret. Then he slapped his legs gleefully, and explained the conceit to Will'um Byars, who went into the house and thought it over.

There were twelve or twenty little groups of men in the square, which was lighted by a flare of oil suspended over a cadger's cart. Now and again a staid young woman passed through the square with a basket on her arm, and if she had lingered long enough to give them time, some of the idlers would have addressed her. As it was, they gazed after her, and then grinned to each other.

"Ay, Sam'l," said two or three young men, as Sam'l joined them beneath the town clock.

"Ay, Davit," replied Sam'l.

This group was composed of some of the sharpest wits in Thrums, and it was not to be expected that they would let this opportunity pass. Perhaps when Sam'l joined them he knew what was in store for him.

"Was ye lookin' for T'nowhead's Bell?" asked one.

"Or mebbe ye was wantin' the minister?" suggested another, the same who had walked out twice with Christy Duff and not married her after all.

Sam'l could not think of a good reply at the moment, so he laughed good-naturedly.

"Ondoobtedly she's a snod bit crittur," said Davit, archly.

"An' michty clever wi' her fingers," added Jamie Deuchars.

"Man, I've thocht o' makkin' up to Bell myself," said Pete Ogle. "Wid there be ony chance, think ye, Sam'l?"

"I'm thinkin' she widna hae ye for her first, Pete," replied Sam'l, in one of those happy flashes that come to some men, "but there's nae sayin' but what she micht tak ye to finish up wi'."

The unexpectedness of this sally startled every one. Sam'l did not set up for a wit, though, like Davit, it was notorious that he could say a cutting thing once in a way.

"Did ye ever see Bell reddin up?" asked Pete, recovering from his overthrow. He was a man who bore no malice.

"It's a sicht," said Sam'l, solemnly.

"Hoo will that be?" asked Jamie Deuchars.

"It's weel worth yer while," said Pete, "to ging atower to the T'nowhead an' see. Ye'll mind the closed-in beds i' the kitchen? Ay, weel, they're a fell spoilt crew, T'nowhead's litlins, an' no that aisy to manage. Th' ither lasses Lisbeth's hae'n had a michty trouble wi' them. When they war i' the middle o' their reddin up the bairns wid come tumlin' about the floor, but, sal, I assure ye, Bell didna fash lang wi' them. Did she, Sam'l?"

"She did not," said Sam'l, dropping into a fine mode of speech to add emphasis to his remark.

"I'll tell ye what she did," said Pete to the others. "She juist lifted up the litlins, twa at a time, an' flung them into the coffin-beds. Syne she snibbit the doors on them, an' keepit them there till the floor was dry."

"Ay, man, did she so?" said Davit, admiringly.

"I've seen her do't myself," said Sam'l.

"There's no a lassie maks better bannocks this side o' Fetter Lums," continued Pete.

"Her mither tocht her that," said Sam'l; "she was a gran' han' at the bakin', Kitty Ogilvy."

"I've heard say," remarked Jamie, putting it this way so as not to tie himself down to anything, "'at Bell's scones is equal to Mag Lunan's."

"So they are," said Sam'l, almost fiercely.

"I kin she's a neat han' at singein' a hen," said Pete.

"An' wi't a'," said Davit, "she's a snod, canty bit stocky in her Sabbath claes."

"If onything, thick in the waist," suggested Jamie.

"I dinna see that," said Sam'l.

"I d'na care for her hair either," continued Jamie, who was very nice in his tastes; "something mair yallowchy wid be an improvement."

"A'body kins," growled Sam'l, "'at black hair's the bonniest."

The others chuckled.

"Puir Sam'l!" Pete said.

Sam'l, not being certain whether this should be received with a smile or a frown, opened his mouth wide as a kind of compromise. This was position one with him for thinking things over.

Few Auld Lichts, as I have said, went the length of choosing a helpmate for themselves. One day a young man's friends would see him mending the washing-tub of a maiden's mother. They kept the joke until Saturday night, and then he learned from them what he had been after. It dazed him for a time, but in a year or so he grew accustomed to the idea, and they were then married. With a little help, he fell in love just like other people.

Sam'l was going the way of others, but he found it difficult to come to the point. He only went courting once a week, and he could never take up the running at the place where he left off the Saturday before. Thus he had not, so far, made great headway. His method of making up to Bell had been to drop in at T'nowhead on Saturday nights and talk with the farmer about the rinderpest.

