

# ORLANDO CHESTER:

—OR—

## THE ADVENTURES OF A YOUNG HUNTER.

A STORY OF OLD VIRGINIA'S EARLY DAYS.

BY SYLVANUS COBB, JR.



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## ORLANDO CHESTER.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE YOUNG HUNTER AND HIS ADVENTURE.

The year of our Lord 1700 dawned upon Virginia, and found that colony in a prosperous and thriving condition. After passing through many and various troubles, some arising from the unjust government of England, and some from the hostility of the Indians, her people had at length arrived at a period of quiet, and under its genial influence they began to thrive in their commerce and in the cultivation of their rich plantations. The only fear they now entertained of the red men was founded upon the fact that small parties of them sometimes ventured down the river on petty thieving expeditions; but as little damage was done, and as the Indians seldom offered any violence on these occasions—always making it their object to come and go unobserved—the planters paid little attention to their small losses, save to catch and punish the offenders when they could. Wealth was pouring into the colony, comparatively healthy laws had been enacted, and the people were contented for the present.

It was a bright and beautiful day in the laughing month of May. On the northern bank of James River, some thirty-five miles above the settlement at Jamestown, stood a young man beneath the shade of a huge pine, and at whose feet lay two noble hounds. The individual thus introduced could not have seen over twenty

summers; but even that time had been sufficient to develop in his frame and features the strong stamp of manhood, though the hand of time had evidently been assisted by the effects of a somewhat eventful life in the more marked developments. In stature he was of fair height and well proportioned, showing an abundance of physical strength and nerve, and an easy carriage. But the most striking part of the picture—that part which would first attract the beholder's attention—was the young man's face. From much exposure it was considerably darkened by the rays of the sun and the beatings of the storm; but yet its fair surface was like a mirror, from which was reflected the soul that gave it animation, ever varying, as thought after thought came and went, and revealing a store of natural intelligence one would scarcely expect to find accompanying such a sphere and occupation. The brow was open and bold, showing a deal of mental power, and beneath it sparkled two large, full eyes, whose quick flashes and sudden turnings evinced a readiness and quickness of sight that might never fail their possessor. Now get a view at that face in an oblique direction, just so as to throw the further temple out of sight, and let the eyes be slightly downcast, and you would at once observe an almost predominant melancholy pervading the

whole face. In that melancholy there appears to be no pain, no anguish; but it rather seems to be an offspring of the soul, that has long, very long held its present sway; and after the beholder has once discovered that shade, he could not lose sight of it, except some sudden and strong emotion should for a time drive its impress away.

The young man was habited in a hunter's garb, consisting of a light blue shirt of stout linen stuff, which was secured about the waist by a leathern belt—said belt giving support to a brace of pistols and a hunting knife. A pair of deer-skin leggings, laced at the sides, a pair of moccasins, and a light fur cap completed his attire. As we find him now he is leaning upon his rifle, in an easy, resting attitude, with his left hand resting upon the head of one of the bounds, while his eyes are turned towards the deep river that flows by at his feet. Such is a picture of Orlando Chester.

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

While yet the young hunter rested upon his faithful rifle, his quick ear caught the sound of oars at some distance above where he stood, and, calling his dogs after him, he took up his position behind a clump of tangled vines and shrubbery, from whence he could observe whoever might pass. As the first sound had started him from his reverie the idea of Indians flashed across his mind, but on the next instant he detected the splash of oars, which was totally unlike the dip of the red man's paddle, and he at once came to the conclusion that it must be some pleasure or hunting-party from one of the extensive tobacco-plantations below.

Ere many minutes had elapsed, the youth caught sight of a small boat pulled by four stout negroes, and in the stern of which were seated a young girl and her black female attendant. The negroes were pulling at their oars with all the strength they could command, while the girl, with frantic gestures, was urging them to increase their speed if possible. The boat was now nearly a quarter of a mile distant from where the hunter stood, but yet he could plainly see the anguish that dwelt in the features of the fair pleader—not that he could make out those features in form—but the attitude of the streaming hair, and the agonized movements conveyed them to his mind, and he knew that the vindictive red man was upon their watery trail. Of course, young Chester's first and only impulse

upon coming to this conclusion, was to give his aid; but a moment's reflection showed him that his best course was to wait till he could see the exact position and number of the enemy.

Five minutes passed away, and the hunter could not only see the features of those in the boat, but he could plainly hear the entreaties the girl put forth to her almost exhausted oarsmen. The boat was in the middle of the river, and three minutes more would bring it opposite to where he stood; and just as he was beginning to wonder that the enemy had not come in sight, the sharp crack of a rifle struck upon his ears, and on the next instant, one of the negroes dropped his oar and fell forward at the feet of his mistress. On the next moment another report, almost an echo of the first, rang through the air, and a second negro dropped his oar. Quickly throwing his rifle across his arm, the hunter sprang down the river's bank, and on casting his eyes up the stream he saw, not more than forty rods distant, a large canoe containing four Indians, which had come down under cover of the bank, in order to avoid the current which the boat had buffeted. With a presence of mind that never forsook him, young Chester cast a hasty glance over the canoe, and his quick eye told him in an instant who were the two that had fired, for their rifles lay carelessly by their sides, while the remaining two held theirs ready for use in their arms while they paddled.

The young hunter saw that he had not been detected by those in the canoe, but a glance at the boat told him that the girl had seen him. Not twenty seconds had elapsed after he sprang down the bank before he was back in his place, and with his cap in his hand he beckoned earnestly for the girl to have her boat turned towards the shore. The hunter could see that she understood his signal and also that she trusted him, for he saw that she was urging the terror-stricken negroes to pull for the bank where he stood. The canoe had turned its head towards the middle of the river, now that the boat was brought so near, and Chester could see the heads of the Indians two of whom were paddling, while the other two stood up with their rifles in their hands. The hunter raised his rifle, and was upon the point of firing at one of the red men, when a sudden idea flashed through his mind, and, loosening his finger from the trigger, he waited with his weapon still against his shoulder. The canoe had just begun to turn its head in shore again, as the boat changed its

course, and, if it rounded to enough, the two standing Indians would be brought within range of his rifle! Anxiously the hunter awaited the result. Slowly came the canoe about in her angle, and gradually the line of space between the two Indians grew less. At length the moment came—the line of the hunter's never failing aim passed through the neck of the nearest, and struck upon the head of the furthest Indian. With a steady hand he pulled the trigger, and while yet the sharp report was ringing through the forest the two red men fell!

The two remaining negroes heard the report, and, each believing himself to be the object of it; deathly intent, they both dropped their oars; but the girl, who had comprehended the whole, and who had seen two of her enemies fall, soon managed to convince the poor creatures of their safety, and once more they took up their oars and pulled for the shore, while the two surviving Indians, completely terror-struck at this unexpected catastrophe, had sprung to their feet, and were gazing earnestly at the spot where the smoke of the hunter's rifle was curling up above the bushes. With that sagacity which ever characterizes the red man, they seemed at once to understand that there could be but one man on the shore, for had there been more, there would certainly have been another shot, and instantly springing forward, one of them seized the only remaining loaded rifle—one had fallen into the river when its owner fell—and turned its muzzle towards the spot where his eagle eye had caught the outlines of the hunter's form through the shrubbery. But the Indian was too late. Nearly a minute had elapsed since Chester had fired, and his rifle was again loaded. The white man caught his enemy's movement just as he picked up his fallen brother's weapon, and quick as thought his own trusty rifle was on the aim—again it uttered its death-notes, and another Indian fell to rise no more!

The single surviving savage saw his companion drop, and on the instant he resorted to the only means of his own salvation. He seized a paddle, and quickly bending himself to the task he shot the pliable canoe up the river. The tide was in his favor, and as he shaped his course obliquely towards the opposite bank, he was out of danger ere his dreaded foe could reload his rifle. But whether this had been the case or not, the young hunter would have troubled him no further, for the youth had no desire for revenge—his heart had no home for such a feeling

—he only risked his own life for the safety of one who needed protection against remorseless barbarians, and he felt too happy in his laudable success to cherish other feelings than those of joy.

Just as Orlando Chester had finished reloading his rifle, the bows of the boat touched upon the shore, and as he hastened down to meet it, the girl sprang out upon the sand, and fell upon her knees at the hunter's feet.

"O, kind sir, whoever you be," she uttered, as she clasped her hands in gratitude, "how shall I repay you for this? Life, hope, happiness—all, all, you have saved!"

A moment the young man gazed in a sort of rapt wonder upon the fair features that were turned towards him; then taking her by the hand he raised her to her feet, saying as he did so:

"Lady, you can easily repay me for what I have done. I have but performed a duty I owed to the world; go you and do the same. When you can assist a fellow-mortal, do it, and I shall be amply repaid."

The fair girl gazed up into the face of him who still held her hand, and a trembling blush gradually suffused her features, mounting higher, and still higher, till it melted away in the liquid light of her soft blue eyes. She had expected to have seen the rough hunter, and to have heard the harsh tones of a voice that only answered to the howl of the wild beast and the yell of the red savage; but, instead, she saw a countenance of rare beauty and youth, varying with an hundred lights and shades of noble generosity and kindness, and the voice struck upon her ear in tones of a rich, melting cadence, tinged with that plaintive cast which ever excites sympathy in the bosom of the hearer. A light smile flitted across the face of the young hunter as he noticed the maiden's passing emotions, and letting go the soft hand which he seemed to have forgotten he held, he continued:

"I know your thoughts, lady. You wonder that a poor hunter should have asked no boon in return for his services, but should rather have given only a piece of seeming advice."

"No, no, sir," quickly returned the girl, "I was not thinking of that. To hear your words, and see your countenance, would remove all cause of wonder that you were noble and kind. And as for your advice, as you please to term it, I take it most kindly, though the being does not live who can say that assistance within her power

was ever asked of Ada Wimple, and she refused it."

"Ada Wimple!" uttered the hunter.

"That is my name, sir."

"Then you are the daughter of Sir Oliver, whose plantation is below here."

"I am, sir."

A moment young Chester seemed puzzled by the manner of the being he had rescued—for he had not the assurance to think that anything in his own form or features had so moved her; and yet her words were not without a turn to that effect, nor could he fail to see that in her eyes there shone a light which must have emanated from some other cause than that of mere wonder. Her father, Sir Oliver Wimple, he had often seen, and he knew him to be one of the most wealthy and influential men in the colony. It may be that the hunter experienced a momentary regret that the maiden was not poor like himself; but, be that as it may, he soon banished all thoughts to that effect, and resuming his wonted composure, he said:

"You were venturesome to go so far up the river, lady."

"But I thought not that the Indians were so near us, sir."

"O, yes, the red-skin ventures even below here; and if I mistake not, they have lately paid your father's plantation a visit."

"Yes sir, they have; and he had some of them, whom he caught, severely whipped, and I think those who chased my boat were the ones."

"No doubt of it, lady. The red man has keen eyes, and if he has once seen your father's boat he will never forget it. If they had cause of enmity against Sir Oliver, they would venture far to be revenged; and had they overtaken you, you would doubtless have been a corpse ere this. Be more careful in future."

A cold shudder ran through Ada Wimple's frame, as the thought of that dreadful fate from which the hunter had rescued her presented itself to her mind, and while a tear stole down her cheek, she said:

"I realize the debt of gratitude I am under, sir, and if I am never able to repay you by some work of mine, I pray that God may ever bless you for your noble kindness."

"God already blesses me," returned the young hunter, "for my heart is glad. But come, you should be on your way homeward, for the sun has already sunk far from its noon-tide height, and your parents may be anxious."

"And will you not accompany me, kind sir, and receive the thanks of my father?" asked the fair girl, casting a look of earnest, grateful pleading, strangely blended with a shade of tenderness, upon her companion.

The hunter hesitated a moment, and he bent his eyes to the ground. Ada caught that look, with the now drooping eyes, and she was quickly moved by the strange, soft melancholy which, while those eyes had been beaming full upon her, she had not clearly seen. A thrill of some emotion which she could not or tried not to analyze, trembled in her bosom, and while yet she gazed upon those features the young hunter raised his beaming orbs once more upon her.

"Lady," he said, "I cannot go. There is no danger for you on the river below here, and your two remaining negroes can easily row you down. There is one not far from here whom I must protect and comfort; but yet I trust this will not be our last meeting. Something tells me we shall meet again."

"If we both live we shall," uttered Ada, with more earnestness than she was aware of. "But before I go, I would know the name of him who has saved me."

"Orlando Chester is the name I bear; but few know it, however."

"There is one who knows it now, and who will ever hold it in grateful remembrance," said the fair girl, and as she spoke, she extended her hand. Orlando took it, and he raised it to his lips, and on the next moment he assisted Ada into her boat.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE MANIAC MOTHER.

UNTIL the departing boat was lost to his sight did the young hunter stand upon the river's bank and gaze upon the form of its fair occupant. His eyes were moistened with a new and strange emotion as the frail bark disappeared, and after gazing a moment upon the vacant spot where last he had seen it, he threw his trusty rifle across his shoulder, and whistling to his dogs, he turned away and struck into a narrow path that led off through the deep forest. His steps were slow, and even the faithful hounds seemed to wonder that their master watched not the game coverts about him. At length, however, a sharp growl from one of his dogs brought Chester to his senses, and instinctively he brought his rifle to its guard and followed quickly after the keen-scented hounds. He had not far to go, for in less than a minute a noble deer sprang up before him, and darted off towards the river; but the animal had not run a rod ere the bullet from the hunter's rifle brought him down, and in a moment more the hunting-knife finished the work. With a despatch that plainly evinced his use to the work, young Chester removed the skin, and rolling up in it such parts of the flesh as he could carry, he started once more onward. The scene just enacted had somewhat cast off the gloomy despondency that had rested upon the hunter's

mind a short time before, and with quickened steps and a more watchful eye, he pursued his course.

The hunter's way lay towards the Chickahominy branch, and at the end of nearly a mile and a half he came to a small clearing, in the centre of which stood a well built log-cabin. A single oaken door, formed of heavy plank securely pinned together, with a small square window on each side, ornamented the front of the humble dwelling, while the narrow walk which led to the entrance was flanked on either side by several flower beds, which beds betrayed a taste and refinement that could belong to no ordinary being—for of all things, by which to study the character of a human being, there are few that speak in more palpable terms than do the care and judgment, and the peculiar fancies betrayed in the cultivation and arrangement of a flower garden. In the garden alluded to there was a peculiar arrangement of flowers and shrubs—a sort of wild, fantastical grouping, and a strange harmony yet pervaded the whole. It was a sweet spot for one so lonely; for the warbling songsters of heaven loved to haunt the fragrant groves, and from early morn till darkening twilight their glad notes made melodious the air. Close by the cabin ran a murmuring brook, upon the mossy banks of which,

unaided and uncultivated, grew a thousand wild flowers, and the waters of which lent a soothing, cooling influence to the surrounding atmosphere.

The interior of this cabin presented the same peculiar tastes that were apparent without. The walls were neatly plastered with a cement made from the red clay that formed the lower stratum of some of the uplands; and all about, in strange, fantastic wreaths, were hung evergreens and wild flowers. The floor was white and clean, and every arrangement spoke of the strange genius that presided over the place.

The young hunter went to a small shed that extended from the back of the house, and having deposited his load, and cut off several slices of the venison for the dogs, he turned towards the door.

"I have returned, my mother, and brought with me some venison," said Orlando, as he entered the dwelling.

"So you are a good boy, Orlando; but I shall have no need of meat to-day. See! I have been busy since you were gone. I have plucked fresh flowers, and to-day I shall live upon their fragrance. Alas! that flowers should die! That the only faithful things that God has made should be so frail! See! even as I have torn them from their mother's bosom and impaled them upon my wall, they look down and smile upon me; and how sweetly, too, they breathe upon their destroyer."

"And am not I faithful, my mother?" asked the youth, in a tender, musical tone.

"You? you? Yes, my son, you are faithful; and though you are your father's child, and though that father was my husband, yet I love you. But he! Ah! why did he desert me? I loved him, Orlando, with all the madness of my nature, and yet he left me! When he went away he told me that I should see him again; but years have rolled by since then, and still he comes not. O, how cruel for him to desert me thus! But you will not leave me, my dear boy."

"Neyer," uttered the youth; and as he spoke, he threw his arms about his mother's neck, and kissed her.

The poor woman drew her son to her bosom, and after returning his kiss, she said:

"There, Orlando, go you now and bid Elpsey prepare you some food, for you cannot live upon these flowers, as I can."

As the youth turned away, his mother watched him with emotions of the tenderest gratitude, and when he had disappeared from her sight she wiped a tear from her eye.

Morgiana Chester was what the reader must have already supposed—a maniac! Yet the very mania that had shut the portals of her human understanding seemed almost to have opened a ray of heavenly light to her soul—for never did she rave, never did the spark of passion kindle a flame in her bosom—but with a meek despondency, a high-toned melancholy, did she travel o'er life's weary way. She could not yet have seen forty years, and though there was no bloom upon her cheek, yet there was a transcendent beauty in her features—a tone of soul and of heart that seemed to have formed them for its lovely mirror. Her eyes were large and dark, and into their brilliant depths one might have gazed for hours and not guess that reason had flown from the mind that looked through them. But when once she spoke, then you could detect a super-brilliant spark, sometimes like a star, and sometimes resolving itself into a sort of phosphorescent light, that was not noticed before; or, which, if it had been noticed, might have been taken for some stray sunbeam that dwelt upon their surface. Her form was light and airy, having lost none of its youthful beauty; and as her long raven hair, which curled and played in graceful ringlets, floated far down over her shoulders, confined only about the brow by a coronet of flowers interwoven into a wreath of wild vine, she looked more like a being of some other sphere than an inhabitant of earth.

Orlando could remember nothing back of his mother's strange mania; and the first thing plainly fixed in his memory was of having lived somewhere in Massachusetts colony, and of having come from there to Virginia in a vessel, accompanied by his mother and a negro woman named Elpsey. Yet he knew that his mother was grown to womanhood before she left England, though he could not ascertain from her whether he was born there or in Massachusetts. From old Elpsey he could only learn that his mother had once found her in the streets of Boston in a suffering condition, and had taken her to her own dwelling, where she was carefully nursed. After she recovered she offered her services to Mrs. Chester, and they were accepted. The old negress said that her lady had much money when she first lived with her; but as it had been long since gone, Orlando supposed that the amount could not have been very considerable, though it might have appeared so to the eyes of Elpsey. In fact, the only thing that Orlando could gain with definiteness

from his mother was, that his father had deserted her; and he reasonably supposed that that circumstance caused her mental derangement; and yet Morgiana never breathed a word against her husband in anger—she only mourned his faithlessness in plaintive notes of soul sent anguish, and sometimes wept over her loneliness.

Most of those who had met the young hunter wondered exceedingly at the strange melancholy that characterized his more quiet moments, and also at the peculiarly sweet and mild disposition that marked his every movement of social or business intercourse; for the whole wide colony did not contain a man whose rifle was more sure of its mark, whose heart was stronger, or who was more fearless and bold under difficulties and dangers. But such people knew not the strange being who had presided over his childhood, his youth, and his early manhood. When they wondered at the musical notes that fell from his tongue, and the smoothly gliding language with which his thoughts were clothed, they knew not the sweet, plaintive voice that had tuned his ear and made musical his heart.