The farm kitchen was Bell's testimonial. Its chairs, tables, and stools were scoured by her to the whiteness of Rob Angus's saw-mill boards, and the muslin blind on the window was starched like a child's pinafore. Bell was brave, too, as well as energetic. Once Thrums had been overrun with thieves. It is now thought that there may have been only one; but he had the wicked cleverness of a gang. Such was his repute, that there were weavers who spoke of locking their doors when they went from home. He was not very skilful, however, being generally caught, and when they said they knew he was a robber he gave them their things back and went away. If they had given him time there is no doubt that he would have gone off with his plunder. One night he went to T'nowhead, and Bell, who slept in the kitchen, was wakened by the noise. She knew who it would be, so she rose and dressed herself, and went to look for him with a candle. The thief had not known what to do when he got in, and as it was very lonely, he was glad to see Bell. She told him he ought to be ashamed of himself, and would not let him out by the door until he had taken off his boots, so as not to soil the carpet.

On this Saturday evening Sam'l stood his ground in the square, until by and by he found himself alone. There were other groups there still, but his circle had melted away. They went separately, and no one said good-night. Each took himself off slowly, backing out of the group until he was fairly started.

Sam'l looked about him, and then, seeing that the others had gone, walked round the town-house into the darkness of the brae that leads down and then up to the farm of T'nowhead.

To get into the good graces of Lisbeth Fargus you had to know her ways and humor them. Sam'l, who was a student of women, knew this, and so, instead of pushing the door open and walking in, he went through the rather ridiculous ceremony of knocking. Sanders Elshioner was also aware of this weakness of Lisbeth, but, though he often made up his mind to knock, the absurdity of the thing prevented his doing so when he reached the door. T'nowhead himself had never got used to his wife's refined notions, and when any one knocked he always started to his feet, thinking there must be something wrong.

Lisbeth came to the door, her expansive figure blocking the way in.

"Sam'l," she said.

"Lisbeth," said Sam'l.

He shook hands with the farmer's wife, knowing that she liked it, but only said: "Ay, Bell," to his sweetheart, "Ay, T'nowhead," to McQuhatty, and "It's yersel', Sanders," to his rival.

They were all sitting round the fire, T'nowhead, with his feet on the ribs, wondering why he felt so warm, and Bell darned a stocking, while Lisbeth kept an eye on a goblet full of potatoes.

"Sit in to the fire, Sam'l," said the farmer, not, however, making way for him.

"Na, na," said Sam'l, "I'm to bide nae time." Then he sat in to the fire. His face was turned away from Bell, and when she spoke he answered her without looking round. Sam'l felt a little anxious. Sanders Elshioner, who had one leg shorter than the other, but looked well when sitting, seemed suspiciously at home. He asked Bell questions out of his own head, which was beyond Sam'l, and once he said something to her in such a low voice that the others could not catch it. T'nowhead asked curiously what it was, and Sanders explained that he had only said: "Ay, Bell, the morn's the Sabbath." There was nothing startling in this, but Sam'l did not like it. He began to wonder if he was too late, and had he seen his opportunity, would have told Bell of a nasty rumor that Sanders intended to go over to the Free Church if they would make him kirk-officer.

Sam'l had the good-will of T'nowhead's wife, who liked a polite man. Sanders did his best, but from want of practise he constantly made mistakes. To-night, for instance, he wore his hat in the house, because he did not like to put up his hand and take it off. T'nowhead had not taken his off either, but that was because he meant to go out by and by and lock the byre door. It was impossible to say which of her lovers Bell preferred. The proper course with an Auld Licht lassie was to prefer the man who proposed to her.

"Ye'll bide a wee, an' hae something to eat?" Lisbeth asked Sam'l, with her eyes on the goblet.

"No, I thank ye," said Sam'l, with true gentility.

"Ye'll better?"

"I dinna think it."

"Hoots, ay; what's to hender ye?"

"Weel, since ye're sae pressin', I'll bide."

No one asked Sanders to stay. Bell could not, for she was but the servant, and T'nowhead knew that the kick his wife had given him meant that he was not to do so either. Sanders whistled to show that he was not uncomfortable.

"Ay, then, I'll be stappin' ower the brae," he said at last.

He did not go, however. There was sufficient pride in him to get him off his chair, but only slowly, for he had to get accustomed to the notion of going. At intervals of two or three minutes he remarked that he must now be going. In the same circumstances Sam'l would have acted similarly. For a Thrums man it is one of the hardest things in life to get away from anywhere.

At last Lisbeth saw that something must be done. The potatoes were burning, and T'nowhead had an invitation on his tongue.

"Yes, I'll hae to be movin'," said Sanders, hopelessly, for the fifth time.

"Guid-nicht to ye, then, Sanders," said Lisbeth. "Gie the door a fling-to ahent ye."

Sanders, with a mighty effort, pulled himself together. He looked boldly at Bell, and then took off his hat carefully. Sam'l saw with misgivings that there was something in it which was not a handkerchief. It was a paper bag glittering with gold braid, and contained such an assortment of sweets as lads bought for their lasses on the Muckle Friday.