Few were there who knew poor Morgiana Chester, for she seldom ventured beyond the confines of her own sweet home in the wilderness; and when, perchance, a wandering hunter craved food or drink at her house, old Elpsey acted the hostess, and bestowed that hospitality which, at the door of the maniac mother's cot, was never refused to a human being.

The old negress was not long in preparing a meal for Orlando; and as he sat down to the repast he urged his mother to partake with him, but she persisted in the assertion that she needed no food, and so the youth ate alone. He had no fears, however, for he knew that she would not allow herself to suffer from hunger, for often she ate but one meal a day, save a few berries which she would pick and eat while wandering by the brook.

The young man had finished his repast, and already had the sun sunk behind the tree-tops as he arose from the table. As he turned towards his mother he was somewhat surprised to find her, in a seeming meditation. The vacant look that usually rested upon her features when she assumed a musing attitude was not there, but the same strange, sparkling light that shone upon her more active movements was still in her eyes, though its beams were more steady and intense.

"Yes, yes, I did put it in there," she murmur-

ed, as she rose from her seat a moment after her son had commenced watching her. "Yes, 'twas yesterday I put it there, for I remember it well. How could I have forgotten it?"

As she spoke she went to a large oaken chest that stood in one corner and commenced taking out the contents and placing them upon the floor. Orlando gazed a moment upon his mother's movements, and then a bright tear-drop stole down his cheek. A thousand times had he seen the poor woman do this, and he knew that she suffered extremely whenever the strange delusion came over her. Slowly and carefully Morgiana Chester took article after article from the chest; each one she would unfold and examine, then lay it aside for the next. And so she went on till every article in the chest had been examined, after which she diligently searched every nook and corner of the inside. The chest was perfectly plain, with not even a till to break the sameness of its interior, and after a moment's examination she turned to her son and asked:

"Orlando, have you been here since yesterday?"

"No, mother, I have not."

"Some one has been here and stolen my money. O, how could they be so cruel! I put it in here yesterday, I am sure."

"Was it money that you put there, mother?"

"Yes, 'twas money. 'Twas money to me, 'twas money to you; for 'twas my life that I put there. 'Twas a simple thing; yet I would not wish to lose it, and so I put it in here and locked it up, and the key I have worn about my neck. O, cruel, cruel! Why, why, should they have stolen that?"

"Perhaps you may find it yet, my dear mother," urged the youth, in as hopeful a tone as he could command. "Surely no one could have taken it, and besides, perhaps you have mislaid it."

"No, no," returned his mother, while the big tears began to gather in her eyes, "I shall never, never find it again. Yesterday I placed it there, and now it is gone! Was it not wicked, Orlando, for them to steal my only treasure? My husband gave it to me the night he went away."

The poor woman covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud. Slowly the tears began to trickle through her thin, white fingers, and as they fell upon her heaving bosom the young man arose from his seat and stood by her side. Gently he pressed his lips upon her pale,



brow, and urged her to be comforted. Then, as he stood once more erect, he gazed into the now empty chest and wondered what was the nature of the secret that hung around it. Ever since he could remember he had seen his mother go through with the same operation she had now performed, and always with the same result. Sometimes a whole month would pass away

without her bestowing a thought upon it, and often she would make the search every week; and when she did so she invariably labored under the impression that it was only a short time previous that she had placed her treasure there. The nature of that treasure, and the secret of its concealment, he believed, were locked up in the mind of the maniac.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE MYSTERIOUS FRIEND.

A WEEK had passed away since the events recorded in the last chapter, and during that time Orlando Chester had made several expeditions in quest of game, and he had got a goodly number of skins and furs laid by for sale. For years past, while alone in his forest wanderings, there had been but one sweet image pictured upon his heart—that of his mother; but now another had stolen in upon its memory, as he had dwelt upon the scene on the river. The lovely features, the soft blue eyes, and the grateful smile of the fair Ada haunted him in his solitude, and again and again did he hear her sweet voice ringing its thanksgiving through his soul. Yet that image crowded not upon the place occupied by the young hunter's love for his mother—it seemed rather to have glided into a nook in his heart which had been unoccupied—it seemed to fill a vacancy in his soul, and he felt happier as he dwelt upon it.

"We shall meet again!" answered the youth, as he inhaled the fragrant morning. "Yes, sweet girl, we shall meet again, and as rises yonder morning sun o'er the waving tree-tops, gilding its way in a flood of golden light, so thine image rises in my mind and throws its softening beams o'er my soul. But wherefore should I see thee again—wherefore cherish so dearly thine image upon the tablets of my heart? We shall meet again! for even thou, sweet Ada, saidst it. Then I'll ask not wherefore, only to see thee once more."

Suddenly, while yet the young hunter murmured to himself, the sound of an approaching

footstep fell upon his ear, and on raising his eyes he beheld a strange looking figure approaching him from the woods that lay towards the river. It was a white man, but yet with a face so browned that the features alone betrayed their owner's English descent. In height the stranger was considerably over six feet, and his frame was as massive in its proportions as it was tall; but yet there was nothing in his appearance calculated to excite fear, for his countenance was open and bold, though it must be confessed that there was a something in the twinkle of his small gray eyes, and in the peculiar compression of his thin lips, which evinced a trait of character that only experience could solve. The gigantic form of the stranger was clothed in a rough hunter's garb, and the skins of which it was formed plainly told that he must have procured them far north of Virginia. A long, heavy rifle, ponderous but comely in its proportions, a hunting-knife, shot-pouch and horn, completed the new comer's outward attire, and, take him all in all, he was one whom few would dare to excite to anger.

"Good morning, stranger," said Orlando, as the man came up, at the same time advancing to offer his hand.

The new comer started at the tones of the young man's voice, and ere he spoke, he gazed for a moment eagerly into young Chester's face. A shade of some strong emotion passed quickly over his bronzed features; but it was gone on the instant, and taking the proffered hand, he said, in a voice of much power, but yet gentle:

"A pleasant morning to you, fair sir. I faith, but you've a paradise of a spot here in the wilderness."

"It's a pleasant spot, sir stranger," returned Orlando, seeming grateful for the encomium thus passed upon his home.

"'Tis such an one as I could almost fancy," the stranger said, as he cast his eyes around upon the blooming flowers; "but I fear me these pretty things would soon run to ruin under my care. 'Tis a woman's hand, though, that tends them now. Your wife, I suppose."

"No, sir," replied Orlando, while a shade sadness swept across his fine features, "'tis the hand of my mother."

The stranger cast a searching look into the eyes of the youth, and once more he swept his glance around over the garden. Then he said:

"She's a strange being; but," he continued, suddenly changing his tone and manner, "are you not fearful of danger in so remote a place?"

"And wherefore?"

"The Indians sometimes venture here, do they not?"

"Yes; but I harm them not, and they harm not me."

"How was it on the river, a week ago?"

"Ha! how learned you of that?"

"How could such a deed remain unknown?"

"But why think you it was me?"

The stranger gazed into the young man's face for a moment, and while a peculiar meaning played over his countenance, he answered:

"Could you have heard Ada Wimple describe the fair youth who heard her—even to the tones of his voice, the sparkle of his eyes, the color of his hair, and the kind feelings of his soul, you would not ask me such a question."

The rich blood mounted to the brow of the young hunter, and his eyes fell to a downcast turn, for the stranger's words had sent a strange thrill to his soul; but soon recovering his composure, he said:

"In that case I did my duty, and I think the Indians will not trouble me; but even if they should, I fear them not."

"I fear, young sir, that those light arms of yours would be insufficient, in case of an attack from the red-skin."

"They never failed me yet," said Orlando, his eyes brightening, and his bosom swelling with a proud emotion. "Though I like not deeds of strife, yet I fear not danger."

"To deal with such an enemy, you should be

able to wield a weapon like that," said the stranger, as he put forth the muzzle of his ponderous weapon, the butt of which rested upon the ground.

At that moment Orlando's eye caught the outlines of a hawk that was sailing high in the air above the tree-tops beyond the cot. He turned towards his strange visitor, and took the massive rifle in his hand. Its owner smiled as he resigned it to the youth, and stepping back a pace, he remarked:

"She'll prove a little too heavy for that hand of yours, and 'twill be a steady hand and quick eye that takes a wing at that distance."

The young hunter seemed not to notice the words of his companion, but raising the rifle to his side he drew back the hammer, and then placed the butt against his shoulder. The single tick of a watch could hardly have passed between the resting of the rifle and the pulling of the trigger. The sharp, clear crack rang through the forest, and on the next instant the hawk uttered a shrill scream—trembled a moment upon its outspread pinions—and then, with a last effort to maintain its position, it shot obliquely through the air, and fell not a rod from where the two men stood. Orlando stepped to where the bird had fallen, and picking it up, he returned and handed it to the stranger, remarking as he did so:

"That's a good weapon."

As the powerful hunter took the rifle back into his own hand, he looked with a strange emotion upon the youth, and then flinging the hawk upon the ground, he stretched forth his broad palm and said:

"Orlando Chester, take that hand. There—it shall ever be yours in time of need, and upon Mark Chiron you may look as a friend. If the enemy are subtle, the wit and strength of Chiron can overcome them."

Now, however meaningless some portions of Chiron's conversation may have seemed to his young companion, yet a close observer would have seen that beneath all his careless questioning there was an under-current of some deep purpose. With an eagle eye he watched every change of Orlando's countenance, as though he would have committed to memory every line thereof, but as he stretched forth his hand all his earnestness vanished, and his countenance assumed a sort of careless, *nonchalant* expression, which seemed habitual to it. A moment the young man retained his grasp of the hand that

was thus held out to him, and while yet he gazed with singular wonder into the face of his companion, he said:

"Speak you of enemies to me?"

"Indeed I do."

"But I fear not that the red man will attack me."

"And is there no danger in the world, no enemies but the red skins? Do not *white* men sometimes prey upon each other?"

"Yet there are none to prey upon me."

"Be not too sure of that, young sir. I came not here without an object, nor do I offer my services at random. I ask you not to accept of them, for they shall be yours at my own will."

There was an air of truth in the words and in the manner of Chiron, which the young hunter could not doubt, and after a moment's reflection he said:

"If it be as you say—that there is really danger in my path—you can be my friend now by explaining to me its nature, and then I can save you further trouble by avoiding it myself."

"The nature of that danger I could not explain, and to be plain with you, I tell you I would not if I could. Nay—do not start. I speak my thoughts plainly, and I fear not to tell the truth. I have come here to-day to recognize you, and when first I saw this garden, that lays in such fantastical forms and devices about us, I knew well from whose brain sprang the wild conception, and I knew, too, whose delicate hand must have done the work—there is but one, and that—"

The giant hunter drew his hand across his eyes as he thus abruptly broke off, and then raising his face towards heaven, he uttered:

"Alas! poor Morgiana Chester, thy fate is a hard one; but if there is a just God in heaven, thy wrongs shall be atoned for, and those that wrong thee shall be brought to justice. By yon bright sun, that lights thy wildwood home, I swear it!"

"How! My mother! Wrong her!" ejaculated Orlando, seizing the strange man by the arm. "If you know ought of her wrongs, speak—tell me of them—tell me who has wronged her, and though the very crown of England rested upon his head, she should be revenged! My hand should seek him out. Speak, sir—tell me what you know of this."

"Nothing of which I can speak," calmly returned Chiron, gazing with an affectionate look into the face of his companion. "Blame me

not, blame me not, nor yet question me further. What I have said is true, and time will reveal it. But now I must see your mother. I must look once more upon her sweet face."

For a full minute Orlando regarded the man before him in a sort of wondering astonishment. Every vestige of doubt had fled from his thoughts, and though he wondered, yet he hesitated not to trust. Then there was something in the manner of Chiron, a kind of authoritative determination, that made him hesitate to ask further questions, and at length he said:

"My mother is in the cot, and if you will follow me you can see her."

"Stay a moment," uttered Chiron, as Orlando turned to lead the way. "Do you think one who knew me years ago, would know me now?"

"I should think not," returned the young man, as he ran his eyes for the hundredth time over the face of his companion.

"Then lead the way," said Chiron, "and mind you, Orlando, I have called but for a drink of water and a slice of venison."

The young man signified his understanding of his companion's meaning, and without farther remark he led the way to the house. In the entry Chiron deposited his rifle, and then followed his conductor into the presence of Mrs. Chester. For a moment the powerful man gazed upon the fair, pale features of Morgiana Chester, but when her large dark eye met his own, he turned away to hide a tear that stole to his eye. The unwonted emotion soon passed away, and turning his gaze once more upon the poor woman, he took the seat which Orlando proffered him, soon after which the youth brought to him a dish of water.

While Chiron was drinking, Mrs. Chester seemed, for the first time, to notice that there was a stranger in the house, and after watching him for nearly a minute, a sudden light overspread her beautiful features, and rising from her seat she approached the spot where he sat, and laid her hand carelessly upon his broad brow. Chiron trembled with his exertion to keep back the emotions that would spring to his face, and at length he was able to meet the plaintive, inquiring gaze of the eyes that were bent upon him.

Orlando watched with an exciting interest every movement of his mother, and his heart bounded with a wild thrill as the thought stole over his mind that she recognized the strange man, and that his secret would be known to

him; at least, that he should know who he was.

"Are you not a stranger, sir?" asked Mrs. Chester, in a tone of considerable earnestness.

"I am, madam," returned Chiron, again starting, as the sweet, musical tones of that voice fell in rich cadence upon his ear.

"Then perhaps you, kind sir, can tell me of my husband. He has deserted me, sir, and I know not where to look for him."

"What was his name, good woman?"

"Name!" uttered Morgiana, while her large eyes filled with tears. "Alas!" he had no name! When he deserted me and lost his honor, he lost his name. Oh he was cruel thus to leave me. But he will come back, for he told me that he would. You have not seen him, then?"

This last expression was so melancholy, so full of real, heart-felt sorrow, that the stout man could no longer contain his feelings, and as the tears burst forth from his eyes, he murmured:

"O God! what a fall is here!"

"And do you, too, weep? And is it because you know not where my husband is, and thus you weep for pity? See, sir, those flowers are weeping. This morning I went forth among the shrubs and vines, and they were all bowed down with pearly tears; but they looked not so kind as you do, nor do they weep long, for when the sun shines upon them they feel happy in the laughing beams, and soon wipe their tears away. Surely you must have seen my husband. Tell me, have you not?"

"No, madam, I have not. But rest you in peace, for you may yet see him again."

Mrs. Chester went back to her window and sat down. Whether the thoughts of her husband had passed from her mind, or whether the assurance of the strange hunter had softened her grief, it is impossible to tell, but at all events her tears were wiped away, and the usual placid melancholy overspread her features with its softening influence.

As soon as Chiron saw that Morgiana was quieted from her burst of sorrow, he arose from his seat, and beckoning to Orlando, he took his rifle and left the cot.

"Sir," said the old hunter, while he swept his locks, which were just beginning to be tinged with the frost of years, back from his brow, as the two stood once more in the garden, "this is the first time for many, many years, that tears have wet these rough cheeks of mine; but who,

who could see that sad sight and not weep! Boy, you know not what a mind has there been wrecked. The same pure, sweet, mild disposition still reigns in that bosom, but that noble mind—that gem of the pure soul, has gone, and God alone can take away the cloud that hides its lustre. I must now away, but he and we shall meet again, and often. Pursue your wonted course, and when danger threatens I will be near to protect you."

"One moment, sir," urged the young man, as Chiron was in the act of turning away. "Which way from here do you take?"

"To Jamestown."

"And how?"

"The same way I came—by land."

"I, too, am going to Jamestown to carry a load of skins and furs, and if you will take a seat in my canoe, we will bear each other company."

Chiron assented readily to the proposal, and while Orlando went to make his arrangements, the old hunter reloaded his rifle, and then busied himself in looking about the place. It took the young man but a few minutes to get ready for his mission, and when he rejoined his companion, with his furs upon his back, the latter remarked, as he noticed the pistols in the belt of Orlando:

"You go well armed."

"I always do," returned the youth, as he started off. "My rifle carries but one ball, sometimes I want more."

Orlando led the way in a south-easterly direction towards the river, and as both the hunters were naturally on the watch for what might be stirring about them, there was but little said on the way, and that of a commonplace character. At length they came to a small, vine-arched cove, which let up some rods from the river, and here the young man found his canoe, and ere long they were both upon the broad river, with the tide in their favor, sailing rapidly down towards the settlement.

For nearly fifteen minutes after the canoe was upon the river, not a word was spoken. Chiron was busy with his own thoughts, and Orlando knew not how to address his companion upon the subject nearest his heart. There were an hundred questions he would like to have asked, but he disliked to meet a refusal for an answer, and so he asked them not.

"Orlando," at length asked Chiron, just as the youth had shot his canoe past a swift eddy that made round an abrupt point, "will you tell me

what are the peculiar points of your mother's mania?"

"You saw her this morning, sir. She is seldom different—never raving."

"I mean not that," returned Chiron. "A soul like hers could never rave with utter madness. I meant to ask what are the particular ideas that haunt her most?"

"There are only two ideas that seem to be firmly fixed in her shattered mind. One of them you have seen in its effects. The same question she so earnestly asked you, she puts to all strangers who may call, though never before have I known her to approach a visitor as she did you. And she also often talks to me about her husband's having cruelly deserted her. Then there is one other subject which seems indelibly fixed in her memory. She has a strong old oaken chest, and ever since I can remember she has, as often as once a month, and frequently much oftener, searched it all through in quest of some treasure which she says she deposited therein. Sometimes she says 'twas money, and at others she asserts that it was merely papers."

"And this chest—is it safe?" uttered Chiron, with sudden energy.

"Yes, the chest is safe, but the treasure, whatever it may be, my mother says has been stolen from her," Orlando answered, regarding with no small degree of wonder the manner of his companion.

"And how has she searched it? What nooks, what corners, what secret places has she found?"

"None at all. The chest is perfectly plain, without a crevice or crack to indicate any secret hiding-place."

"'Tis fortunate for poor Morgiana that she has lost her own secret," murmured Chiron, half to himself, "for had she remembered it, she might have found her treasure but to have irredeemably lost it."

"Chiron," said the young hunter, as he raised his paddle from the water, and in a voice so soft and low that its earnestness was like a prayer, "what of that treasure? Speak, I adjure you."

"If I give you one plain, straightforward answer, will you promise to ask no more?"

"I promise."

"Then the paper—for a paper I think it is—is undoubtedly safe, and for the present it is *safe only in its concealment*!"

Again Orlando Chester dipped his paddle into the water, and mechanically he urged his canoe forward. He gazed upon the strange man before him, but he dared not break his promise, and he asked no more, though he would have given his all for a solution of the mystery. But yet, all mysterious as Chiron was, the young hunter resolved that he would trust him, for he believed that in some way he held the key to his own and his mother's future fate!

## CHAPTER IV.

### A CONFESSION OF LOVE.

A few miles above Jamestown, stretching back from the northern bank of the river, lay the rich tobacco-plantation of Sir Oliver Wimple. The sun had turned upon its afternoon course, and though its rays beat down with a strong power, yet the fresh breeze which came sweeping up from the broad Chesapeake cast an invigorating influence through the atmosphere. Sir Oliver's dwelling stood only a few rods back from the river, with a green lawn in front, while back of it, and stretching slightly around to the western side, lay an extensive garden, divided into box-bound paths and flower-beds, with here and there a vine-clad arbor, or a trellised walk.