"Hae, Bell," said Sanders, handing the bag to Bell in an off-hand way, as if it were but a trifle. Nevertheless, he was a little excited, for he went off without saying good-night.

No one spoke. Bell's face was crimson. T'nowhead fidgeted on his chair, and Lisbeth looked at Sam'l. The weaver was strangely calm and collected, though he would have liked to know whether this was a proposal.

"Sit in by to the table, Sam'l," said Lisbeth, trying to look as if things were as they had been before.

She put a saucerful of butter, salt, and pepper near the fire to melt, for melted butter is the shoeing-horn that helps over a meal of potatoes. Sam'l, however, saw what the hour required, and, jumping up, he seized his bonnet.

"Hing the tatties higher up the joist, Lisbeth," he said, with dignity; "I'se be back in ten meenits."

He hurried out of the house, leaving the others looking at each other.

"What do ye think?" asked Lisbeth.

"I d'na kin," faltered Bell.

"Thae tatties is lang o' comin' to the boil," said T'nowhead.

In some circles a lover who behaved like Sam'l would have been suspected of intent upon his rival's life, but neither Bell nor Lisbeth did the weaver that injustice. In a case of this kind it does not much matter what T'nowhead thought.

The ten minutes had barely passed when Sam'l was back in the farm kitchen. He was too flurried to knock this time, and, indeed, Lisbeth did not expect it of him.

"Bell, hae!" he cried, handing his sweetheart a tinsel bag twice the size of Sanders's gift.

"Losh preserve's!" exclaimed Lisbeth; "I'se warrant there's a shillin's worth."

"There's a' that, Lisbeth—an' mair," said Sam'l, firmly.

"I thank ye, Sam'l," said Bell, feeling an unwonted elation as she gazed at the two paper bags in her lap.

"Ye're ower extravegint, Sam'l," Lisbeth said.

"Not at all," said Sam'l; "not at all. But I wouldna advise ye to eat thae ither anes, Bell—they're second quality."

Bell drew back a step from Sam'l.

"How do ye kin?" asked the farmer, shortly; for he liked Sanders.

"I speired i' the shop," said Sam'l.

The goblet was placed on a broken plate on the table, with the saucer beside it, and Sam'l, like the others, helped himself. What he did was to take potatoes from the pot with his fingers, peel off their coats, and then dip them into the butter. Lisbeth would have liked to provide knives and forks, but she knew that beyond a certain point T'nowhead was master in his own house. As for Sam'l, he felt victory in his hands, and began to think that he had gone too far.

In the meantime, Sanders, little witting that Sam'l had trumped his trick, was sauntering along the kirk-wynd with his hat on the side of his head. Fortunately he did not meet the minister.

The courting of T'nowhead's Bell reached its crisis one Sabbath about a month after the events above recorded. The minister was in great force that day, but it is no part of mine to tell how he bore himself. I was there, and am not likely to forget the scene. It was a fateful Sabbath for T'nowhead's Bell and her swains, and destined to be remembered for the painful scandal which they perpetrated in their passion.

Bell was not in the kirk. There being an infant of six months in the house, it was a question of either Lisbeth or the lassie's staying at home with him, and though Lisbeth was unselfish in a general way, she could not resist the delight of going to church. She had nine children besides the baby, and being but a woman, it was the pride of her life to march them into the T'nowhead pew, so well watched that they dared not misbehave, and so tightly packed that they could not fall. The congregation looked at that pew, the mother enviously, when they sang the lines:

> "Jerusalem like a city is
> Compactly built together."

The first half of the service had been gone through on this particular Sunday without anything remarkable happening. It was at the end of the psalm which preceded the sermon that Sanders Elshioner, who sat near the door, lowered his head until it was no higher than the pews, and in that attitude, looking almost like a four-footed animal, slipped out of the church. In their eagerness to be at the sermon, many of the congregation did not notice him, and those who did put the matter by in their minds for future investigation. Sam'l, however, could not take it so coolly. From his seat in the gallery he saw Sanders disappear, and his mind misgave him. With the true lover's instinct, he understood it all. Sanders had been struck by the fine turn-out in the T'nowhead pew. Bell was alone at the farm. What an opportunity to work one's way up to a proposal. T'nowhead was so overrun with children that such a chance seldom occurred, except on a Sabbath. Sanders, doubtless, was off to propose, and he, Sam'l, was left behind.

The suspense was terrible. Sam'l and Sanders had both known all along that Bell would take the first of the two who asked her. Even those who thought her proud admitted that she was modest. Bitterly the weaver repented having waited so long. Now it was too late. In ten minutes Sanders would be at T'nowhead; in an hour all would be over. Sam'l rose to his feet in a daze. His mother pulled him down by the coat-tail, and his father shook him, thinking he was walking in his sleep. He tottered past them, however, hurried up the aisle, which was so

narrow that Dan'l Ross could only reach his seat by walking sidewise, and was gone before the minister could do more than stop in the middle of a whirl and gape in horror after him.

A number of the congregation felt that day the advantage of sitting in the laft. What was a mystery to those downstairs was revealed to them. From the gallery windows they had a fine open view to the south, and as Sam'l took the common, which was a short cut, though a steep ascent, to T'nowhead, he was never out of their line of vision. Sanders was not to be seen, but they guessed rightly the reason why. Thinking he had ample time, he had gone round by the main road to save his boots—perhaps a little scared by what was coming. Sam'l's design was to forestall him by taking the shorter path over the burn and up the commonty.

It was a race for a wife, and several onlookers in the gallery braved the minister's displeasure to see who won. Those who favored Sam'l's suit exultingly saw him leap the stream, while the friends of Sanders fixed their eyes on the top of the common where it ran into the road. Sanders must come into sight there, and the one who reached this point first would get Bell.

As Auld Lichts do not walk abroad on the Sabbath, Sanders would probably not be delayed. The chances were in his favor. Had it been any other day in the week, Sam'l might have run. So some of the congregation in the gallery were thinking, when suddenly they saw him bend low and then take to his heels. He had caught sight of Sanders's head bobbing over the hedge that separated the road from the common, and feared that Sanders might see him. The congregation who could crane their necks sufficiently saw a black object, which they guessed to be the carter's hat. crawling along the hedge-top. For a moment it was motionless, and then it shot ahead. The rivals had seen each other. It was now a hot race. Sam'l, dissembling no longer, clattered up the common, becoming smaller and smaller to the onlookers as he neared the top. More than one person in the gallery almost rose to their feet in their excitement. Sam'l had it. No. Sanders was in front. Then the two figures disappeared from view. They seemed to run into each other at the top of the brae, and no one could say who was first. The congregation looked at one another. Some of them perspired. But the minister held on his course.

Sam'l had just been in time to cut Sanders out. It was the weaver's saying that Sanders saw this when his rival turned the corner; for Sam'l was sadly blown. Sanders took in the situation and gave in at once. The last hundred yards of the distance he covered at his leisure, and when he arrived at his destination he did not go in. It was a fine afternoon for the time of year, and he went round to have a look at the pig, about which T'nowhead was a little sinfully puffed up.

"Ay," said Sanders, digging his fingers critically into the grunting animal; "quite so."

"Grumph!" said the pig, getting reluctantly to his feet.

"Ou, ay; yes," said Sanders, thoughtfully.

Then he sat down on the edge of the sty, and looked long and silently at an empty bucket. But whether his thoughts were of T'nowhead's Bell, whom he had lost forever, or of the food the farmer fed his pig on, is not known.

"Lord preserve's! Are ye no at the kirk?" cried Bell, nearly dropping the baby as Sam'l broke into the room.

"Bell!" cried Sam'l.

Then T'nowhead's Bell knew that her hour had come.

"Sam'l," she faltered.

"Will ye hae's, Bell?" demanded Sam'l, glaring at her sheepishly.

"Ay," answered Bell.

Sam'l fell into a chair.

"Bring's a drink o' water, Bell," he said.

But Bell thought the occasion required milk, and there was none in the kitchen. She went out to the byre, still with the baby in her arms, and saw Sanders Elshioner sitting gloomily on the pig-sty.

"Weel, Bell?" said Sanders.

"I thocht ye'd been at the kirk, Sanders," said Bell.

Then there was a silence between them.

"Has Sam'l speired ye, Bell?" asked Sanders stolidly.

"Ay," said Bell again, and this time there was a tear in her eye. Sanders was little better than an "orra man," and Sam'l was a weaver, and yet—but it was too late now. Sanders gave the pig a vicious poke with a stick, and when it had ceased to grunt, Bell was back in the kitchen. She had forgotten about the milk, however, and Sam'l only got water after all.

In after days, when the story of Bell's wooing was told, there were some who held that the circumstances would have almost justified the lassie in giving Sam'l the go-by. But these perhaps forgot that her other lover was in the same predicament as the accepted one—that, of the two, indeed, he was the more to blame, for he set off to T'nowhead on the Sabbath of his own accord, while Sam'l only ran after him. And then there is no one to say for certain whether Bell heard of her suitor's delinquencies until Lisbeth's return from the kirk. Sam'l could never remember whether he told her, and Bell was not sure whether, if he did, she took it in. Sanders was greatly in demand for weeks after to tell what he knew of the affair, but though he was twice asked to tea to the manse among the trees, and subjected thereafter to ministerial cross-examinations, this is all he told. He remained at the pig-sty until Sam'l left the farm, when he joined him at the top of the brae, and they went home together.