Within one of the paths, at the end of which was a sort of green-house, stood Ada Wimple. She had been plucking some weeds from a small bed of English clematis, and had just risen to her feet, when the sound of approaching steps attracted her attention, and on the next instant she was in the presence of Orlando Chester. A slight, tremulous blush passed over her fair features as she met his dark eye, but it was quickly gone, and with a frank, kind smile, she extended to him her hand.

"You will pardon me for this intrusion, lady," said the young hunter, still holding the hand that had been extended to him, "but I was passing homeward in my canoe, and I could not resist the desire to see you."

"And surely you would not have passed without stopping," said Ada, with artless grace, while, with an interest that sought not concealment, she gazed into the face of him who had saved her.

"No, I would not have passed now without stopping," replied Orlando, "for I desired to know of your safety, and I feel happier now that I know you suffer not from the effects of your adventure on the river."

"And that I do not suffer, or that I even live to know it, I owe to you," returned Ada, while a bright beam of gratitude shone from her blue eyes. "Of course, sir, you will always call when you pass."

"Always?" iterated the young man, in a tone of deep meaning. "No, I may not stop again."

"Not stop again!" repeated Ada, in a tone of surprise, while a sudden look of disappointment rested upon her features. "You will surely come and see my father and my mother. They are both away to-day, at Mr. Berkeley's."

"And wherefore should I see them?"

"That they may thank you for saving their only child."

"Do they not thank me already?"

"Thank thee? Ah, yes—and bless thee, too."

"Then I accept their blessings, and feel a joy, in knowing that I have merited them. But I



did not that deed for thanks, nor for any other blessing or reward than that given by my own approving conscience. When your parents return, tell them that he who saved your life feels happy that he possesses their thanks; and for you, fair girl, I can only say, may God make your life as happy as the soul that sustains it is pure and virtuous."

Orlando did not turn away as he spoke, but with a kind, yet melancholy look, he extended his hand to the fair being who stood before him. Ada took it, and, with trembling accents, she said:

"Why, why do you refuse to come again? When first we met, and when first we parted, I had thought that a bond of friendship would ever unite us. Few, few there are who have such claims upon friendship as have you; and why cast it off now?"

The young hunter looked steadily into the earnest features of his companion. A strange light shot forth from his dark eye, and a powerful emotion seemed struggling in his bosom; but at length it passed away, and letting go the soft hand he held, he said:

"Fair girl, I would not tear from out this heart of mine one chord of pure friendship for all the wealth of the colonies. To feel that yourself and your parents are my friends is a source of pleasure that I would not exchange for all the high-sounding titles in the land."

"Then, why not call upon us? Why not give to us that sure pledge of friendship—the kind smile and welcome of your generous soul?"

"Ada Wimple," said the young man, in a tone so soft and plaintive, and yet so thrillingly earnest, that she felt spell-bound by its power, "you say I have saved your life, and you are grateful. I did save it and I am happy. You say that you had thought the bond of friendship would ever unite us; and so it ever may. But I cannot deceive my own soul. I cannot take to myself a pleasure that might ere long turn to a serpent and sting me. My own heart tells me that the friendship it already feels would soon kindle to a brighter flame. I will speak plainly now, and then you will understand me—nor will you wonder at, or blame me, for my course. The human heart knows not the social barriers which the world has set up between man and man, but it loves all that is beautiful, all that is good; and so my heart has turned toward thee until thine image is reflected there as a light to my soul. Now I am safe; and though it costs me

a pang to pluck away some of the deeper roots which that friendship has taken, yet I must do it, else it might grow to a warmer love, and bloom but to wither away and die. The flower of love cannot long live upon the heart alone that would cherish it; the soft breath of its kindred soul is needful to keep it in bloom—for if it be solitary and unrequited, its fair blossom will wither; and though the heart may never throw it off, yet 't will be but a lifeless stalk that shall cumber there till that heart ceases to beat. You now understand me. Whenever you call my image back to your mind, think of me as one who had too much honor to deceive you, and too much self-love to break his own heart. Farewell, and may God bless and protect you, and may the life He gives you on earth be one of a joyful truth and virtue."

As the young man spoke he turned away to hide the tear that stole to his eye, and in a moment more he started to walk away. His steps were slow, for the feelings that dwelt in his bosom were heavy and sad, and he felt as though he were leaving his very heart behind him. Half a dozen steps had he taken, when a low sob broke upon his ear; and while yet it went thrilling through his soul, his own name, pronounced in an earnest, imploring tone, broke the spell that bound him. Quickly, as if by some sudden instinct, he turned, and beheld Ada, with her arms out-stretched, and gazing with a tearful, imploring look upon him.

"Do not leave me thus," she murmured, as she met the inquiring glance of Orlando; and as she spoke she buried her face in her hands and wept.

With a heart bounding from its despondency like the lightning's leap, the young hunter sprang to the side of the fair girl, and taking her hand from her tear-wet face, and retaining it within his own, he uttered:

"Ada, Ada, why do you call me back? Speak to me, Ada, and—"

He did not finish the sentence, for at that instant the maiden raised her eyes, and as he gazed into their liquid depths, he almost fancied he saw his own image reflected there. A moment only he hesitated, and then he continued:

"What would you say to me? Fear not to speak."

"I would not have you leave me thus," she said, as she placed her remaining free hand upon Orlando's shoulder.

"I left you in all kindness, Ada."

"Ah, Orlando, and so you did; but that very kindness might break my heart."

"I understand you not," pronounced the youth, while the tremor that shook his frame plainly evinced that her words had struck deeply to his heart.

Ada gazed a moment into his face, and then, while a glow of beaming truth overspread her fair features, she said:

"You spoke plainly, and so will I. Ere you broke forever the ties that bound your heart, could you not have asked Ada how burned her feelings toward you?"

"And if I had?"

"She would have told you the truth."

"And that truth would have been death to the poor hunter's love."

"And for that thou thinkest I would have called thee back. O, while you think your own heart is burning with its flame of devotion, you would think mine to be as the crystalline flint. No; hadst thou asked me, I should have told thee that the gratitude which the poor maiden first felt towards her preserver had already mounted to a stronger feeling, and that it might burn with as pure a flame of holy love as ever warmed upon the altar of a devoted heart. Now you can leave me, and return to your home in the forest. Ada Wimple has told you the truth."

"Noble, generous girl, what adequate thanks can my poor heart pour out for this!" ejaculated Orlando, as he pressed the hand he held warmly to his lips, and then gazed tenderly into her face.

"If I possess the love of your own pure heart, what more could I ask," answered Ada, in return.

"You do, you do possess it. For the week that has passed since we so strangely met upon the river's bank, this heart of mine has been flitting and struggling within the silken web that would have folded it to itself, and a moment ago I thought to break the spell; but now, dear Ada, that heart bounds joyfully from my bosom and takes your own to make it whole. Happy happy day."

"And none more happy than I," responded Ada, as she pillowed her head upon the young hunter's bosom.

"There, there, Ada, I cannot tarry longer

now, for my poor mother will moan my absence. The sun is already creeping towards its mountain home, and I must away; but may I not hope that some time—ere long—you will go with me and spend a day at my forest home? O, the flowers would bloom with a new grace, and pour out a sweeter fragrance for your presence. We have flowers there, Ada, and the birds sing more sweetly than they do here. The brooks murmur their sweet music around our cot, and the giant trees wave their branches in whispering melody above us. Some time you will go with me and see it."

Ada drank in the soft, melodious tones that fell from her companion's lips, and as she raised her eyes once more to his, they were beaming with a love that could not but come from the very depths of her soul.

"I will come," she said, "but you will show me the way; and you shall come and see my parents."

"Your parents!" iterated the young man, while a shade passed over his handsome features.

"I know your thoughts," quickly exclaimed Ada, as she noticed her companion's manner; "but you need not fear for them. They love their child too well to see her miserable, and, more than all that, though my father be a baronet, they have very little sympathy with the aristocratic notions of the times, and besides, how could they reject as their daughter's lover him to whom they owe her very life? No, no; you have nothing to fear from my parents."

"Then, sweet one, I shall rest upon your assurance; and until we meet again, may God bless you."

Orlando Chester stopped to take one more look at those fair features that beamed in love upon him, and then turning away he passed quickly from the spot. At the river's bank he turned, and Ada was still where he left her, gazing after him; and waving his hand in token of one more adieu, he stepped down into his canoe and pushed off from the shore. His heart was light and happy, and the pensive melancholy of his features was relieved by a glad smile as the sunbeam that seemed struggling to take the whole of that face for its home.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE FRUITLESS SEARCH.

By the time the young hunter reached the cove where he usually secured his canoe the sun had just sunk behind the distant tree-tops that skirted the bend of the river, and he made all possible haste to be on his way home. His faithful hounds were with him, and after dragging the canoe up into the bushes, he whistled them away and shouldering his rifle he started on. The path through which he took his route homeward was somewhat circuitous, owing to several bog-holes that intercepted the straight line, and thus for most of the way he could see only a short distance ahead.

He had traversed nearly a quarter of a mile on his way, when he was startled by the quick, sharp cry of one of his hounds. It was a cry such as seldom escaped their lips, and for a moment he seemed undecided what course to pursue, for both the dogs came crouching towards him, evidently having seen something that they dared not cope with. But what could it be? for he knew of nothing in those woods of such a character. His hesitation was but momentary, however, for laying down the small bundle he had brought with him from Jamestown, he cocked his rifle and stole carefully forward. The wind that sighed through the towering tree-tops lent but little of its music to break the silence of the forest; and as the young hunter

crept stealthily onward he could almost hear the beatings of the hearts of the hounds that kept by his side.

He had not proceeded more than a rod, when a sharp, double click struck upon his ear, scarcely more perceptible than the dropping of a pin, but yet of such a nature as to make him start, for he knew it to be the snapping of the dog-spring of a rifle lock! As quick as had been the thought that conveyed the intelligence to his mind, the hunter cast his eyes in the direction from which the sound proceeded, and almost on the instant he caught the fiery gleam of a glaring eye, just within a clump of alders, glancing along upon a rifle barrel towards him. One single flutter of hesitation or fear would have proved fatal to the young hunter, but his heart knew nothing of the kind. Quick as lightning he fell upon his knee, thus bringing his shoulder down to his rifle, and on the second that the butt came to its place he pulled the trigger!

The division of a second of time had saved young Chester's life, for almost simultaneous with the report of his own rifle came the crack of his enemy's, but that enemy was half a second too late, and his ball just grazed the hunter's cap, while the sharp cry of pain that came from the alders told a fatal tale of him who had laid

in ambush there. With a quick bound the anxious hounds darted forward, and it was with some difficulty that Orlando could prevent them from setting their fangs into the object of his rifle, but he soon managed to restrain them, and on going up to the spot he found a powerful Indian writhing in agony.

The first idea that passed through the young man's brain was, that the red man before him was the same who had survived his rescuing attack a week previous, and that he had now come to seek revenge for the death of his three companions; but on a nearer examination he found himself to be mistaken, and a peculiar sensation of wonder thrilled through his frame as he discovered the fallen Indian to be one whom he had met on that very day at Jamestown!

The red man was groaning with pain, and as Orlando stooped over him he turned his glassy red eyes upon his intended victim, and as he seemed to have recognized the young hunter's countenance, he uttered:

"Poor Indian dead—he killed—the young hunter of the pale faces be too quick. Water, water!"

Orlando unclasped the Indian's deerskin bottle from his girdle, and having filled it with water from a clear spot in the bog near by, he reached and held it to the dying man's lips. The Indian took a few swallows of the tepid water, which seemed to revive him a little, and on gazing once more on his captor's face, he said, in broken, weakening accents, while he vainly endeavored to place his hand upon his head:

"The pale hunter take my scalp?"

"No, no," returned Orlando, with a shudder.

"I never sought the red man's harm; and why did you try to kill me?"

"Feel in my pouch—take it off," said the red man, as his eye brightened up at the assurance he had received that his scalp should not be taken away.

Orlando did as directed, and at a further sign from the Indian he emptied its contents upon the ground, which proved to be a bottle of rum and five half-crowns.

"White man give poor Indian that to kill the pale hunter," said the fallen man, as his eyes rested upon the flask and the money.

"How? A white man! where?" ejaculated the young man, while the strange assurance of Chiron came vividly back to his mind, and awakened a mingled sensation of surprise and anxious curiosity.

"At Jamestown," returned the Indian.

"Who was it? What was his name?"

"I no tell his name. Indian don't know him. He give me these, and say me shoot you. I put them in my pouch and come here to wait for you; but the pale hunter was too quick."

"But what looked he like? Tell me that."

urged the young hunter, as he took the red man's head upon his knee and gazed earnestly into his dark face. "Tell me how you should know him again if you were to see him."

"Poor Indian never know him again—never see him any more; for the red man must die."

As the savage spoke his eyes rolled wildly, yet painfully, in their sockets, and pressing his hand hard against his bosom, he groaned in his agony. Again Orlando asked for some clue to the appearance of the man who had thus bartered for his destruction—for that the red man spoke the truth he had not the least doubt—but the dying man only groaned in his pain, and his weakening senses roused not to comprehend the question that was asked of him. At length, while a quick, meteor-like light beamed from his eyes, he uttered:

"The red man dies! His body will rot on the earth—nobody buries him! The pale face gave him fire-water—Indian not Indian then. I was no bad Indian—I never killed the pale faces, for they no harm me."

"You shall be buried," said the young hunter, much affected by the manner of the Indian, whom he knew to be one of the friendly nations that traded with the colonists, and who, he believed, could have no animosity against the white man. "I will myself lay you in the earth."

"Dig deep—set me down so I can look towards the place where the sun goes home to the Great Spirit—cover up deep—forgive the Indian—he no—"

The dark, swarthy features of the red man were moved by a powerful convulsion—a shudder ran rough his frame—his head sank heavily upon the knee that bore it, then rolled off upon the ground, and his soul had fled to the land of his fathers!

"And so the red man's race is fading away," murmured Orlando, as he stood and gazed upon the fallen Indian. "The fountain of the white man is everlasting; but when the stream of the red man's blood is dried up, from whence shall it be supplied? Alas! poor Indian! I am sorry that my hand should have been the one to deprive thee of thy life; but God so willed it."

Had it not been thus thou wouldst have taken mine, and then my mother would have had no protector. 'Tis better as it is."

As the hunter thus spoke to himself, he drew the body within the bushes, and having covered it over as best he could for the night, he went back to the spot where he had left his bundle, and having reloaded his rifle and swung his package over his shoulder, he once more started quickly homeward. A thousand strange emotions found their way into young Chester's mind, as he walked along through the forest. That Chiron's warning was founded upon some stern fact he had now no hesitation in believing. But who was Chiron? Who was it that thus sought his destruction, and wherefore?

Then, in the midst of these thoughts, arose the sweet face of Ada Wimple, and once more her soft avowal thrilled through his soul, and lent itself to dispel the clouds that were gathering in his working brain.

It was almost dark when Orlando reached his humble cot, and he found his mother sitting upon the door-stone waiting for him; but she seemed not to have suffered under any apprehension, for she greeted him with a quiet smile, and immediately led the way to the interior, where he found his supper already in waiting. Often during the meal, did the young man cast his eyes upon that old oaken chest that stood in the corner, and he resolved that he would that very night, if he had opportunity, make a thorough search through it—for that it had once contained a paper of some importance to his mother and himself, he had no doubt; and that it might be there even now he had strong reasons to believe, since he had heard the strange words of his mysterious friend. Perhaps there was some place—some crack—some secret hiding-hole that might yet come to light; and if so, he resolved to find it out.

The cot was divided into four apartments—three upon the lower floor, and one in the loft, in the latter of which Orlando slept, Mrs. Chester sleeping in a small room that led off to the left from the sitting-room, while Old Elpsey slept and cooked in the kitchen which occupied the back part of the house. At an early hour Mrs. Chester retired to rest, and ere long after-

wards Orlando heard the loud snore of Elpsey, and feeling sure that all was now secure, he proceeded to re-light the candle which he had extinguished when his mother retired.

With a noiseless tread Orlando glided into his mother's room, and having secured the key, he stepped silently back and went to the chest. He threw back the lid, and with a trembling, nervous hand he began to take out the articles it contained and lay them carefully aside. He did not stop to examine them, for he had seen his mother do it so often, that he knew they did not contain the sought-for treasure; and so he emptied the chest of its palpable contents as quickly and silently as possible. At length they were all out, and the bare oaken surface was exposed to his view, and having set his candle within the chest, he began to examine the corners and joints of the old box. With his knuckles he rapped upon every part, but yet he met the same dull, heavy sound, showing conclusively that there was no secret chamber within the massive wood that met his touch. Then the idea of the lock came to his mind, and stepping softly to where his rifle hung over the fire-place, he took it down, and having opened the box in its breech, he took therefrom a small screw-driver, and then went back to the chest. The lock was soon free in his hand, but he gained nothing for his trouble, only the satisfaction of knowing that the thing he sought was not there. The wards, the guards, and all its springs and bolts were revealed to his gaze, but nought save the handiwork of the locksmith was to be seen.

With a sad and disappointed countenance the young hunter began to re-pack the chest. Something had almost assured him that the paper was there; 't was not the mere words of Chiron—though what he had said had strengthened him in the opinion—but 't was the fullblowing of the conviction that had long haunted his mind. Now, however, that conviction sank again below even a hope; and when Orlando replaced the key where he had found it, he did so with the belief that it turned not the bolt upon the object of his mother's firm, unwavering anxiety. If the paper had ever been there, it was in all probability gone—where, he knew not; and he endeavored to think that he cared not.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ADA WIMPLE'S CONFESSION.

WHILE Orlando Chester was engaged in concocting his plans for the opening of the old chest, there was rather an interesting scene going on in the house of Sir Oliver Wimple. It was after nightfall when Sir Oliver and his wife returned to their home, and they found Ada alone in the sitting-room busily engaged in picking to pieces the fly-leaf of a book she had taken to read.

"O, father," cried the artless girl, as soon as her parents had divested themselves of their walking apparel and taken their seats near her, "he has been here to-day."

"Indeed!" uttered Sir Oliver, slightly elevating his eyebrows, and gazing inquisitively at his daughter. "And who might he be?"

"Why, Orlando Chester, to be sure—the noble, generous youth that saved me from the Indians. I asked him to remain till you came back, but he could not, for he said his mother would be anxious. O, I wish you could have seen him."

"I certainly should like to have seen him," said Sir Oliver. "But will he not call again?"

"O, yes—often."

"Often?" repeated Lady Wimple, who, somehow or other, had caught a very peculiar expression in her daughter's countenance.

"Certainly, mother. He told me he often passed here."

"O, that's it. Then he did not really say that he should call often."

"Why, no, he did not exactly say that; but then I know he will."

Lady Wimple cast a significant glance at her husband, but at that moment she caught not his eye, for he was engaged in wondering what made the color come and go so in his daughter's cheek. The first glance of meaning is always the important one; and as the lady lost that, she waited not for her husband's eye, but turning again to Ada, she asked:

"And is this youth good looking?"