"It's yersel', Sanders," said Sam'l.

"It is so, Sam'l," said Sanders.

"Very cauld," said Sam'l.

"Blawy," assented Sanders.

After a pause:

"Sam'l," said Sanders.

"Ay."

"I'm hearin' yer to be mairit."

"Ay."

"Weel, Sam'l, she's a snod bit lassie."

"Thank ye," said Sam'l.

"I had ance a kin' o' notion o' Bell mysel'," continued Sanders.

"Ye had?"

"Yes, Sam'l; but I thocht better o't."

"Hoo d'ye mean?" asked Sam'l, a little anxiously.

"Weel, Sam'l, mairitch is a terrible responsibeelity."

"It is so," said Sam'l, wincing.

"An' no the thing to tak up withoot conseederation."

"But it's a blessed and honorable state, Sanders; ye've heard the minister on't."

"They say," continued the relentless Sanders, "'at the minister doesna get on sa weel wi' the wife himsel'."

"So they do," cried Sam'l, with a sinking at the heart.

"I've been telt," Sanders went on, "'at gin you can get the upper han' o' the wife for a while at first, there's the mair chance o' a harmonious exeestence."

"Bell's no the lassie," said Sam'l, appealingly, "to thwart her man."

Sanders smiled.

"D'ye think she is, Sanders?"

"Weel, Sam'l, I d'na want to fluster ye, but she's been ower lang wi' Lisbeth Fargus no to ha' learnt her ways. An' a'body kins what a life T'nowhead has wi' her."

"Guid sake, Sanders, hoo did ye no speak o' this afoore?"

"I thocht ye kent o't, Sam'l."

They had now reached the square, and the U. P. kirk was coming out. The Auld Licht kirk would be half an hour yet.

"But, Sanders," said Sam'l, brightening up, "ye was on yer way to speir her yersel'."

"I was, Sam'l," said Sanders, "and I canna but be thankfu' ye was ower quick for's."

"Oin't hadna been you," said Sam'l, "I wid never hae thocht o't."

"I'm sayin' naething agin Bell," pursued the other, "but, man Sam'l, a body should be mair deleeberate in a thing o' the kind."

"It was michty hurried," said Sam'l, wofully.

"It's a serious thing to speir a lassie," said Sanders.

"It's an awfu' thing," said Sam'l.

"But we'll hope for the best," added Sanders, in a hopeless voice.

They were close to the Tenements now, and Sam'l looked as if he were on his way to be hanged.

"Sam'l?"

"Ay, Sanders."

"Did ye—did ye kiss her, Sam'l?"

"Na."

"Hoo?"

"There's was vara little time, Sanders."

"Half an 'oor," said Sanders.

"Was there? Man, Sanders, to tell ye the truth, I never thocht o't."

Then the soul of Elshioner was filled with contempt for Sam'l Dickie.

The scandal blew over. At first it was expected that the minister would interfere to prevent the union, but beyond intimating from the pulpit that the souls of Sabbath-breakers were beyond praying for, and then praying for Sam'l and Sanders at great length, with a word thrown in for Bell, he let things take their course. Some said it was because he was always frightened lest his young men should intermarry with other denominations, but Sanders explained it differently to Sam'l.

"I hav'na a word to say agin the minister," he said; "they're gran' prayers, but, Sam'l, he's a mairit man himsel'."

"He's a' the better for that, Sanders, isna he?"

"Do ye no see," asked Sanders, compassionately, "'at he's tryin' to mak the best o't?"

"Oh, Sanders, man!" said Sam'l.

"Cheer up, Sam'l," said Sanders; "it'll sune be ower."

Their having been rival suitors had not interfered with their friendship. On the contrary, while they hitherto been mere acquaintances, they became inseparables as the wedding-day drew near. It was noticed that they had much to say to each other, and that when they could not get a room to themselves they wandered about together in the churchyard.

When Sam'l had anything to tell Bell, he sent Sanders to tell it, and Sanders did as he was bid. There was nothing that he would not have done for Sam'l.

The more obliging Sanders was, however, the sadder Sam'l grew. He never laughed now on Saturdays, and sometimes his loom was silent half the day. Sam'l felt that Sanders's was the kindness of a friend for a dying man.

It was to be a penny wedding, and Lisbeth Fargus said it was delicacy that made Sam'l superintend the fitting-up of the barn by deputy. Once he came to see it in person, but he looked so ill that Sanders had to see him home. This was on the Thursday afternoon, and the wedding was fixed for Friday.

"Sanders, Sanders!" said Sam'l, in a voice strangely unlike his own, "it'll a' be ower by this time the morn."

"It will," said Sanders.

"If I had only kent her langer," continued Sam'l.

"It wid hae been safer," said Sanders.