"He is beautiful," returned the fair girl, in an earnest tone, "and he is equally as good and pure. You will like him—I know you will."

"And what if I should like him as well as Ada does," said Lady Wimple, in a low, meaning tone, while she cast a searching look into her daughter's face.

Ada met her mother's gaze, and in a tone of earnest, simple meaning, she replied:

"Then, if the life of your only child is as valuable in your eyes as it is in mine, you would cherish him in your heart's holiest gratitude."

"And so we will," uttered Sir Oliver, and then, while a peculiar shade passed over his benevolent features, he called his daughter to his side

The father had noticed as much in the fair girl's countenance and manner as had the mother, and perhaps the same thoughts had entered his mind; but with that open frankness that characterized all his dealings and social intercourse with the world and with his family, he determined to speak plainly, and as he felt.

"Ada," said he, taking her fair hand, and gazing affectionately into her face, "if this youth be fair, you had better be cautious in your intercourse with him, for you have seen but little of the world, and most of your time, since you have come to the age of understanding, has been passed here."

"And for what shall I be cautious, father? Do you think he who risked his own life to save mine would cherish a thought of harm against me now?"

"You do not understand me, Ada. Are you not aware that you might, ere you became cognizant of the fact, cherish something more than a gratitude for this young man?"

"You mean that I might love him, father."

"Yes, Ada, with a love that could only make you miserable."

"O, father," uttered the young girl, while she cast a look upon her parent that made his bosom swell with a proud emotion, "how can that purest, that holiest of all human feelings—a pure and virtuous love—make one miserable?"

"When it is fastened upon a worthy object, it cannot," returned Sir Oliver.

"And what is a worthy object? What characterizes such an one?"

The old gentleman gazed into his daughter's face as she spoke, and hesitated for an answer. Ada, the while, returned her father's gaze with an earnest, simple look of unaffected truth and candor, and seemed anxious for a reply.

"Well," said Sir Oliver, at length, "such an object should be pure and noble, like yourself, and one that could confer upon you the happiness and peace which the confidence of such a heart as yours deserves?"

"Well, what else?"

"Is not that enough, Ada?"

"I should think so, father; and if Orlando Chester possesses not all this, then is the sun false to the earth that revolves within its light."

"Yes, there is one other thing," said Sir Oliver Wimple, not a little moved by the strange manner of his child. "You should be loved in return with a love as strong and true as that which you give."

"And if in the person and soul of him who saved your own loved child from death were combined all these, what would be your answer if I told you loved him with my whole heart?"

As Ada spoke she threw her arms around her father's neck, and pillowed her head upon his bosom. A moment the old man gazed upon her as she reclined thus, and he could feel her fluttering heart as it beat against his own. Then he raised her head, and placing his hand upon her fair brow, he said:

"I know not, Ada, what would be my answer. But tell me what has taken place. Tell me all, Ada."

"Father," returned the maiden, "I never knowingly told you a falsehood, nor do I know that there dwells in my bosom the memory of a deed which I would not freely confess to you. I will tell you all. To-day I was in my flower-garden, and almost before I was aware of the fact, Orlando Chester stood before me. He asked me to pardon him for his intrusion, but he could not resist the temptation to stop and see if I arrived at home in safety. I assured him of my own welfare, and told him of my parents' gratitude, and asked him to stop and see them. This he could not do. I then asked him to call again; but to even this he hesitated. He said he had done but his duty—had followed the dictates of his own desires, in saving me; and if he possessed my parents' thanks he asked no more. I was well astonished when he intimated that he might never come again; and I asked him if the bonds of friendship were thus to be severed. As I spoke he looked upon me from out his large dark eyes, a tear glistened upon their lashes, and with a trembling lip he nobly told me the truth. He dared not come again, for already the image of Ada had become fixed upon his heart, and he dared not continue an intercourse which could only end in a love, that, meeting no response from its cherished object, would wither and die upon its own altar. He bade me a farewell, and asked me, when I thought of him, to remember him as one who had too much honor to deceive me, and too much self-love to break his own heart. Then he called God to bless me, and with tears in his eyes he turned from me. When I saw him thus turn away, I knew that my poor heart was going with him. He had saved me from a horrible death—he was noble, generous and kind—truth sparkled in every line of his fair features, and I

loved him. Could I then see him go away from me thus? Father, I called him back; I rested my head upon his bosom, even as I would upon your own, and, from the very depths of my soul, I told him that I loved him! O, I was happy then, and my preserver blessed God for the joy I had given him. Father, dear father, do you blame your child?"

Sir Oliver Wimple arose slowly from his chair, and commenced pacing the room. What he had heard had moved him much; but it could not be with anger, for his eyes were moist with a softer emotion. His wife watched his countenance with an eager gaze, seeming to dwell upon her husband's thoughts for a clue to her own decision. She loved her fair daughter with a true mother's affection, and when, a moment afterwards, Ada came and laid her soft cheek upon her neck, she would have rather given up her own pleasures than to have deprived her child of one source of true happiness.

At length Sir Oliver stopped and looked upon his daughter. Then he took her hand, and after

gazing a moment into her swimming eyes, he said:

"Ada, you are an honest, noble-hearted girl. Be ever thus—be ever truthful, ever confiding towards your parents, and we shall all be happy. I do not blame you, my child, for what you have done; and if young Chester be all that you think him, though he had not even where to lay his head, I would not hesitate to give your hand and heart into his keeping. There, rest happy Ada, for there could be no joy beneath our roof if our child were miserable."

"Ada," said her mother, as she stretched forth her arms to clasp her child, "this is your mother's answer."

As Lady Wimple spoke she imprinted a tender kiss upon the fair girl's lips, and as Ada once more stood erect, she gazed upon her father and mother for a moment, and then, while the soft light of her blue eyes sparkled with a richer effulgence, she clasped her hands upon her bosom, and gently murmured:

"O, joy! O, happiness! How good, how kind my father and my mother are!"

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE TWO SPIES.

On the next morning after the young hunter had made his unsuccessful search within the old oaken chest, he threw his rifle across his shoulder, and taking a spade in his hand, he started forth to perform the rites he had pledged to the dying red man. Having arrived at the spot where the event of the previous day had taken place, he found the body of the Indian just as he had left it, and having cleared away the tangled vines and brushwood from a quiet nook, he set to work at digging a suitable grave. The winds that murmured gently through the tree-tops seemed to the hunter as a mournful requiem for the departed, and his heart was sad as he threw up the earth to make room for the mortality of his enemy. Why the Indian had been his enemy he thought he had gained from the red man's own words, for he believed the dying savage had spoken the truth; but why those who had set the Indian on could have aught against him he was at a loss to determine—indeed, he had not the slightest clue to any existing cause for such evil thoughts against him.

At length the grave was finished, and with considerable exertion, Orlando placed the body of the Indian within it. He sat the face towards the home of the setting sun; then he placed the rifle, the horn and the pouch beside it. He touched not a thing that had belonged to the

Indian to keep it for himself; but the weapons, the money, and even the leaden balls, he placed sacredly within the grave by the side of the cold corpse.

When this was all done, Orlando murmured a prayer for the soul of the departed, and then proceeded to fill up the grave. The last sod of earth had been placed upon the gentle mound that rose above the Indian's resting-place, and the hunter was upon the point of turning away from the spot, when he was startled by the crackling of the dry brushwood behind him, and on looking around he beheld two men approaching him from the path. Their countenances were both familiar, from his having seen them down at the settlement; but yet he could have wished that they had not thus met him, for there was that in their looks which he was far from liking.

"So you've turned grave-digger, eh?" said the foremost of the new comers, as he came up to the spot where our hero stood, and placed his foot upon the grave.

"I have dug this grave, and have filled it up again," returned Orlando.

"And fixed a subject to put in it, too," said the other, with a half-sarcastic smile.

"The one who sleeps beneath these sods would have killed me had one moment of addi-

tional life been his," the young hunter replied, as he boldly met the almost impudent gaze of the two men.

"That is hardly likely, young sir, for Lolowah was a friend of the white man. He was in the employ of the governor as a messenger and interpreter."

"And how know you that this was Lolowah?" asked Orlando, while a slight tremor shook his frame, as a sense of the peculiar position in which he was placed came to his mind—for he knew Lolowah to have been a sort of spy upon the marauding Indians, and held in much esteem by the civil authorities, though he had never known him by sight.

"O, my young man, we've watched you ever since you began to dig the grave," returned the first speaker.

"Then why did you not reveal yourselves before?"

"O, we thought you might not like to be interrupted, you see. People seldom do in such matters as these."

Orlando started at this reply, for it was delivered with that tone and manner which indicates the foulest of suspicions; and in a voice of much anxiety, he said:

"I had nothing here to conceal. I shot the red man to preserve my own life. Do you not believe it?"

"Then why should you bury him so secretly?"

"Secretly? I buried him where he fell; and the only secrecy lent to the act is that given by the deep forest about us. I sought no hiding of the deed."

"But why bury him at all, if he would been your murderer?"

"Because he asked it of me, and I would not refuse him."

"Ha! then he spoke, did he, after you had shot him?"

"Yes."

"And what said he? What did he communicate?" asked the spokesman of the two men, with strange and sudden energy.

Orlando, with the truthfulness and candor that were a part of his nature, would have answered this question by a full statement of all that had transpired, but the manner of his interlocutor made him hesitate, and a moment's reflection made him determined not to reveal the knowledge he possessed, so he simply replied:

"He said what a dying Indian might have

been expected to say. He knew he must die, and he begged of me to bury him."

"And said he no more?" asked the settler, in an earnest tone.

"What else should he have said?" returned Orlando, bending a keen, searching glance upon the speaker who had thus questioned him.

"O, nothing, nothing," he answered. "I only asked because I thought that perhaps he might have—have told you—that is—left some word for the officers at Jamestown."

"Well, he did not," said the young hunter, while a smile of contempt curled about the corners of his mouth.

From the whole tone and manner of the two men Orlando at once conceived that they had some knowledge, at least, of the Indian's murderous mission, and that however many questions they would like to have asked, a fear of implicating themselves would keep them silent on the point he wished to keep from them.

"Never mind," at length said he, who had his foot still upon the grave; "tis well for you, perhaps, that dead men cannot speak; and it might have been better still had you got through with this job in secret."

"What mean you by that?" Orlando asked, as the rich blood of just indignation began to mantle his brow.

"O, nothing in particular," replied the settler, with a sort of sarcastic grin. "If you can't comprehend it, there is no need that I should tell you." Then, turning to his companion, he continued: "Come, Colton, let's be off."

As he spoke he took his foot from the grave and turned away, followed closely by his companion. The young hunter would have called them back, but he had told them all he had to tell, and if they believed him not now, then he had no hopes of inducing them to a belief, and so without interruption, he suffered them to depart. As soon as young Chester was once more alone he began to reflect upon the interview just passed, and he could not but believe that the two men who had just left him knew something of Lolowah's mission, and, also, that their present visit had been made to learn the result of the Indian's ambush. And another thing, too, dwelt somewhat heavily upon the young man's mind. Lolowah had not only been a friendly Indian, but having become so serviceable to the government, might not a rigid investigation take place with regard to his death? But what of that? Orlando felt himself inno-



cent of all crime, and endeavoring to banish his fearful thoughts, he started on his way homeward.

When the young hunter reached his cot he found Old Elpsey standing in the garden, and it took but one look into her black features to show him that some circumstance was giving her a vast deal of trouble, for she not only appeared much agitated, but her large eyes were rolling almost wildly about in their sockets.

"O, massa Orlando, me glad you come back," she uttered, as soon as she espied her young master. "Me sartin 'fraid dey got you."

"Got me?" repeated the youth. "What do you mean, Elpsey?"

"I mean de two men dat come dis mornin'," returned the old woman, regarding Orlando with a look of evident satisfaction in view of his safe return.

"But who were they? What did they want, Elpsey?"

"Why, I tink dey was after you, massa, but den I don't know who dey be, cause I nebber see 'em before."

"Did they inquire for me?"

"Dey talk 'bout you, massa—an' I tell you how. When you went away dis mornin', I was down to de brook washin' myself. In a minute I hear someting make a noise in de bushes, an' I hide myself; den dese two men come out, an' one ob 'em say, 'Dat's him going off into de woods,' an' he p'inted his finger at you. Den de odder say, 'Yes, dat's him—we'll go an' see

what he do.' Den dey talk 'bout shootin' you in de woods, an' 'bout Indian dog call Lolowah. Den me tink dat dey go to shoot you, but bress de Lord, you come back safe."

"O, there's nothing to fear, Elpsey," said Orlando, more to quiet the old woman than by way of expressing his own feelings, "I met the two men of whom you speak."

"And didn't dey want to hurt you? Didn't dey try to shoot you?"

"No, no, they were only in search after an Indian, and they probably thought I might know where to find him."

"But den what did dey talk 'bout shootin' you in de woods for?"

"I guess they were speaking about the Indian's shooting me. You must have misunderstood them."

Elpsey made no answer to this, for she appeared to think that Orlando was right; and then, in her honest heart she could not conceive how any one could wish to harm her dear, kind young master. Yet she was not without an inkling that all was not right, for as the young hunter turned towards the house, she followed him with an eager gaze, and the peculiar shaking of her head plainly told of her doubts.

Neither was Orlando without his fears and doubts, for the whole affair looked dark and dubious, to say the least, but he resolved that his poor mother should not have occasion for worryment, and so he cast off the gloom that might otherwise have settled upon him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE ARREST.

It was on the second day after the events recorded in the last chapter that Orlando Chester took his rifle and prepared to go out in quest of game. He had already passed out from the garden, and had just called his dogs to his side, when he was somewhat startled by the appearance of half a dozen men coming towards him from the edge of the wood; nor were his emotions lessened when he saw that the sheriff was at their head.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said Orlando, as the posse came up.

"Do I speak with Orlando Chester?" asked the sheriff, after he had returned the youth's compliment.

"That is my name, sir," returned the young man; at the same time casting his eyes about to see if he could recognize the two men whom he had met in the forest; but neither of them was there.

"Then," said the sheriff, "I have to ask that you will accompany me to Jamestown."

"To Jamestown, sir? And for what?"

"Simply to answer to a criminal charge that has been preferred against you."

"And the nature of that charge—what is it?" asked Orlando.

"Young man, do you know what has become of the commercial agent's messenger?" asked

the sheriff, in return; at the same time casting a scrutinizing glance into the youth's features.

"To what commercial agent do you allude?"

"To Mr. Roswell Berkley."

"And who was his messenger?"

"An Indian named Lolowah."

"Then I have every reason to believe that I shot him," answered Orlando, in a frank, independent tone.

"So you are accused, and for that I must arrest you," said the sheriff, not a little surprised at the readiness with which his question had been answered.

"Arrest me for that, sir?" exclaimed the young hunter. "I am sorry that the red man fell by my hand, but I could not help it. I did the deed in self-defence. Even as I drew my trigger upon him his rifle was aimed at my heart. He had waylaid me in ambush, and in a moment more I should have fallen a victim to his own bullet. Surely, sir, you would not arrest me for that."

"If you killed him in self-defence, you will undoubtedly be able to prove it before the court," returned the officer.

"And how, how shall I prove it, if my simple word is not sufficient?" earnestly exclaimed Orlando. "I have no witness but God, for He alone saw the deed."



"I am sorry that this duty devolves upon me," said the sheriff, "but such as it is I must perform it. With your innocence or guilt I have nothing to do—that rests with a power higher than mine. I have simply to arrest you, and I trust that you will now quietly accompany me."

"Sir," urged the youth, while an expression of the deepest agony rested upon his features, "I have a poor maniac mother who depends for her very peace and comfort upon my presence. Her already shattered heart would be utterly crushed did she think that danger threatened her son, and she might go down to the grave in the sorrow of her desolation. O, sir, do not then take me away. Let my accusers, if any I have, be brought here, and if the firm assurance, from a heart that never cherished a thought of evil against a human being, can be believed, then will my innocence be established."

"The favor you ask is beyond my power to grant," the sheriff returned, in a tone and manner that evinced a deep sympathy with the young man. "You must go with me to Jamestown, and there I trust you will be enabled to make the court believe in your innocence, even as I do now."

"And have I been really accused of any crime in connection with Lolowah's death?" asked Orlando, while a thankful gleam shot athwart his countenance, as he heard the sheriff's avowal of a belief in his innocence.

"Crime?" returned the officer, in a tone of deep regret. "'Tis for the red man's murder you are arrested. Lolowah was a Christian, and a servant of the government."

"Murder! O, God!" uttered the youth, as he clasped his hands towards heaven. "No, no, they cannot hold such a charge against me. Such an accusation I could blow to the winds in an instant. I will go with you, sir. But I shall not be lodged in jail—in the cold, damp jail, shall I?"

"I think you will, for the present. But you need not fear on that account."

"Fear, sir!" exclaimed Orlando, with a flush of indignation. "For myself I'd care not if a thousand prison doors were barred upon me, for a soul like mine has nothing to dread; but 'tis for my poor mother that I fear. Her shattered mind cannot comprehend as mine, and she will think me lost to her forever. But if it be God's will that I go, then go I must; but you will allow me to see my mother first, that I may leave her comfort for my absence."

"The sheriff readily assented to this request, and commanding all the self-control of which he was master, Orlando entered the cot."

"Mother," said he, as he took her thin, white hand in his own, and imprinted a warm kiss upon her brow, "I am going to Jamestown, and I may not return to-night; but you will not worry about me. I shall return to bless you ere long."

"And you will not desert me, then?"

"No, no, mother."

"Ah, there's a tear in your eye, Orlando. Hold down your head and let me wipe it away. There, you must not weep, for I shall think you, too, are going to desert me."

The young man turned away from his mother, for he dared not trust himself longer in her sight, and passing out into the back room, he found Elpsey.

"Elpsey," said he, "I am going down to the settlement, and I may be gone for some time, and during my absence I would have you comfort my poor mother all you can. If she asks after me, tell her I am coming back shortly, and assure her that I am safe. Be smiling and cheerful, and do all you can to ease her mind over its troubles."

"And will Orlando come back soon?" asked the old negress, gazing earnestly in the young man's face. "Tell Old Elpsey all."

"There is no danger for me," returned Orlando; and then, in as few words as possible, he explained to the old woman what had happened, and extracted from her a promise that she would do as he had bidden her.

Elpsey looked uneasy and sad when her young master turned away, and she shook her head with a thoughtful, dubious motion, for she had not failed to read in his speaking countenance the fears and misgivings which he would have hidden from her; but she asked him no more questions, nor did she say aught calculated to betray her thoughts.

Once more Orlando sought the side of his mother, and once more he kissed her; then he called upon God to bless her and protect her during his absence, and with a sad, heavy heart, he left the cot. His faithful dogs crouched at his feet, and it was with much difficulty that he kept them back, but he at length succeeded, though for a long distance he could hear their piteous whinings at being thus deprived of their master's company.

"You seem to know well my path," remarked

Orlando to the sheriff, as the latter struck off into the narrow track that led the way to his boat-landing.

"O, yes," returned the sheriff. "I had it minutely described to me before I started."

"By whom?" asked the young hunter.

"By those who accuse you of the murder," answered the sheriff.

"And they were here the day before yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Then is there some deep-laid villany in this affair," uttered Orlando, half to himself.

He would have said more, but he knew that he had at present no means of solving the mystery, and feeling that if he said too much, his enemies, whoever they were, might learn of his knowledge, and take measures to screen themselves behind some other mode of attack. He determined, therefore, that he would betray none of the intelligence that he had gained till he should again see Chiron, for he had no doubt that he was both able and willing to befriend him.

At the landing a barge was in waiting, which the young hunter was politely requested to enter, and ere long he was being rowed swiftly down the river. A sigh of anguish escaped from his bosom as he passed the mansion of Sir

Oliver Wimple; and the thought that Ada might hear of the crime of which he was accused, without knowing the facts of the case, lent a keen torture to his soul.

When the barge landed at Jamestown, our hero was at once conveyed to the office of the justice, where he found the two men who had met him at the Indian's grave, and who had appeared as witnesses against him. Mr. Roswell Berkley was the man who had issued the accusation, and caused the young man's arrest, and he was present in the office when Orlando was brought in. It required but a few moments for Gilman and Colton—the two witnesses—to tell their story, and ere long the prisoner was committed to answer to the charge of murder. He stoutly persisted in his plea of innocence, but he was coolly informed that he could enter that plea at his trial.

In half an hour later Orlando Chester was within the walls of the jail, and as the jailer had received injunctions to look well to his security, he was placed within one of the strongest cells. As the door of the dungeon was closed upon him, the youth sank back upon the hard couch and buried his face in his hands, not caring that the struggling day-beams should fall upon his misery!

## CHAPTER IX.

### A CURIOUS INTERVIEW.

THE cell into which Orlando Chester had been cast was upon the lower floor of the jail, the walls of which were of rough stone, clumsily put together, but yet firm enough to resist any ordinary means of escape. The light entered through a square-grated aperture nearly at the top of the wall, and the door, which was bolted and barred upon the outside, was of oak, firmly rivetted together.

An hour, and perhaps more, had passed away after our hero had been thrust within the dungeon, when the bolts of his door were withdrawn, and as the door swung open, Mr. Roswell Berkley entered the cell. Mr. Berkley was a stout-built, middle-aged man, of rather a commanding appearance, but with a countenance far from prepossessing—there being a sort of lurking, mistrustful gleam in his eyes, which gave to his whole face an artful, cunning expression.

As soon as Berkley entered, the door was closed behind him, and after gazing upon the young man for a few moments, as though his eyes had not yet got used to the dim light of the place, he said:

"Young sir, this is a heavy crime of which you are charged; but yet I trust you may go clear. I can hardly persuade myself to believe that you are guilty of actual murder, for you are yet too young to have cherished such criminal feelings."

"Then, why did you accuse me of it?" asked Orlando, who, both from his visitor's appearance and words, did not place the fullest confidence in his condolence.

Mr. Berkley slightly cowered beneath the words and looks of the young hunter; but quickly recovering himself, he replied:

"I could not have well done otherwise than to have accused you, for this case is a peculiar one. Lolowah was not only of much service to the authorities, but he was also extensively known and beloved among the friendly Indians about us; and if his violent death were to pass unnoticed by us, it would not only alienate the confidence of his red brothers, but it might bring down their wrath upon us. The two men who saw you bury your victim spread the intelligence abroad, and I could do no less than I have done. But I trust you will yet be able to clear yourself."

"If there be justice in the colony I certainly shall," returned Orlando. "The red man fell a victim to his own intended crime."

"I hope you can prove it," said Berkley, in a half-doubting tone.

"Hope I can prove it!" iterated the youth, with a flush of indignation. "Do you mean to taunt me, sir? Hope I can prove it! You know that my eye, and that of God alone, saw the deed; my tongue alone can speak of what took place when the red man fell."

"But your hiding the body—"

"Hiding the body!" interrupted Orlando, with an earnestness strongly tinged with contempt. "I buried the body; and do not all Christians the same? Even to one of my dogs I would give a grave; and should I refuse the boon to one who was made in the image of God? Should I have seen the corpse of the red man left a prey for the beasts of the forest, and his bones to bleach upon the surface of the earth? No; in pity and in sorrow I buried him, and I murmured a prayer for his soul. Hiding the body! Out upon such a shallow subterfuge for my arrest! What had I against the Indian? I never had dealings with him, nor did I want aught of his. Everything that he had about him when he fell, now lies by his side beneath the sod that covers him."

Roswell Berkley trembled and shrunk away, as the burning words of the young hunter fell upon his ear, and for several moments he gazed upon the prisoner with a sort of fearful wonder; but at length he said, in a cautious, constrained voice:

"If I remember rightly what Gilman and Colton said, the Indian spoke some words to you after he fell."

"You understood rightly, then."

"And what did he say?" asked Berkley, with an evident attempt to conceal the earnestness which he manifested.

"He said he was dying—that my eye was too quick for him—and he asked me to bury him."

"Did he say nothing else?"

"Nothing to speak of. He gave me no communication for other ears than my own."

Mr. Berkley seemed much nettled by the laconic manner of the young man, and once he seemed upon the point of leaving the cell, but he turned again, and assuming a sort of careless air, he remarked:

"You say the Indian was preparing to shoot you."

"I did say so, sir."

"Then did you not ask him why he had attempted your life?"

"Yes."

"And what was his answer?"

This last question was asked with a nervous earnestness, and with a perceptive tremor the speaker awaited an answer. Orlando gazed into the face of his visitor with a keen, searching look, and at the expiration of a few moments he returned:

"The Indian endeavored to excuse himself, but yet there was murder on his soul."

"But what excuse did he offer?"

"He offered none."

"You said but now he did."

"I said he endeavored so to do, but as what he offered could be no excuse for my assassination, 'twould benefit you not to know what he said."

"What! Do you mean to insult me?" exclaimed Berkley, entirely losing his self-control, and bursting into a passion. "Do you refuse to answer my questions?"

"I have answered them all," quietly returned Orlando.

"But not as I asked them, young sir. You answer them not plainly. I asked you what the Indian told you as a reason for attempting your life."

"And now I will answer you," returned Orlando, while the fire began to sparkle in his eye.

"To you I will speak no word of what he said. Is that plain?"

"Tis too plain for your own good, Master Chester," muttered Berkley, "for your own unwillingness to reveal the facts stamps you as the murderer of Lolowah. When we meet again I wot that you will be somewhat humbled."

As Berkley spoke he turned and left the cell. There was a meaning fire in his eye—a serpent-like look—as he cast his glance back upon the prisoner; and when at length the bolts were once more shoved into their sockets, the young hunter felt that he had just met with one who, to say the least, bore him no good will. Berkley's words, his strange earnestness in asking his questions, and his trembling looks, all seemed to indicate that he knew more than he should have known with regard to the mission of Lolowah. If he had not, then why should he have been so anxious to have known whether the Indian had implicated any one by his dying declaration to the hunter, for that was certainly the object of his inquiries. The more Orlando thought upon the interview that had just passed, the more he became convinced that his case was a hard one; for if Roswell Berkley was his accuser, he had certainly nothing to hope from him, if he might judge from that gentleman's conduct thus far; and then the two witnesses, Gilman and Colton, were evidently nothing but tools in the hands of some paying master, for already had they perjured themselves in their evidence at the justice's office. There they had sworn that they came accidentally upon the

young man when he commenced digging the grave, while Orlando knew that they had been stealthily creeping about his cot long before he went forth to bury the Indian, and, from Elsey's communication he knew, too, that they were fully aware of Lolowah's having come to the forest on purpose to shoot him. Of these circumstances he had said nothing, fearing that if he did, measures would be taken previous to his trial to rebut them, whereas, if he kept all to himself till the trial came on, they might prove of more service to him, especially if he should obtain the assistance of some competent advice.

The afternoon passed slowly and heavily away, and as the window of the young hunter's cell looked towards the west, he could easily mark the setting of the sun; and as the glorious orb sank lower and lower, his own spirits seemed to sink with it. His heart looked not upon his own incarceration for the misery it brought to himself, but he could have wept, had he felt less miserable, for her whom he had left in the forest. Towards his mother went forth his heart in sorrow, and he feared it might be weeks ere he should see her again, and perhaps—*never!*

As that thought—that simple *never*—passed through young Chester's mind, he started up from the couch upon which he had seated himself as though the grim angel of death had even then intruded upon him; but the idea was so terrible, so seemingly impossible, that he strove to banish it from his mind; still it haunted him, nor could he drive the fearful spectre from him.

The last rays of the sun were resting upon the prisoner's wall, when the door of the cell was opened, and a small loaf and a mug of

water were silently placed upon his stool. After the door had been again fastened upon him, Orlando took the loaf and the mug in his hands and seated himself upon the stool. The bread was yet warm, having evidently been but a short time from the oven; but the prisoner felt not like eating, for the excitement he had undergone, and the fearful conjectures that had just been working through his brain, made him sick at heart, and he laid the food upon the floor. Of the water, however, he partook, for his lips were parched and dry.

Ere long Orlando Chester stretched his weary limbs upon the hard rough couch, and as a sensation of drowsiness began to creep over him he was startled by a low, grating voice by his side. He started up and peered through the gloom that was gathering about him, but he could see nothing. Again the sound struck upon his ear, seeming to come from the floor, and on looking down he could just distinguish the outlines of two or three large rats gnawing away at his bread. At first he thought of driving them away, but he wanted no food for himself then, and as they would probably bring him more in the morning, he determined that he would let the rats have their fill; and with this idea he sank back upon his couch, and lay so that he could watch them at their repast. But the dungeon grew darker and darker, until at length the prisoner could see his little companions no longer; but still he could hear them as they industriously gnawed away at the bread, and with the low grating of their sharp teeth yet sounding in his ears, he fell asleep.

## CHAPTER X.

### STRANGE EFFECTS OF THE RATS' REPAST.

Our young hero slept during most of the night, but yet that sleep was dreamy and uneasy, and when at length the day-beams began to peep through his window he arose from his hard couch and commenced pacing the floor of his dungeon. A dozen turns, perhaps, had he taken, when the thought of the rats he had left at work on his bread entered his mind, and he turned to observe the result of their operations. The loaf had been nearly all eaten up, and Orlando was upon the point of resuming his walk, when something at the foot of his couch arrested his attention, which, upon a closer observation, he found to be a dead rat, and at a short distance from it, nearer to a small hole in the corner of the cell through which the animals had evidently made their way, he found another of the little quadrupeds, which was also dead.

At first this circumstance created but little thought in the mind of the young hunter, but gradually a strange idea began to work its way through his brain, and with a trembling hand he picked one of the bodies up. Small particles of bread were still upon the rat's nose; and an examination of the other body gave the same result. Orlando knew that these must be the same that he had left eating his bread on the night previous, and with one of them in his hand he sat down upon the side of his couch. Hardly had he assumed this position, however,

when the bolts of his own door were withdrawn and on looking up, he beheld the gigantic form of Chiron enter the cell. In an instant our hero cast the rat upon the floor, and with a bounding heart he sprang forward to meet the man whom he sincerely believed to be his friend.

"So, so," uttered Chiron, as he shook the youth warmly by the hand, "they've begun the work sooner than I expected."

"They've begun it, at all events," returned Orlando, in a tone of carelessness that actually surprised himself; but the presence of Chiron had served to dispel the gloom of his heart, and instinctively the feeling of safety came to his relief.

"Yes, and they came near accomplishing their purpose, too," said Chiron. "I little thought that the game was to commence so soon, or I should have been on the watch. But how was it that you escaped the Indian's bullet? Lolowah was a cunning fellow, and he had the reputation of being a fatal marksman."

"He may have been a good marksman, but his eye was not quick enough," returned Orlando, and then he went on to relate the particulars of the rencontre.

Chiron's eye sparkled as the youth told his story; and when it was closed, he exclaimed: "By my faith, Orlando, your eye must be a quick one. I had thought myself next to invul-

nerable, but I hardly think I should have escaped as you did. 'Twas indeed a narrow chance. But tell me, did not the Indian speak to you ere he died?"

"Yes, he told me he never had aught against the white man, but that one of them gave him money and rum to kill me. They plied him with the fire-water before they sent him on the mission, and I really believe the poor fellow was sorry for the part he had taken against me."

"No doubt he was," said Chiron, "but he was the tool of a subtle enemy. Have you told any one else of the Indian's avowal?"

"No. You are the first one to whom I have communicated it, though the two men, Gilman and Colton, who dogged me in the woods, tried to get it from me, and yesterday Mr. Berkley, plied me most assiduously to the same end, and in my poor mind I have come to the conclusion that all three of them know more of the red man's mission than becomes honest men."

"Berkley!" uttered Chiron, with a start of surprise. "Has he been here?"

"Yes, and he threatened me, too, because I would not tell him what Lolowah said to me. Are you acquainted with this Berkley?"

"I have seen him often, and I know somewhat of his history," replied Chiron, in a sort of thoughtful mood.

"And who is he?" asked Orlando.

"He became rich by the death of a rich brother, and his riches have made him proud. Sir Wallace Berkley and Roswell Berkley came to Virginia many years ago, and the former amassed a large fortune, but his health seemed to be on the decline, and he resolved to return to England, partly on business, and partly for his health; but before he went he made his will, bequeathing all his property to his brother, and then he went to England and died. Thus Roswell came into possession of one of the most valuable estates in the colony, together with a vast amount of money; but with all his wealth he has been of but little service to the colony, for he is avaricious and niggardly in the extreme, revengeful in his disposition, and capable of stooping to the lowest means to accomplish his ends."

"And is it he, then, who is persecuting me?" asked Orlando, in an earnest tone.

"I think it is."

"And what, in the whole scope of earthly reasons, can he have against me? How have I ever come in contact with his interests, or how offended him?"

For several moments Chiron remained in a silent, thoughtful mood, but at length he said, while he looked steadily into the face of his young companion:

"That Roswell Berkley is your enemy is most true, and I have reason to believe that he is at the bottom of this attempt upon your life; but why he is thus—why he seeks your removal from this world of care—I may not now tell you, for I have much to clear up yet before I can understand it all myself. But while you are here you have nothing to fear from him; and when you go out from here, we will take measures to secure you against danger."

"And think you I have nothing to fear while here in prison?"

"Most assuredly not; for you shall not be convicted of this crime."

"Chiron," said the young man, in a serious, meaning tone, while a peculiar shade passed over his countenance, "last night the jailer brought to me a small loaf of bread and a mug of water. The bread I could not eat, for I had no appetite; so I laid it carelessly upon the floor, and shortly afterwards I laid down on my couch. Presently I was startled by the sound of something near me, and on looking over upon the floor I saw two rats gnawing my bread. I watched them till the gathering darkness hid them from my sight, and then I went to sleep. This morning they had eaten my bread most all up."

"Well," uttered Chiron, somewhat startled by the young man's manner, "and what of that? There is enough more bread."

"Perhaps there is. But look," said Orlando, "as he pointed to the two dead rats, 'there lie the poor fellows, as I found them this morning, stiff and dead!'"

"Dead!" iterated Chiron, starting from his position, and gazing first upon the rats, and then upon his companion, "Dead! By heavens! a rat, even, could not have died without a cause. Is the bread all gone?"

"No, here is a portion of it," returned Orlando, as he picked up what remained of the loaf.

"Is there any water in your mug?" asked Chiron, after he had gazed for some time upon the bread.

"There is a little," answered the youth, and as he spoke he took the mug from his stool and brought it forward.

Chiron took the mug, and carefully crumbled the bread into it as finely as he could between

his thumb and finger, and having accomplished this he stirred the whole quite briskly for a moment or two, then he let it stand till the bread had mostly settled. He spoke not a word while he was engaged in this work, but the eager look that dwelt upon his countenance, and the flashes that shot from his keen eyes, told that he was deeply interested in his experiment. As soon as the mug had stood long enough for the saturated bread to settle, Chiron took his knife and began slowly to stir the mess up again, and this he carefully continued until the bread and water had become mixed into a sort of pulp, and then he cautiously turned it off on to the floor.

As soon as the bread and water was all out of the mug, Chiron took the vessel to the window and carefully examined its inside.

"Come here, Orlando," he exclaimed, while his eyes sparkled more intensely than ever. "There, look in there!"

"Well, and what is it?"

"Do you not see that fine, white sediment?"

"That which glistens so?"

"Yes."

"Yes, I see it."

"And that is arsenic. There must have been enough in that loaf to have killed a dozen men!"

"And 'twas meant for me," said Orlando, with a shudder.

"Of course 'twas meant for you, for the loaf could not have been long made."

"No, 'twas new last night, for 'twas warm when the jailer placed it in here."

"Then is this villany hard upon you, even here," exclaimed Chiron, as he gazed once more into the mug, and then dashed it in pieces against the wall. "But you shall not be long thus, for I will tear the old jail down about their ears ere its walls shall hold you in contact with such danger. Here is bread of mine—'twill last you till you can get some more safer to eat than was that. By my faith, but those poor rats have done humanity a good service, at all events. 'Tis a pity, though, that the fatal experiment could not have been tried upon him who compounded the infernal dose!"

As Chiron spoke he took from his pouch several slices of bread and venison, and Orlando was just upon the point of making some remark, when the jailer put his head in at the door and informed the visitor that the time allowed for his visit to the prisoner had expired.

"Here sir! Look ye here!" exclaimed Chiron, in an authoritative tone, as the jailer stood waiting for him to come out.

There was that about the towering form and the imperative look of the old hunter that made the jailer almost forget his own right to command on the premises, and without hesitation he entered the cell.

"Was it you, sir, that brought this prisoner his food last night?" asked Chiron.

"Yes," returned the jailer.

"And was that bread prepared in the jail?"

The jailer trembled as he heard this question, and he silently gazed into the face of his interlocutor.

"Was that bread prepared in the jail?" again asked Chiron.

"No sir, it was not," answered the jailer, with considerable perturbation; "but I trust you will not expose me for thus overstepping the bounds of my duty. All the bread in the jail was hard and mouldy, and as the gentleman kindly offered to send the unfortunate young man a warm loaf, I could not find it in my heart to refuse. Who was the gentleman that sent it?" asked Chiron.

"I promised him that I would not tell," returned the jailer, with a simplicity scarcely to have been expected from one in his situation. "He was very kind to the prisoner, and wished him well out of the scrape."

"Yes, he was very kind," returned Chiron; "but tell me who he was, and you may rest assured that no harm shall come to you through the affair. I have particular reasons for asking, for to one in the prisoner's situation a knowledge of his friends may be of much service."

"Well, sir," said the jailer, with some hesitancy, "it was Mr. Berkley."

"Mr. Roswell Berkley?"

"Yes."

"Now, Orlando, you are pretty sure of one friend, at least," said Chiron, casting upon the youth a look of deep meaning, "and," continued the old hunter, in a low tone that could not reach the ears of the jailer, "this is no place for you. Keep up a good heart, for there is no danger."

This last remark was delivered in a loud tone; and giving the youth a hearty shake of the hand, the old hunter turned and followed the jailer from the cell, and as his footsteps died away in the distance Orlando turned his gaze upon the fragments of the mug that lay scattered upon the floor, and his heart beat with a wild emotion as he thought how narrow an escape from a horrible death had fallen so strangely to his lot.