"Did ye see the yallow floor in Bell's bonnet?" asked the accepted swain.

"Ay," said Sanders, reluctantly.

"I'm dootin'—I'm sair dootin' she's but a flichty, licht-hearted crittur, after a'."

"I had aye my suspeecions o't," said Sanders.

"Ye hae kent her langer than me," said Sam'l.

"Yes," said Sanders; "but there's nae gettin' at the heart o' women. Man Sam'l, they're desperate cunnin'."

"I'm dootin't; I'm sair dootin't."

"It'll be a warnin' to ye, Sam'l, no to be in sic a hurry i' the futur," said Sanders.

Sam'l groaned.

"Ye'll be gaein' up to the manse to arrange wi' the minister the morn's mornin'," continued Sanders, in a subdued voice.

Sam'l looked wistfully at his friend.

"I canna do't, Sanders," he said, "I canna do't."

"Ye maun," said Sanders.

"It's aisy to speak," retorted Sam'l, bitterly.

"We have a' oor troubles, Sam'l," said Sanders, soothingly, "an' every man maun bear his ain burdens. Johnny Davie's wife's dead, an' he's no repinin'."

"Ay," said Sam'l; "but a death's no mairitch. We hae haen deaths in our family too."

"It may a' be for the best," added Sanders, "an' there wid be a michty talk i' the hale country-side gin ye didna ging to the minister like a man."

"I maun hae langer to think o't," said Sam'l.

"Bell's mairitch is the morn," said Sanders, decisively.

Sam'l glanced up with a wild look in his eyes.

"Sanders!" he cried.

"Sam'l?"

"Ye hae been a guid friend to me, Sanders, in this sair affliction."

"Nothing ava," said Sanders; "doun't mention't."

"But, Sanders, ye canna deny but what your rinnin oot o' the kirk that awfu' day was at the bottom o't a'."

"It was so," said Sanders, bravely.

"An' ye used to be fond o' Bell, Sanders."

"I dinna deny't."

"Sanders, laddie," said Sam'l, bending forward and speaking in a wheedling voice. "I aye thocht it was you she likeit."

"I had some sic idea mysel'," said Sanders.

"Sanders, I canna think to pairt twa fowk sae weel suited to ane anither as you an' Bell."

"Canna ye, Sam'l?"

"She wid mak ye a guid wife, Sanders. I hae studied her weel, and she's a thrifty, douce, clever lassie. Sanders, there's no the like o' her. Mony a time, Sanders, I hae said to mysel, 'There a lass ony man micht be prood to tak. A'body says the same, Sanders. There's nae risk ava, man; nane to speak o'. Tak her, laddie, tak her, Sanders; it's a grand chance, Sanders. She's yours for the speirin'. I'll gie her up, Sanders."

"Will ye, though?" said Sanders.

"What d'ye think?" asked Sam'l.

"If ye wid raither," said Sanders, politely.

"There's my han' on't," said Sam'l. "Bless ye, Sanders; ye've been a true frien' to me."

Then they shook hands for the first time in their lives; and soon afterward Sanders struck up the brae to T'nowhead.

Next morning Sanders Elshioner, who had been very busy the night before, put on his Sabbath clothes and strolled up to the manse.

"But—but where is Sam'l?" asked the minister. "I must see himself."

"It's a new arrangement," said Sanders.

"What do you mean, Sanders?"

"Bell's to marry me," explained Sanders.

"But—but what does Sam'l say?"

"He's willin'," said Sanders.

"And Bell?"

"She's willin', too. She prefers it."

"It is unusual," said the minister.

"It's a' richt," said Sanders.

"Well, you know best," said the minister.

"You see, the house was taen, at ony rate," continued Sanders. "An' I'll juist ging in til't instead o' Sam'l."

"Quite so."

"An' I cudna think to disappoint the lassie."

"Your sentiments do you credit, Sanders," said the minister, "but I hope you do not enter upon the blessed state of matrimony without full consideration of its responsibilities. It is a serious business, marriage."

"It's a' that," said Sanders; "but I'm willin' to stan' the risk."

So, as soon as it could be done, Sanders Elshioner took to wife T'nowhead's Bell, and I remember seeing Sam'l Dickie trying to dance at the penny wedding.

Years afterward it was said in Thrums that Sam'l had treated Bell badly, but he was never sure about it himself.

"It was a near thing—a michty near thing," he admitted in the square.

"They say," some other weaver would remark, "'at it was you Bell liked best."

"I d'na kin," Sam'l would reply, "but there's nae doot the lassie was fell fond o' me. Ou, a mere passin' fancy's ye micht say."