## CHAPTER XI. -

### THE VILLAIN IS CORNERED.

WHEN Chiron left the jail he stood for some moments in the road engaged in deep meditation. That Mr. Berkley had intended to have poisoned Orlando he had not the least doubt, but yet he resolved to make "assurance doubly sure," and with this view he took his way at once towards Roswell Berkley's house. That gentleman was in his sitting-room, and when Chiron entered he found him pacing the floor in anything but an easy or unconcerned manner.

"Ha! Who are you, sir, that comes thus unbidden upon my privacy?" exclaimed Berkley, starting back in a sort of frightened amazement as his eyes rested upon the huge proportions of the new comer.

"I think you have seen me before," coolly returned Chiron, as he set his ponderous rifle against the panelling of the wall.

"Seen you, sir," uttered the agent, still trembling before the powerful hunter. "I have met you in the street, but wherefore do you thus intrude upon me unannounced? Do you take my residence for a common inn?"

"O, no, one of the servants in the yard told me that you were in this room, and he also had the kindness to offer to call you out, but as my business was somewhat of a private nature I dispensed with his services."

"Then, sir, I trust you will get through with

your business as soon as possible," said Mr. Berkley, in a more confident tone, for his presence of mind had begun gradually to return to him.

The old hunter bent a keen, searching glance upon the man before him, and in a meaning tone he asked:

"Have you heard that the young man, whom you had confined in the jail yesterday, was dead?"

"Young Chester, do you mean?" returned Berkley, while a quick, sparkling light shot through his eyes.

"Yes, I mean Orlando Chester."

"No, I had not heard of it. At what time did he die?"

"O, he is not dead yet."

"And is he sick?" asked Berkley, with an earnestness and nervous impatience which he could not hide.

"No, he was never better in his life," returned Chiron.

A single instant Roswell Berkley gazed into the calm features of his gigantic visitor, and then, while a sudden tremor shook his frame, he grasped the back of his chair for support.

"Villain! scoundrel!" uttered the agent at length, "what mean you by this taunting?"

"It seems to affect you wonderfully, sir," said

Chiron, in a sarcastic tone, still keeping his eyes bent upon the man before him.

"I had thought the poor youth might be in reality dead, and it is no wonder that such a result should have moved me," returned Mr. Berkley, suddenly changing his manner to one of the utmost solicitude.

"There was a death in the jail last night," said Chiron, "and I knew not but you might have heard of it. Two rats died in young Chester's cell."

"How now, sir? What mean you by this flummery?" exclaimed Berkley, again shrinking before the gaze of his visitor.

"But is it not strange, sir, that those rats should have died in *Chester's* cell?" asked Chiron, seeming not to heed his companion's manner.

"Sirrah!" cried Berkley, bursting into a rage, "have done with your impudent fooling; and if you have aught to say, say it quickly, for I would be alone."

"But I have not done with the rats, yet."

"Silence, sir!" almost screamed the enraged man, "or I will have you cast into the street I would a mad dog."

"Those rats, sir," resumed Chiron, with the most imperturbable coolness, "ate most of the bread which was left for young Chester last night, and I should not wonder if that caused their death. At any rate, I think the matter had better be inquired into."

"And was the bread *all* eaten? Was there any part of it left?" asked Berkley, with a sudden energy, at the same time losing his anger in the powerful emotion that swept over him.

"There was a small piece left, but it was destroyed and thrown away," answered Chiron.

Roswell Berkley breathed more freely as he heard this, and after collecting his seemingly scattered senses, he said:

"This was some mere accident—some strange freak of nature—this death of the rats. They were probably half-famished, and thus overate themselves."

"Very likely. Indeed, I think they must have overeaten themselves," returned the old hunter, and as he spoke, all signs of the searching gaze that had dwelt upon his features passed away, for he had seen enough to convince him that the man before him was the projector of the poisoned bread. Chiron now knew with whom and with what young Chester had to deal, and he could not repress the look of con-

tempt that worked up from his soul as he looked upon the miserable villain before him.

"Now, sir," said Berkley, assuming his usual haughty tone and manner, "if you have nothing further to communicate, I would thank you for your absence, and if there is anything wrong at the jail, I will attend to it." Then, as though an idea, which until the present moment had escaped him—entered his mind, he asked, with a sudden start:

"Who told you of this affair?"

"About the rats, do you mean?"

"Yes. Was it the jailer?"

"No, I saw it myself."

"Yourself? And do you mean to say that you have been admitted to the jail?"

"Certainly I have. I had business with young Chester, and received permission to visit him. Is there anything strange in that?"

"O, no," returned Berkley, with considerable embarrassment. "Then you are acquainted with the young man."

"Yes, I have seen him," said Chiron, "and I feel some interest in his welfare."

For a few moments Mr. Berkley gazed vacantly into the face of his visitor, and then he cast his eyes upon the floor. The old hunter smiled as he noticed the manner of his host, and he thought he could guess what was passing in his mind. Twice had he been peremptorily requested to leave the room, and yet the agent kept him now in waiting. At length Berkley raised his head, and while a look of mingled anxiety rested upon his features, he said:

"Young Chester has a mother living, I am told."

"He has," returned Chiron, again resuming his keen gaze upon the countenance of his host.

"And do you know her?"

"Yes. I have seen her at her house in the woods."

"They tell me she is crazy."

"Then they told you part truly and part falsely. The poor woman's mind is shattered, but she is far from being crazy."

"Since I have been the means of having this poor woman's son arrested, and as he may never protect her more, I believe I must take some measures to provide for her welfare. It is hardly right that she should suffer for the sins of her son."

There was something so mean, so serpent-like in the tone and manner of Berkley, and then his desire to get the poor maniac mother



within his power was so evident, that the noble soul of Chiron could no longer contain its deep indignation, and, while his eyes flashed like starting meteors, he exclaimed:

"Roswell Berkley, you have managed to get young Chester within the walls of the cold and desolate prison-house, and you have managed, too, to fasten upon him the imputation of a dark crime; but you need not waste your sycophantic fears upon his fate, for Orlando Chester will not remain long in your clutches. He is innocent of all crime, and you yourself know it well. The red man who fell beneath his fatal rifle was the unfortunate victim of the base villain who set him upon his bloody work. Tell me, ye shameless, heartless man; if you think such a diabolical plot as has been hatched up against young Chester can escape the revealing light of day—and tell me, too, if you think its perpetrator can escape the retribution of his incensed and outraged God! And now, not content with what has already been done, you would fasten your poisonous grasp upon poor Morgiana Chester! Roswell Berkley, if you dare to lay a finger upon that woman, or if you issue an attempt against her, you shall sorely rue it. The lives of two thousand like yourself were not worth one moment of that maniac mother's peace! Now, beware! I know that for some cause you seek young Chester's ruin, but I'll yet show you that you have counted without your host, for I'll blow your flimsy fabric to the wind, and yourself I'll give to the justice that demands you!"

Like a whipped cur did Roswell Berkley quail before the towering form of the old hunter. His face was pale, and his lips trembled with a slavish fear. Twice he attempted to speak, but the words stuck in his throat, and while yet

Chiron gazed fixedly upon him he sank into a chair.

"Villain," uttered the hunter between his set teeth, "I know you for what you are, and I know now where to meet you. You asked me if the bread was all gone that was given to the young prisoner last night. I found a piece of it, and analyzed it, and I found it to contain a most deadly poison, and, sir, I know that you prepared it, and that you sent it there!"

Those last words seemed to recall Berkley to his senses, for with the balls almost starting from their eye-sockets, he sprang from his chair. His face was livid with rage, and his whole frame trembled beneath the most intense excitement. With a nervous movement, he placed his hand in his bosom, and as his eyes sparkled with a cat-like gleam, he suddenly drew forth a pistol.

"Now, dog, go tell your story to the angels of the other world! You'll never repeat it on earth!"

Chiron had caught the meaning gleam of the villain's eye when first he placed his hand within his bosom, and he mistrusted at once the object of the movement, so that no sooner was the pistol drawn upon him than he was prepared for the attack. With a movement, as quick as it was powerful, the hunter sprang forward and caught the weapon from Berkley's grasp, and then he dashed the villain to the floor.

"I gave you not credit for so much courage," said Chiron, in a tone of irony, as Berkley raised himself upon his elbow.

A moment more the old hunter gazed upon the prostrate man, and then casting the pistol out through an open window, he turned and left the apartment.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE RIFLE SHOT.

THE shades of evening were settling with a cooling, grateful influence over the river plantations, and as the dew began to fall Ada Wimple left her garden and entered the house. She had just taken a book and seated herself by the lamp near which her mother was working, when her father entered the room. There was a deep shade upon Sir Oliver's countenance, and instead of his usual social greeting upon his return, he was taciturn and even sad. Ada caught the expression in a moment, and laying her book upon the table, she gazed for a few moments eagerly into her father's features, and, when at length he sank into a chair, she went up to him and put her arms around his neck.

"Dear father," she said, as she kissed him upon the brow, "what makes you so sad?"

Sir Oliver gazed up into his daughter's face, but he made no reply.

"Tell me," urged Ada, "what it is that ails you. Have you been hurt? Are you sick?"

"Ada," said her father, as he took one of her small white hands in his own, "I know not that I should keep this thing from you, and I trust that when I tell you the cause of my sadness, you will be woman enough to receive it as you should."

Lady Wimple laid down her work and turned towards her husband with a look of all-absorb-

ing curiosity, while Ada, with a fluttering heart bade her father speak.

"My child," said he, while the tumultuous heaving of his bosom told how painful 'twas for him to tell his cause of grief, "you must give up all thoughts of the youth who saved you from the Indians, for he is not what you thought him."

"You do not mean Orlando Chester," said Ada, in a faint whisper, as if afraid to trust that name in connection with such a result.

"Yes, Ada. Orlando Chester is even now in jail under charge of murder."

"Murder?" shrieked the fair girl, starting back and regarding her father with a half vacant stare. "No, no, you do not mean that. You do wrong to trifle with your Ada thus."

"I am not trifling with you, my child," Sir Oliver replied. "Young Chester is really in jail for having murdered Lolowah, an Indian interpreter and messenger."

"And surely you do not believe him guilty of such a crime," uttered the young girl, without a moment's hesitation. "You cannot believe that he murdered the messenger."

Sir Oliver gazed a moment into his child's face, and it was not without a feeling of pride that he saw the proud flashing of her eyes, and even as he dwelt upon their conscious beams he



found his prejudice against the young accused gradually dwindling away; but with a father's solicitude for the welfare of his child, he wished the connection between young Chester and Ada to be sundered, and taking his daughter's hand once more, he said:

"The evidence is very strong against the young man, and I fear that he will be convicted of the crime, and consequently you cannot wonder that I should wish you to forget him."

"But this evidence—what is it, father, and what are the circumstances attending the case?" asked Ada, in an earnest tone, but yet with such a confidence in Orlando's innocence that she was almost calm.

"Mr. Berkley related to me the circumstances. Lolowah was missed, and two men were sent in quest of him, and these men found young Chester in the very act of burying the body of the Indian, and he was accordingly arrested and brought down, and he has been committed to answer to the charge of murder."

"And does Orlando deny that he killed the Indian?"

"No, he owns that he killed him, but he says he did it in self-defence."

"Then," said Ada, while a new light shone from her eyes, "I believe that he did. Tell me, father, would you say that Orlando murdered those three Indians whom he shot to save my life?"

"Of course not, my child; but this case is vastly different."

"It is only different in that he saved his own life, instead of saving mine. No, no, father; though every tongue but his own should tell me he was guilty of murder, I'd not believe them. When first you spoke, the words struck upon my heart with a fearful sound; but now I scarcely heed the imputation. They cannot convict him of the crime, for their own consciences must tell them that he is innocent. Let me know, let me feel that he is capable of crime, and I'll cast his image from my heart; but till I can feel this I will not rend my love from him."

Sir Oliver Wimple gazed in surprise upon his daughter, as she spoke; but he made no reply, seeming rather to be pondering upon the circumstance. Ada, too, assumed a thoughtful mood, and after reflecting for several moments, she continued:

"Tell me, father, do you not think there is something strange in this affair? For the last month there have been numerous small parties

of Indians committing depredations about us, and many of them have been caught and punished; and now a young white man, who has always borne an irreproachable character, has slain one of the red men, and, notwithstanding his explanation, he is charged with murder. Is there not something strange in it?"

"Ada," said her father, in his moderate, calculating tone, "I don't know but that you are right. There is something curious in this case—and now I think of it, Mr. Berkley seemed rather ill-tuned with regard to the matter, and some of his answers were anything but satisfactory, though the excitement of the circumstance prevented me from noticing it then, as I do now."

During this time Lady Wimple had uttered not a word, seeming, as was usually her way, to wait till her husband had fully explained his own views ere she ventured an opinion, and then she invariably coincided with him. Now, however, the case had arrived at a point where she thought she might speak, and she had already formed her words for utterance, when she was suddenly cut short by the report of a rifle near the house, and uttering an exclamation of fear, she sank back trembling into her chair.

Ada was somewhat startled, too, by this sudden report, and she caught her father's arm while she bent her ear to hear what sound might follow next. Sir Oliver gently laid his daughter's hand from off his arm, and having seized his hat, he started forth to learn the cause of this strange interruption. The moon was shining brightly, and as the baronet stepped out upon the gravelled walk he saw a gigantic figure, standing only a short distance from the corner of the house, quietly leaning upon a rifle.

"How now, stranger?" cried Sir Oliver, as he approached the spot where stood the powerful form. As the baronet spoke, the stranger turned towards him and revealed the features of Chiron.

"Your pardon, Sir Oliver, for this intrusion," said the hunter, as he brought his rifle up under his arm and stepped forward a pace.

"Chiron?" uttered the baronet.

"Yes; I was here, if you remember, when your daughter returned from her expedition up the river."

"I never should forget you," said Sir Oliver, as he measured with his eye the huge proportions of the hunter; "but what means this disturbance—this rifle-shooting about my premises?"



ORLANDO CHESTER, THE YOUNG HUNTER.—See page 8.

"I assure you, sir," returned Chiron, with a smile, "had I known that I was to have been made the mark for a rifle-bullet, I should have chosen some other spot than this upon which to have stood the fire; but you know we seldom get sufficient warning of such events to admit of very choice arrangements."

"What, sir!" exclaimed the baronet, in amazement, "do you mean to say that you have been shot at?"

"I have, sir. There, do you see that boat, just crawling out from under the bank?"

"Yes," answered Sir Oliver, looking in the direction pointed out.

"Well, sir, there are two men in it, and they have followed me up from the town. I took no notice of them, for I little thought they meant me harm; but as I hauled my canoe up on to the bank and started towards your house, one of them fired at me. The ball whizzed past my head, and as I turned towards them they paddled under the bank and started back down the stream."

"And have you any idea who they are?"

"Yes, I think I know. They are two men named Gilman and Colton."

"Gilman and Colton?" uttered the baronet, with a moment's thought. "Why, those are the two men whom Mr. Berkley told me detected young Chester in the act of burying the body of the Indian."

"Yes, they are the same; and now they seem to wish that I were buried."

"But there is some mystery in this affair. What means it all?"

"Sir Oliver, I came here to-night for the express purpose of unravelling to you the whole plot; and if you will give me an hour's time, I will tell to you a tale that shall make you wonder at some things, and cease to wonder at others."

In a few moments the baronet had excused himself from his family and was seated in his private room with Chiron, and after turning the key in the door, the hunter began his story.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE SECRET OF THE OLD OAKEN CHEST.

SIR OLIVER WIMPLE and Chiron were closeted over an hour, and when at length they came forth to the sitting-room, there was upon the face of the former a strange mingling of astonishment and gratification, while the latter, with a bright smile upon his features, seated himself by the side of Ada.

"Lady," said he, as he gazed with an admiring, friendly look into her handsome features, "I have been requested by one who is now in prison to give to you his faithful remembrance, and he trusts that you will not despise him because fate has for the time abused him."

"Then you, sir, know something of Orlando Chester," uttered Ada, without seeming to notice what he had said.

"I know that he is innocent of all crime, lady."

"God be praised for that assurance," murmured Ada, as she clasped her hands together. "I knew that he could not be guilty."

"And when I see him again what shall I tell him of comfort from you?"

"Nothing, nothing," quickly exclaimed the fair girl, while her eyes sparkled with a strange light.

"And will you send him no word?" asked Chiron, in astonishment.

"No, words are treacherous conveyances of

thought when they come second-handed. I will go to Orlando's cell myself, and should you see him before I do, you may tell him this. He can ask no more."

"No, and he would not have dared to have even hoped so much," returned Chiron, with a look of admiration.

"May I not go and see him?" asked Ada, as she arose from her seat and approached her father.

"Yes, my child," returned the baronet, without hesitation. "You were right in your assertion of the young man's innocence, and you have my full permission to render him all the comfort in your power."

The strange expression upon the countenance of her father caught Ada's eye, and she asked him the cause, but he shook his head in a sort of mysterious manner, remarking as he did so:

"What I have learned to-night, Ada, has only been entrusted in my keeping in case that Chiron should be taken away. Until within the last hour and a half a secret deeply concerning young Chester has been locked up in his own bosom, and he has only communicated it to me, so that, should some enemy's rifle pick him off, as came very near being the case to-night, it might not be lost with himself. Let the assurance that Orlando is safe satisfy you for the present."

"Of course it will, my father, since you wish it, and I thank you, too," returned Ada.

Then turning to Chiron, whom she regarded now almost with reverence, she said:

"And you, sir, will convey to Orlando what I have said."

"I will, lady," answered Chiron, and as he spoke he arose from his chair and took his cap.

"But you are not going to-night," said Sir Oliver, as he noticed the movement of his guest.

"Yes, the moon will light me on my way," replied the old hunter, "and I would be back early on the morrow."

"But may there not be danger?"

"Not so much as by daylight," said Chiron, with a smile. "I have nothing to fear but cowards, and they dare not lurk in the forest at night."

"Our house is at your service," remarked the baronet; "but if you choose to set forth to-night, then may God protect you."

"Thank you, sir," returned the hunter, and then bidding the family good night, he left the dwelling.

Chiron took his way down to the river, and having launched his canoe, he leaped quickly into it and paddled swiftly up stream. The tide was in his favor, and in less than two hours he had reached the spot where Orlando's canoe was concealed in the bushes, and having hauled his own up out of sight, he struck off towards the young hunter's cot. It was two hours past midnight when he reached the dwelling, and as the front door was fastened, he went around to the back part, where he knew Old Elpsey slept. At first the old woman was considerably frightened as she was aroused by the knocking of the hunter, but at length he succeeded in making her understand that he was a friend, and that he also had a message from Orlando.

At the mention of this last circumstance, Old Elpsey uttered a cry of delight, and bidding the hunter go round to the front of the dwelling again, she unfastened the door and admitted him.

"—sh!" uttered Elpsey, as Chiron entered the dwelling; "don't make any noise, 'cause dear missus just got to sleep. She been ransacking de ole chest again. But dear young massa—how is he?"

The old woman had at once recognized the hunter, as him who had been there once before, and with whom Orlando had gone to Jamestown, so she felt no hesitation in trusting him.

"Orlando is well," returned Chiron, in answer

to the old woman's question, "and he will return to you ere long."

"Den dey wont hang him."

"Hang him? Why, what should put such an idea into your head?"

"O, Massa Orlando tell me all 'bout what dey take him for."

"Well, then you may rest assured that he is safe, and that in a few days he will be at liberty. But how does his mother get along during his absence?"

"O, sho berry well now, only she speak sometime as though she think he might leab her, but I tell her no, an' den she better. She don't say much to Old Elpsey. She most de time out in de garden."

"Then she has n't suffered much yet?"

"No, only to-night, when she oberhaul de ole chest."

"Well, Elpsey—that's your name I believe."

"Yes sar."

"Then if you will let me have a bed, I will retire for the rest of the night."

"You can hab Orlando's bed, an' I'll git you a candle."

As Elpsey spoke she went into the kitchen, and in a few moments returned with a lighted candle, and showed the hunter the ladder which led up into the garret. Chiron thanked her for her kindness, and after bidding her a good night, he set his rifle against the fire-place and ascended the ladder.

As soon as he reached the landing he set his candle down, and having pulled off his heavy moccasins, threw himself upon the bed. He removed none of his clothing, nor did he seem inclined to fall asleep, for with his head resting on his hand, so as to leave both ears free, he eagerly listened for the sounds that came up from below. He could hear the deep breathing of Morgiana Chester, for the door of her room was open, and the night air was calm and quiet, and he could hear Elpsey, too, still lumbering around in the kitchen in her stockinged feet. Still the hunter listened, and at length he heard the old woman get into her bed, and it was not long before her loud snore began to rumble through the humble dwelling. A few moments Chiron waited to assure himself that all about the house was quiet, then he slipped quietly from the bed, took the candle in his hand, and silently descended the ladder. At the foot he listened for a moment, and then stole carefully towards the old oaken chest. He tried the cover, and a

low murmur of disappointment escaped his lips as he found that it was not only locked, but that the key was not there.

"It must be in Morgiana's own room, somewhere," uttered Chiron to himself, as he turned and looked towards the open door that led to Mrs. Chester's sleeping-room. "I would not waken her for the world, but yet I must make the trial, for Orlando must be released from that jail, and that, too, speedily."

Thus speaking to himself, the powerful hunter moved noiselessly towards the small room before him, taking care to shade the light so that its beams should not penetrate the kitchen. At the door he stopped and looked in. Morgiana was lying upon her right side, with her face turned towards the wall, and was evidently under the influence of a sleep from which she could not be easily awakened. With an eager, searching gaze the hunter peered about the room, but nowhere could he find the sought-for key. He lifted the various articles of clothing from their respective hanging-places, examined a small box that lay upon Mrs. Chester's dressing-table, and moved back the table itself, but nowhere did the key appear.

Chiron began to fear that his search would be fruitless, and already had he become almost disheartened. He stood near the bed, with his hand interposed between the blaze of the candle and the sleeper; gradually, however, he let the light fall upon the sleeping form of Morgiana, but with no other view than to gain one more look upon those features that had called up in his bosom such strange and powerful emotions of affection. A tear stole to the eye of the strange man, as he gazed upon those peaceful features, and for the moment he almost forgot the object of his visit as a silent prayer wended its way out from his heart. Pale as marble were the lines of that beautiful countenance, with here and there a blue vein just raised above the surface, and as the hunter gazed, the simple words, "*Poor Morgiana,*" burst involuntarily from his lips.

Chiron was upon the point of turning sadly away, when a small black ribbon upon Morgiana's neck arrested his attention, and the thought that the key might be attached to it instantly entered his mind. But how was he to get it? Were Mrs. Chester to learn of the secret she had lost, in her present state of mind, it might ruin all his hopes, and blast her own and her son's future prospect; but still if the key was upon

that ribbon he felt that he must have it, and stepping nearer to the bed, he carefully examined the object that had caught his eye. With a hand trembling beneath the excitement of the occasion the hunter took the ribbon in his hand, and carefully he drew it out from beneath the clothing that covered it. There was a key upon it! Chiron waited a moment in deep study as to how he should gain possession of the key, now that he had found it. There was but one way, and that was to cut the ribbon. Fortunately the place where it was knotted was in sight, and drawing his hunting-knife from its sheath he bent over and cut the knot in two, and then drew off the key. A single instant he remained to see if he had disturbed the sleeper, but finding that she moved not, he again placed his hand before the blaze of the candle and glided noiselessly back to the main apartment. Here he listened a moment to assure himself that Elpsey still slept, and as her loud, regular snoring fell upon his ear, he once more started on. Chiron sat the candle down in a chair by the side of the old oaken chest, and then he placed the key in the lock; he turned it—it fitted! With a steady hand he urged the bolt back, so that not even a sound broke the air, and then he slowly, noiselessly lifted the cover. The various articles in the chest were packed away with care and precision, but Chiron touched them not.

"Poor Morgiana," murmured he to himself, as he stood and gazed into the chest, "what a strange freak it must have been that could thus have taken your secret from you, and yet left you so vivid a recollection of its existence. How many times have you searched this old depository through and through, and yet left the task in disappointment."

As the hunter spoke he cast a furtive glance about him, and then bending over he placed his fingers upon one of the hinge-plates that was screwed to the cover. The hinges were of stout iron, and the plates—one fastened to the body of the chest, and the other to the cover—were long and wide, and apparently well studded with screws. Having satisfied himself that he had hit upon the right spot, Chiron drew from his pocket a small screw-driver, and applying it to one of the screw-heads near the end of the plate, he turned it half round, then he placed his thumb upon the head of the screw next to it, which he easily slid from its place, and, from the sound that accompanied the motion, evidently

moving a small bolt at the same time. This having been accomplished, he removed his thumb to the end of the plate, and, pressing hard upon it, a section of the iron surface flew back, revealing a small chamber not over half an inch deep, within which was a small roll of parchment.

With an eager movement Chiron grasped the parchment, unrolled it, and held it down to the candle. A bright, joyous light overspread his features as he ran his eyes over the characters that were traced thereon, and with a pleasant "*Thank God!*" he rolled it up again and placed it carefully in his bosom. Then he shut up the little chamber thus strangely opened, moved the seeming screw-heads back to their former positions, closed the chest and relocked it.

Once more the old hunter took up his candle and turned his steps towards the small sleeping-room. Morgiana had not moved, but all unconscious of what was going on about her she slept in peaceful quiet. Gently setting the candle upon the small work-table, Chiron bent over the sleeping woman; and having cleared the ends of the ribbon from the remains of the former knot, he slipped the key back to its wonted place, and knotted it anew, so that no one could have told from its looks that it had been disturbed. One more moment that strange man gazed upon the sweet, angelic face before him, then he took his candle and stole noiselessly back to his bed in the garret.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A STRANGE VISIT, WITH A STRANGE RESULT.

"I WAS on the same night that Chiron visited the maniac mother's cot in the forest, that Orlando Chester had thrown himself upon the couch, and had been half buried in an uneasy, fitful slumber; but how long he had been thus he could not tell, when he was startled by a sort of thumping noise upon the wall, and as he gradually regained his sleep-scattered senses he became aware that the sound proceeded from a point directly beneath his window. The first thought that passed his mind was that of some new danger, but in a moment he recollected the parting words of Chiron, and a vague idea that this might be him at once dispelled the fear. At all events, he resolved that he would quietly await the result, let it be what it might.

The thumping sound soon ceased, and Orlando was pretty sure that a ladder had been placed against the wall, and in that opinion he was presently confirmed by the appearance of a human head at the window; and, from a few faint, glimmering beams that shot up from below, he judged that there was not only a lantern outside, but that some one was holding it. The individual who had thus appeared at the window, said not a word; but, as near as our hero could tell through the darkness, he turned and drew up something after him, which, from its sound as it thumped against the wall, seemed to be a heavy iron bar.

Orlando could only gain the outlines of the stranger, and his only clue to these strange proceedings was gained from the sound that accompanied them. At length the prisoner became aware that the beam was being forced between the bars of his window, and in a moment more he knew that the bars were being forced from their sockets. Fifteen minutes had thus passed when the gratings had been all forced out, and then the man disappeared from the window, and the prisoner thought he could hear the hum of a hurried conversation going on below. In a few moments, however, the man reappeared, bearing in his hand a small dark lantern, and by means of a rope which he had drawn up after him, and the end of which he threw over the sill, he let himself down into the cell. The new comer was a thick set, muscular man, habited in the rough garb of a seaman, and as he threw open his lantern Orlando had an opportunity to study the outlines of his countenance; but they betrayed no marked or prominent feature, except that they indicated any amount of reckless daring, without anything that could be termed decidedly villainous, or evil-disposed.

For a few moments after the stranger had thus gained entrance to the cell he bent his ears towards the door, as if to assure himself that all

was quiet in the jail, and then, turning towards Orlando, he said:

"Rather a strange way for a man to get himself into jail, but circumstances alter cases, you know; and as I know my visit 'll be welcome, I sha'n't stop to make any apologies."

"You are most certainly welcome to stay as long as you see fit," returned Orlando.

"Thank you; but I sha'n't stay long, for I haven't a very great fancy for this kind of a place—howsoever, I'll stop long enough to do my business."

"Well, and what might be your business?"

"Can't you guess it?"

"I never guess at a man's business when he is himself present to speak for himself."

"But of course you know what my business must be."

"How should I? You have not told me."

"No, but there's an old saying that 'actions speak louder than words.' Now, 'taint very likely I should have taken the trouble to break away the bars of your jug just for the sake of coming in here, unless I had calculated that when I went out you'd go too."

"Do you mean that you've come to set me at liberty?" uttered our hero, while a peculiar series of lights and shades passed over his countenance.

"That is exactly what I come for," returned the stranger, with a countenance indicative of nothing but an idea of common business.

"But I never saw you before," said Orlando, as he gazed inquiringly into the face of the man before him.

"Neither did I ever see you before," laconically replied the stranger.

"Then, why should I trust you?"

"Because I come to set you free."

"But there is such a thing as 'jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire,'" said our hero, in a sort of thoughtful mood.

"Yes, I grant it; such, for instance, as jumping out of jail on to the gallows," returned the stranger, with a twinkling smile.

The youth shuddered as he heard this remark, but quickly casting off the feeling, he said:

"But there is no danger that such a fate will be mine, for I am perfectly innocent of the crime with which I am charged, and can prove it."

"That you are innocent, young sir, I have not the least doubt, though to prove it may not be so easy. But come, we are wasting time. If you will but follow me, all danger is at end."

"And wherefore should I follow you? I know you not."

"Do you know Chiron?"

"Chiron—yes. He is my friend."

"Chiron sent me on this mission."

"But why did he not come himself?"

"Because he had other business."

"He might at least have left me a word," said Orlando, half to himself, for a shade of suspicion that all was not right had passed through his mind.

"He had no chance to leave you word," returned the stranger, seeming to comprehend what was passing in the youth's mind.

"But did he not send any writing?—any token?"

"Only myself. He thought that would be sufficient. I met him just at sundown, and he told me that you must be relieved from the jail this night, and out of an old friendship for him I undertook the job; and now if you would have me make sure of it, the sooner you come along the better."

"Look ye here," said Orlando, while the dawning of a new idea seemed to flash upon him, "have you known Chiron long?"

The stranger averted his eyes for a moment, and he seemed to hesitate for an answer; but at length he said, while he evidently endeavored to have his hesitancy pass for a period of thought:

"I've known him off and on for a number of years."

"And do you know who he is—from whence he comes—or where he belongs?" asked the prisoner, with considerable earnestness.

The stranger's face brightened up, and a meaning twinkle played in his eyes, as he answered:

"If Chiron has'n't told you this himself, I had'n't ought to tell it, either, for perhaps he has reasons for concealing it."

Young Chester mistrusted not this answer, for he thought 'twas given in good faith, and once more he turned his thoughts upon the object of the present visit, and for some moments he seemed undecided what course to pursue. At length he said:

"I am obliged to you, sir, for the kindness and solicitude you have manifested in my behalf, but I cannot go with you, for 'twould only serve to make appearances bear harder against me than they do now. As it is, I can prove my innocence; but if I attempt to escape, that innocence will thereby become more doubtful."

A deep shade of disappointment passed over the stranger's countenance, and for a moment he seemed to hesitate, but gradually a beam of intelligence shot athwart his features, and in a tone of considerable feeling, he said:

"I think you'll change your mind."

"Not without some stronger inducement than my own personal safety," returned Orlando, with considerable assurance.

"And such an inducement I can easily give you. You have a poor maniac mother."

"Ha! my mother!" exclaimed the young hunter, starting forward and grasping his companion by the arm, "What of her?"

"She moans for you, and would see you, and if you would not have her poor heart broken, you will go to her at once."

"Alas! my poor mother!" murmured the youth, as he placed his open palm upon his brow, then turning to the stranger once more, he said: "For my mother, sir, I'll dare anything. I'll go, though the officers seize upon me again to-morrow. Lead on, and I will follow you."

"O, you need n't be afraid of the officers," returned the stranger, "for Chiron will look out for that."

"But how can he prevent them from again arresting me?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. He did n't explain any of his plans. But come, just lend me a hand to get this bed of yours up here under the window, and we'll be out of this in short order. We have n't got much time to lose."

The mention of his mother had made the young man as firm in his resolution to go as he had been before undecided; and without hesitation he helped his companion move the couch up under the window, and while the latter was placing the stool on top of the bed, Orlando said:

"Since you have thus befriended me, I should like at least to know your name—that is, if you have no objections."

"Not in the least," returned the stranger, as he tried the stool to see if it set firmly enough in its place to afford a good foothold, "my name is Dick Nolan. Come, here she goes. Follow me as soon as possible."

As Nolan spoke, he took his lantern and mounted upon the stool, from the top of which he easily threw himself across the sill of the window and soon disappeared. There was a strange fluttering about the heart of our hero as he started to follow, and he even hesitated, as a

dim, shadowy fear of treachery flitted through his mind; but the image of his poor mother at once dispelled the indecision, and with a quick bound he mounted the stool. He found no difficulty in working his way through the aperture, and by means of a rope, which he found in readiness, he let himself down to the ground, for the ladder by which his visitor had ascended had been removed to the wall, and thither Nolan at once led the way, where our hero found a man in waiting.

"—sh!" uttered Nolan to his waiting companion, "Is't all right?"

"Not a mouse has stirred," returned the other, in a low whisper.

"Then over, quick," said Nolan, and then turning to Orlando he bade him go next, and he would follow and pull the ladder up after him.

Nolan's companion and our hero reached the top of the wall, and bent low down upon the coping, while Nolan himself came up and hauled the ladder after him, and as soon as it had been landed upon the other side, the trio silently descended. The moon was shining somewhat brightly, and Orlando got a fair view of his deliverer's companion, who was, like Nolan, habited in a seaman's garb, and seemed also to be a reckless, daring fellow.

The river was only a few rods from the jail wall, and towards its shore Nolan led the way, where a small skiff was found hauled up on the sand; and as soon as it was launched, the young hunter was requested to enter it. He seated himself in the stern-sheets, and in a moment more, Nolan and his companion entered and began to row from the shore.

"Up, up the stream should lay our course," said Orlando, as he noticed that the boat was being headed down the river.

"We'll not venture by the town in this moonlight, for our cargo is rather *contraband*," returned Nolan. "I do not want that you should be taken from me now, for the job of getting possession of you was by no means an easy one."

The young hunter looked up into Nolan's face as he said this, and as he dwelt upon the seaman's features he thought he could detect a look of irony resting there; and the manner in which he had spoken, too, partook strangely of a nonchalance little in keeping with the tone of an earnest deliverer.

"Do you intend to land below the town and walk around through the outskirts?" asked the youth, not yet daring to suspect that he had been betrayed.

"We sha'n't land *above* the town at present," returned Nolan, bending himself powerfully at his oar. "Just consider yourself safe, and let that satisfy you."

Orlando Chester could see the countenances of both his companions, and as the moonbeams fell full upon them he was enabled to study well what meaning might rest upon them; but he gained little from the survey, for they both seemed only intent upon the object of their mission. What that object might be, or what might be the end of their mission, he could not tell,

though a strange doubt began to frame itself in his mind, and as the skiff was rowed swiftly on, farther and farther from the town, and that, too, in an opposite direction from that which should have been taken to convey him to his home, those doubts grew stronger, until at length, the fearful reality of a base treachery stared him in the face; but yet the young hunter resolved that he would not entirely give up his hopes of there still being some truth in the assertions of Nolan, though the substance of those hopes did not even approach to a probability.



## CHAPTER XV.

### THE LEASHED VILLAIN.

It was quite early in the morning when Chiron arose from his bed in the garret of the forest cot, and while in the act of putting on his moccasins he was not a little surprised at seeing the woolly head of Old Elpsey just peering up through the ladder-scuttle. The hounds had been whining and growling for some time, but the old hunter had supposed they were only mourning for the continued absence of their young master, and he consequently gave but little attention to the matter; but as he caught the expression that rested upon the black features of the old woman he began to think that something unusual had occurred, and hastily lacing his moccasins, he approached the scuttle.

"What's the matter, Elpsey?" he asked, as he reached the aperture.

"O, sir, I don't know what's de matter, but dere's some men in de woods dat's been watchin' de house for dis half hour."

"Men watching the house!" repeated Chiron, while the working of the cords and muscles about his neck and hands bespoke the feelings which the communication had called up, "How many are there?"

"I did n't see only three."

"And what did they look like, Elpsey?"

"I couldn't say for sartin, sir, 'cause dey was hid behind de bushes. But dey was watchin' de

house, an' I tink one ob 'em was de same dat cum an' watch for Massa Orlando when he went to bury de Indian."

"Then, by heavens, there's some new plan on foot," uttered the old hunter, half to himself, "and a villanous one, too. Go you down, Elpsey, and I will follow. But stop. Does your mistress know anything of this?"

"No sir. She's only just got up, an' I didn't say nothin' to her 'bout it."

As the old woman spoke she descended the ladder, and Chiron soon followed her. In the room below he found Mrs. Chester, but she seemed to betray no surprise at his appearance, though she regarded him with a curious, inquiring gaze.

"Ah, you, sir, have come from the town, have you not?" she asked, as Chiron took a few steps into the room.

"I have, madam," the hunter answered, as he moved back a step to avoid the window, which commanded a view of the woods in front of the house.

"And have you seen my son?" the poor woman asked, stepping quickly forward and laying her hand upon Chiron's arm.

"Yes, madam; and I bear to you a message from him. He is well, and will ere long be with you."

## THE YOUNG HUNTER.

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"But why should he leave me thus? Why should Orlando desert me for so long?" exclaimed Mrs. Chester, while a painful light shone in her eyes.

"He has business in Jamestown," returned the hunter, "that he could not leave; but he begged of me to give you his love, and assure you that he would soon return."

"Then my boy still loves me, and he will come back. Ah sir! his father said, too, that he loved me, and he promised to come back, but he never did. 'Twas cruel for him to treat me thus, was it not?"

Again that plaintive, heart-broken voice thrilled through the soul of the hunter, and he turned away his head to hide the emotions he could not suppress. In a few moments Mrs. Chester turned towards the wall where a wreath of garden anemone and aspen leaves was hung upon the top of a wooden cross, and she seemed to forget that a comparative stranger was present. Chiron took advantage of the movement and sought Elpsey in the kitchen.