THE RYNARD GOLD REEF COMPANY LIMITED

BY SIR WALTER BESANT

Sir Walter Besant (born 1836, died 1901), the author of many novels and short stories, was knighted in 1895 for his notable services to literature. He founded the Society of Authors, but is perhaps best known as joint-author (with the late James Rice) of "All Sorts and Conditions of Men," which led to the founding of the People's Palace as a reality in the East End of London.

THE RYNARD GOLD REEF COMPANY, LIMITED

By SIR WALTER BESANT

ACT I

"You dear old boy," said the girl, "I am sure I wish it could be—with all my heart—if I have any heart."

"I don't believe that you have," replied the boy gloomily.

"Well, but, Reg, consider; you've got no money."

"I've got five thousand pounds. If a man can't make his way upon that he must be a poor stick."

"You would go abroad with it and dig, and take your wife with you—to wash and cook."

"We would do something with the money here. You should stay in London, Rosie."

"Yes. In a suburban villa, at Shepherd's Bush, perhaps. No, Reg, when I marry, if ever I do—I am in no hurry—I will step out of this room into one exactly like it." The room was a splendid drawing-room in Palace Gardens, splendidly furnished. "I shall have my footmen and my carriage, and I shall—"

"Rosie, give me the right to earn all these things for you!" the young man cried impetuously.

"You can only earn them for me by the time you have one foot in the grave. Hadn't I better in the meantime marry some old gentleman with his one foot in the grave, so as to be ready for you against the time when you come home? In two or three years the other foot I dare say would slide into the grave as well."

"You laugh at my trouble. You feel nothing."

"If the pater would part—but he won't—he says he wants all his money for himself, and that I've got to marry well. Besides, Reg"—here her face clouded and she lowered her voice—"there are times when he looks anxious. We didn't always live in Palace Gardens. Suppose we should lose it all as quickly as we got it? Oh!" she shivered and trembled. "No, I will never, never marry a poor man. Get rich, my dear boy, and you may aspire even to the valuable possession of this heartless heand."

She held it out. He took it, pressed it, stooped and kissed her. Then he dropped her hand and walked quickly out of the room.

"Poor Reggie!" she murmured. "I wish—I wish—but what is the use of wishing?"

ACT II

Two men—one young, the other about fifty—sat in the veranda of a small bungalow. It was after breakfast. They lay back in long bamboo chairs, each with a cigar. It looked as if they were resting. In reality they were talking business, and that very seriously.

"Yes, sir," said the elder man, with something of an American accent, "I have somehow taken a fancy to this place. The situation is healthy."

"Well, I don't know; I've had more than one touch of fever here."

"The climate is lovely—"

"Except in the rains."

"The soil is fertile—"

"I've dropped five thousand in it, and they haven't come up again yet."

"They will. I have been round the estate, and I see money in it. Well, sir, here's my offer: five thousand down, hard cash, as soon as the papers are signed."

Reginald sat up. He was on the point of accepting the proposal, when a pony rode up to the house, and the rider, a native groom, jumped off, and gave him a note. He opened it and read. It was from his nearest neighbor, two or three miles away: "Don't sell that man your estate. Gold has been found. The whole country is full of gold. Hold on. He's an assayer. If he offers to buy, be quite sure that he has found gold on your land.—F.G."

He put the note into his pocket, gave a verbal message to the boy, and turned to his guest, without betraying the least astonishment or emotion.

"I beg your pardon. The note was from Bellamy, my next neighbor. Well? You were saying—"

"Only that I have taken a fancy—perhaps a foolish fancy—to this place of yours, and I'll give you, if you like, all that you have spent upon it."

"Well," he replied, reflectively, but with a little twinkle in his eye, "that seems handsome. But the place isn't really worth the half that I have spent upon it. Anybody would tell you that. Come, let us be honest, whatever we are. I'll tell you a better way. We will put the matter into the hands of Bellamy. He knows what a coffee plantation is worth. He shall name a price, and if we can agree upon that, we will make a deal of it."

The other man changed color. He wanted to settle the thing at once as between gentlemen. What need of third parties? But Reginald stood firm, and he presently rode away, quite sure that in a day or two this planter, too, would have heard the news.

A month later, the young coffee-planter stood on the deck of a steamer homeward bound. In his pocket-book was a plan of his auriferous estate; in a bag hanging round his neck was a small collection of yellow nuggets; in his boxes was a chosen assortment of quartz.

ACT III

"Well, sir," said the financier, "you've brought this thing to me. You want my advice. Well, my advice is, don't fool away the only good thing that will ever happen to you. Luck such as this doesn't come more than once in a lifetime."

"I have been offered ten thousand pounds for my estate."

"Oh! Have you! Ten thousand? That was very liberal—very liberal indeed. Ten thousand for a gold reef."

"But I thought as an old friend of my father you would, perhaps—"

"Young man, don't fool it away. He's waiting for you, I suppose, round the corner, with a bottle of fizz, ready to close."

"He is."

"Well, go and drink his champagne. Always get whatever you can. And then tell him that you'll see him—"

"I certainly will, sir, if you advise it. And then?"

"And then—leave it to me. And—young man—I think I heard, a year or two ago, something about you and my girl Rosie."

"There was something, sir. Not enough to trouble you about it."

"She told me. Rosie tells me all her love affairs."

"Is she—is she unmarried?"

"Oh, yes, and for the moment I believe she is free. She has had one or two engagements, but, somehow, they have come to nothing. There was the French Count, but that was knocked on the head very early in consequence of things discovered. And there was the Boom in Guano, but he fortunately smashed, much to Rosie's joy, because she never liked him. The last was Lord Evergreen. He was a nice old chap when you could understand what he said, and Rosie would have liked the title very much, though his grandchildren opposed the thing. Well, sir, I suppose you couldn't understand the trouble we took to keep that old man alive for his own wedding. Science did all it could, but 'twas of no use—" The financier sighed. "The ways of Providence are inscrutable. He died, sir, the day before."

"That was very sad."

"A dashing of the cup from the lip, sir. My daughter would have been a Countess. Well, young gentleman, about this estate of yours. I think I see a way—I think, I am not yet sure—that I do see a way. Go now. See this liberal gentleman, and drink his champagne. And come here in a week. Then, if I still see my way, you shall understand what it means to hold the position in the city which is mine."

"And—and—may I call upon Rosie?"

"Not till this day week, not till I have made my way plain."

ACT IV

"And so it means this. Oh, Rosie, you look lovelier than ever, and I'm as happy as a king. It means this. Your father is the greatest genius in the world. He buys my property for sixty thousand pounds—sixty thousand. That's over two thousand a year for me, and he makes a company out of it with a hundred and fifty thousand capital. He says that, taking ten thousand out of it for expenses, there will be a profit of eighty thousand. And all that he gives to you—eighty thousand; that's three thousand a year for you—and sixty thousand; that's two more, my dearest Rosie. You remember what you said, that when you married you should step out of one room like this into another just as good?"

"Oh, Reggie"—she sank upon his bosom—"you know I never could love anybody but you. It's true I was engaged to old Lord Evergreen, but that was only because he had one foot—you know—and when the other foot went in too, just a day too soon, I actually laughed. So the pater is going to make a company of it, is he? Well, I hope he won't put any of his own money into it, I'm sure, because of late all the companies have turned out so badly."

"But, my child, the place is full of gold."

"Then why did he turn it into a company, my dear boy? And why didn't he make you stick to it? But you know nothing of the City. Now, let us sit down, and talk about what we shall do. Don't, you ridiculous boy!"

ACT V

Another house just like the first. The bride stepped out of one palace into another. With their five or six thousand a year, the young couple could just manage to make both ends meet. The husband was devoted; the wife had everything that she could wish. Who could be happier than this pair in a nest so luxurious, their life so padded, their days so full of sunshine?

It was a year after marriage. The wife, contrary to her usual custom, was the first at breakfast. A few letters were waiting for her—chiefly invitations. She opened and read them. Among them lay one addressed to her husband. Not looking at the address, she opened and read that as well:

"DEAR REGINALD—I venture to address you as an old friend of your own and schoolfellow of your mother's. I am a widow with four children. My husband was the Vicar of your old parish—you remember him and me. I was left with a little income of about two hundred a year. Twelve months ago I was persuaded, in order to double my income—a thing which seemed certain from the prospectus—to invest everything in a new and rich gold mine. Everything. And the mine has never paid anything. The Company—it is called the Rynard Gold Reef Company—is in liquidation because, though there is really the gold there, it costs too much to get it. I have no relatives anywhere to help me. Unless I can get assistance my children and I must go at once—to-morrow—into the workhouse. Yes, we are paupers. I am ruined by the cruel lies of that prospectus, and the wickedness which deluded me, and I know not how many others, out of my money.' I have been foolish, and am punished: but those people, who will punish them? Help me, if you can, my dear Reginald. Oh! for God's sake, help my children and me. Help your mother's friend, your own old friend."

"This," said Rosie, meditatively, "is exactly the kind of thing to make Reggie uncomfortable. Why, it might make him unhappy all day. Better burn it." She dropped the letter into the fire. "He's an impulsive, emotional nature, and he doesn't understand the City. If people are so foolish. What a lot of fibs the poor old pater does tell, to be sure. He's a regular novelist—Oh! here you are, you lazy boy!"

"Kiss me, Rosie." He looked as handsome as Apollo and as cheerful. "I wish all the world were as happy as you and me. Heigho! Some poor devils, I'm afraid—"

"Tea or coffee, Reg?"

END OF VOLUME THREE