The hounds still continued their low growling, though they had not yet gone far from their kennel, and in their brute language one could easily read the warning of danger. The hunter held a short conference with the old woman, the result of which was that she should not be under any serious apprehension, and that he would remain near enough to protect them if danger threatened, but yet he felt safe in assuring her that she and her mistress had nothing to fear.

Chiron had good reason to believe that if the men who were lurking about the house had any sinister purpose, he was the object of it; and for some moments he studied as to what course it was best for him to pursue. At length a course seemed laid out in his mind, and turning to Elpsey he asked her to accompany him to the garden and remain there till he got out of sight in the woods; for he could not but harbor the idea that if Gilman and Colton were about the spot, they had come for the purpose of assassinating him, and if no one were by to witness the deed, they might shoot him before he could reach the woods. For this purpose, then, he wished Elpsey to be near enough to witness what might take place; but at the same time he strictly enjoined it upon her that she should betray no fear, nor manifest a single sign by which the lurking men might mistrust that their presence had been discovered, or that anything out of the common course of affairs had transpired.

Elpsey promised implicit obedience to these requests, and having assured himself that the priming of his rifle was in safe order, and that the flint was clean, the hunter stepped out from the house, followed by Elpsey, and after a few moments of careless conversation he shouldered his rifle and started for the woods.

Though Chiron walked swiftly on, yet he had his eyes about him, ready to catch the least movement that might be made against him; but no such movement was made, and he reached the woods in safety. As soon as he had proceeded far enough to feel assured that he was secure from observation, he left the path and ensconced himself behind a clump of alders, in such a position that he could command a view of the path, and yet be hidden from the sight of any who might pass.

The hunter had not been in this position more than five minutes when his ear caught the sound of crackling bushes from the opposite side of the path, and in a moment more the villain Gilman emerged from the shubbery. He was creeping along with a swift, but cat-like tread, with his rifle at rest, and peering ahead as though in search of some object for his ready weapon. Chiron's first impulse was to shoot the villain on the spot, for well he knew that 'twas he who fired at him the night before; but an instant's reflection changed his mind, and while a grim smile passed over his features, he raised his rifle and took deliberate aim at the lock of Gilman's piece.

Chiron's ball did not fail him, and the villain uttered a sharp cry as he heard the report and felt his own rifle fall shattered from his grasp. In a moment, however, he seemed to comprehend that he was not hurt, save a few slight wounds from the splinters of his rifle-stock, and turning quickly around he sought to ascertain from whence had come the shot.

"So, so, Mr. Gilman, you are on another accidental expedition, I suppose?" ironically exclaimed Chiron, as he came forth from his hiding-place.

The villain started back as he beheld the gigantic form of the old hunter, and for a moment he trembled with fear; but soon his native impudence came to his aid, and with a show of defiance he said:

"I do not skulk about in the woods like a coward, at all events. If I wanted to shoot a person I'd meet him like a man, and not hide in the bushes to stab him in the back; but your

bangling aim has saved my life, and now you'll suffer for this."

Chiron leaned quietly upon his rifle and gazed with the utmost contempt upon the villain before him. At length a bitter laugh broke from his lips, and while the villain shrank from his strange manner, he said:

"Dost think I aimed at thee, and missed my mark? No, I only sought to shatter your rifle; for a rifle, even in the hands of a villainous coward like yourself, may be a dangerous thing. Now, Master Gilman, I have thee on the hip, and you will not escape so easily. Please tell me what business could have called you thus early into the forest?"

"I suppose I have as good a right to be in the forest at this time as yourself," returned Gilman, in a sullen mood.

"Certainly," remarked Chiron, as he poured a charge of powder into the barrel of his rifle; "but then if you've come for any villainous purpose, you'll of course expect to bear the consequences."

"Do you mean to shoot me?" cried Gilman, as Chiron rammed home the bullet, at the same time starting to spring forward.

"Back!" shouted Chiron. "If you but lay a finger on me you die on the instant! Now tell me"—and as he spoke he poured the priming into the pan of his rifle—"who they are that you have left in the forest near young Chester's dwelling?"

"I have left no one."

"Villain! coward! you lie!" shouted the old hunter, while the deep passion-marks began to manifest themselves upon his features. "You did leave men skulking about the place, and I will find them out myself."

"Then go and try it."

"I intend to."

"And I wish you success."

There was a dark, lowering look in the features of Gilman as he spoke, and already had he turned to move away.

"Stop a moment, my dear sir," said Chiron, as he stepped quickly forward and laid his hand heavily upon the villain's arm. "I would not have you think that you are to run at large while I look after your companions. I shall provide for your safety first."

"Don't lay your hand on me," exclaimed Gilman, and as he spoke he drew a knife from his girdle.

The hunter's eyes flashed with a sparkling light as he saw this movement, and with a quick, powerful blow of his ponderous fist he laid the villain at his feet; then he took from his pocket a number of deer-hide thongs with which he firmly bound the fallen man's ankles, and then pinioned his arms behind him. Having accomplished this he raised Gilman to his feet, set him against a tree, and with a long stout thong the hunter bound him to the trunk in an upright posture.

Gilman swore and raved, threatened and entreated, but all to no effect. The old hunter was inflexible in his purpose, and as soon as he had accomplished it he took up his rifle and started off, remarking, as he did so:

"Don't fret, Master Gilman. I'll release you when I come back."

"You needn't trouble yourself," returned the villain, with an oath.

"O, it's no trouble, I assure you; and besides, I may want your company back to Jamestown."

"I will be sorry company for you," said Gilman.

"Rather disreputable, I grant," coolly returned Chiron, and as he spoke he passed on, but yet for a long distance he could hear the bound villain's curses and imprecations mingled with hissing groans of rage and disappointment.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A DARK PLOT IS BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

WITH long and rapid strides the old hunter retraced his steps towards the cot, and as he approached it he bent his eyes about him to see if he could observe anything stirring; but nothing unusual met his gaze, and he had almost begun to think that Gilman's companions had also gone, when the piteous whinings and howlings of the hounds fell upon his ear, and upon hastening up to the spot he found that they had been shut up within their kennel. With a powerful pull at the door he tore it open, and the hounds, finding themselves thus released, sprang out with a bound, and seeming at once to recognize their deliverer, they crouched wistfully at his feet.

Chiron was just in the act of patting one of the dogs upon the head when a sharp, agonizing cry struck upon his ear, and, as though a knife had been driven to his heart, did he start around and spring towards the house. He darted for the front door, and throwing it quickly open he entered the front room. The sight that met his gaze seemed for the instant to freeze him to the spot. Poor Morgiana Chester was upon her knees—the tears were streaming almost in torrents down her pale cheeks, and with clasped hands she was begging of the man who stood above her not to drag her from her home. There was no anger, no rage upon her features; but from out her upturned eyes there gleamed a

look of prayerful, imploring misery that might have melted the heart of a stone.

The man who was thus driving the poor maniac mother to distraction was the villain Colton, and near him, but seeming to take no active part in the scene, stood a man whom Chiron had never before seen, but who, from his garb, appeared to be a physician.

"Come, up, I say," exclaimed Colton, as he grasped the woman's arm. "Give us no more of your prating. I don't know your husband, and I don't know as you ever had one; but we'll take you to a better place than this."

Chiron only hesitated at the door for a moment. He saw the tears as they coursed down Morgiana's cheeks, and he saw her pure white bosom as it heaved with the agony of her terror-wrought soul—and he saw, too, that sacrilegious grasp that held the quivering flesh of her snowy arm. He spoke not a word, and the only sound he made as he stepped forward was the sharp creaking of his grating teeth. But the hunter's movement was quick, and clenching his massive fist he hurled, with all his powerful might, a blow at the head of the cowardly villain. Colton dodged as his eye caught the movement of the old hunter, and the blow which had been intended for his head fell upon his bare neck!

The unfeeling, remorseless villain sank upon

the floor like a flimsy bag, and in another moment the purple tide of life burst forth from his mouth and nostrils. He moved not, nor did he utter a groan, for even as the lightning's flash dies in the heavens had the coward's spark of life gone out!

Morgiana Chester started to her feet, and even her shattered mind seemed to comprehend that she was once more free. She gazed up into the face of Chiron, and as he instinctively opened his arms she fell forward upon his bosom. The stout man dropped a silent tear upon her head, and, influenced by a power which he could not control, he imprinted upon her marble-like brow a warm kiss.

"Look up, sweet Morgiana," he murmured, as he placed his hand upon her head. "Look up, for you are safe."

"Safe," repeated the poor woman, gazing up into Chiron's features with a vacant look. "Surely no one would harm me; and yet, but even now, that bad man said he would take me hence—that he would take me from my home; but he did not mean it, for I have lived many years, and no one ever found it in his heart to harm me. Yet, methinks his voice sounded harsh, and he grasped me by the arm even till my poor flesh was sorely pained. He must have had a bad heart. Where is he?"

Almost unconsciously, as Morgiana spoke, the old hunter's eye wandered to the spot where lay the yet warm corpse of the stricken villain. Hers followed, and as she beheld the inanimate body a strange light beamed athwart her countenance, and in a touching, melting tone, she murmured:

"See! see! The poor man weeps, and O, how deeply from out his heart must come that fount of tears, for see! they are red, even like blood! He moves not, neither does his bosom swell and fall with the flow and ebb of breath. Sir!—He does not answer me. Then that is not a fount of tears—'tis blood, and he is dead! God has stricken him, even as he did the host of Pharaoh; and he must have been a bad man, or God would have let him live. Hold my head, sir, for 'tis weak. See! the dead man moves! He rises! O, save me save me!"

The excitement of the scenes through which she had just passed had proved too much for the shattered mind of Morgiana Chester, and with a deep groan she sank heavily upon the arm of the hunter. Old Elpsey had been a silent, though deeply interested, spectator of the

scene, and as she saw her mistress faint she sprang eagerly forward.

"Take her to her bed, Elpsey," said Chiron, as he resigned Morgiana's inanimate form into the hands of the faithful servant, "and bathe her brow with cool water. She will soon recover."

The old woman lifted the airy form of her mistress in her arms and easily deposited her burden upon the bed within the small sleeping-room, and as soon as Chiron had seen Morgiana thus cared for he turned towards the stranger, who had been standing near the window.

"Now, sir," said the old hunter, looking with anything but a joy-inspiring countenance upon the object of his question, "wherefore are you here?"

The stranger quailed before the glance of Chiron, and an ashy pallor overspread his features.

"Don't kill me! For God's sake, don't!" he uttered in fear-fraught tones.

"Answer my question, sir," thundered the giant hunter, advancing a step and raising his finger.

"Spare me, and I will," tremblingly returned the stranger.

"Then speak, and at once. Why came ye here?"

"I came to help remove a crazy woman."

"And who are you? What are you?"

"A physician, sir."

"And, after what you had seen of that poor woman's state of mind, did you still think of removing her? After you had seen her upon her bended knees, with her hands clasped in agony, her cheeks flowing with tears, and her plaintive voice awoke to earnest prayer, did you then think of removing her—of dragging her from her home?"

The physician trembled in silence.

"Speak, sir, and answer me!"

"I—I—sir, was not the principal in this matter. He who lies there had the lead. I only came professionally."

"Professionally!" repeated Chiron, in a tone of the utmost irony. "And pray, sir, to what end was your *profession* enlisted?"

"I was sent, sir, to see if the woman was actually crazy."

"And what was your decision?"

The physician shrank from the question with a dread that was manifest in every feature of his countenance, but Elpsey, who was at that mo-

ment passing through the room with a pan of water, helped him.

"Massa Chiron," she said, "dat man say dat my missus was stark, starin' mad, an' dat dey must take her off. Dat's whaf he say."

"Look ye, thou creeping, lying, miserable Esculapian, dost see that form at my feet?"

"Yes sir," replied the physician, quaking with fear, as he gazed upon the corpse of Colton.

"Then mark me," said Chiron, suddenly changing his tone to a low, deep whisper, which seemed like the premonitory rumbling of an earthquake, "if you do not answer such questions as I ask, and that, too, without prevarication, you shall sleep by the side of your villainous companion in guilt. Now, sir, were not Gilman, Colton and yourself lurking about here for half an hour before I started off towards the woods?"

"Yes sir."

"Did you know when Gilman started off after me?"

"Yes sir."

"Now, what was his object in following me? Quick, sir."

The physician's legs seemed almost ready to give way beneath his weight as he returned:

"It was to—kill—you, sir!"

"So I thought," said the hunter, while a dark smile flitted across his features. "And now, sir, who sent you three on this errand?"

The man hesitated. Chiron pointed significantly down to the cold corpse.

"It was Mr. Berkley."

"So I thought again. And he paid you well for your part of the job."

"Yes sir."

"And made you pledge your honor that you would keep the mission a secret."

"Yes sir."

A scornful laugh broke from the lips of the old hunter, and the word "honor" dwelt upon his tongue.

"Well, well," uttered Chiron, after he had gazed upon the cowering physician for a moment or two, "though 'twere not safe to trust much upon the pledge of such a security, yet I wot

that Roswell Berkley little dreamed of the test-fire to which your honor would be put. But answer me one more question. What was to have been done with this woman, had you succeeded in dragging her hence?"

"I don't know, sir. Mr. Berkley said he would manage that if we would only make out to bring her to him."

"O, the double-dyed villain," murmured Chiron, as he clenched his fists tightly together. "But never mind, his punishment is even now hanging over his head; and 'tis one, too, of which he little dreams." Then turning once more to the physician, he asked: "What path did you take in coming here this morning?"

"We came up from the Chickahomung."

"And can you find your way back by the same path?"

"Yes, I think I can."

"Then go. There is the door, sir; and if ever you cross its threshold again it will be as the gate of your tomb. Begone, sir!"

"But Gilman—where—"

"Begone, I say!" thundered Chiron, "but before you go let me advise you not to see Mr. Berkley for the present, for it *might* lead to something unpleasant."

The physician crept tremblingly to the door, then turned to take one more look at the body of his fallen companion, and then, with a quick, but nervous, unsteady step, he started off.

"He goes not out by the river path, and so he will not release Gilman. 'Tis well," muttered Chiron to himself, as the form of the departing villain disappeared in the thick wood; and then turning to where lay the form of the fallen man, he murmured:

"So, so, Master Colton, you've paid heavily for your sins, though I meant not that it should have been thus. However, the world is better off without you, and I shall not waste grief for what I have done."

As he spoke he laid the stiff corpse upon his shoulder, and passing out the back way he took a spade, and went forth into the forest to prepare the last earthly resting-place for the stricken villain.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## A JUST RETRIBUTION.

WHEN Chiron returned to the house, after having disposed of Colton's body, he found that Mrs. Chester had recovered from her swoon, and that she seemed to have but little recollection of what had passed. She spoke of being dragged from her home, and of the man she had seen dead upon the floor, but her mind dwelt upon the scene rather as the memory of a dream than as a reality, and Chiron felt glad that it was so, for otherwise she might have suffered exceedingly. Now, however, she was calm and tranquil, and while the fatal affair of the morning seemed to pass entirely from her mind she dwelt with a peculiar sadness upon the absence of her son; but the old hunter assured her that he would soon bring Orlando back to her, and then taking one more long and earnest gaze upon Morgiana's beautiful features, he beckoned for Elpsey to follow him, and quitted the apartment.

"Did you ever fire a rifle?" asked Chiron, as soon as he got into the kitchen.

"O, yes, I fire Massa Rolando's."

Chiron went to the becketts above the fireplace, where one of the young man's rifles hung, and having found that it was loaded, he poured in fresh priming, and handing it to Elpsey, he said:

"There, keep that rifle handy, and if you are again assailed before I return, do not fear to use

it. Call the hounds into the house, and keep them here, for they can help you much. But," he continued, as he noticed the old woman's countenance was beginning to lengthen with new fear, "you need not be under any apprehensions, for there is in all probability no one left to harm you. The villain who has set these minions on will not dare to come himself, nor will he dare to trust many more with his dark secret; and besides, I think he will not learn of the failure of this attempt until I have him safely within the hands of justice. I go now to seek Orlando, and perhaps by to-morrow he will be here. You need not fear, but still 'tis safe enough to be prepared."

Elpsey seemed somewhat relieved by the assurance of Chiron, and she promised that she would be on her guard, and in a few moments more the old hunter passed through the front door and started for the river. His step was easy, and his countenance was moulded in a cast of deep satisfaction, for he believed that he had now crushed the power of Berkley, and that the way was clear for the release of Orlando. The villain whom he had left leashed in the woods he intended to take with him to Jamestown, and, through the influence of Sir Oliver, have him at once lodged in jail.

With such thoughts passing rapidly through

his mind, and occasionally murmuring, in broken, hurried sentences, to himself, the hunter hurried on. As he approached the spot where he had left Gilman he stopped a moment to hear if the villain was yet cursing, but all was quiet, even to a deathly stillness, and with the sudden thought that his prisoner had escaped, Chiron darted quickly forward.

As the old hunter approached the tree the sight that met his gaze made him start. There lay the stiff, extended form of Gilman, his face all black and swollen, his eyes protruding from their sockets, and his head bent forward upon his breast. The villain had attempted to escape by working his body downward, so as to clear the thong that bound him to the tree. He had settled his way down until the thong slipped over his breast, but here his feet appeared to have slipped out from under him, thus bringing the whole of his weight, upon the relentless thong, directly across his neck! The ground was gently sloping from the tree, and though the green, mossy turf showed marks of a fierce struggle for the regaining of his former position, yet the doomed man appeared not to have gained a single inch of vantage.

For several minutes Chiron gazed in silence upon the fearful scene before him, for it seemed to be the work of a power higher than his own.

"Master Gilman," murmured the hunter to himself, "the finger of an outraged God has settled upon thee. I meant not that you should have died yet, for I had use for thee, and I was willing that your insulted country should have had the hanging of thee. But it's done, for you've hung yourself, and my soul is washed from your blood."

As Chiron spoke he drew his knife from its sheath and cut the thong. The body rolled heavily down the slope, and as it settled at the hunter's feet he grasped it by the collar of the frock and dragged it within the bushes, and having covered it over with leaves, he started once more on his way. The more Chiron thought of the strange manner in which Gilman and Colton had come to their deaths, the more was he satisfied with the result, and by the time he had reached the spot where his canoe had been secured he thanked his fortune that he was thus rid of the two villains.

With powerful strokes the hunter propelled his frail bark down the river, and upon reaching the residence of Sir Oliver he urged his canoe in shore and leaped upon the sand. He found

the baronet in his study, together with his wife and daughter.

"Ah, Sir Oliver," exclaimed Chiron, as soon as he had answered the compliments with which he was welcomed, "the work goes nobly on. I have the villain fast, and to-morrow I may need your assistance. This day, sir, has been a scene of strange occurrences, and to-morrow, with your assistance, we will have young Chester released from his prison."

"Released!—to-morrow!" uttered Sir Oliver.

"Yes, and why not?"

"Why not? Did you not release him last night?"

"Who?"

"Orlando Chester."

"O, no; when I spoke about releasing him, I meant not to do it as soon as that, for I shall need your assistance."

"And do you mean to say that you have not released him?" said the baronet, in an earnest, meaning tone.

"Of course I have not," returned Chiron, in surprise. "Since I saw you last I have not been below here. But what mean you?"

"Orlando Chester has escaped from the jail—that is certain," answered Sir Oliver.

"No, no! That were impossible!" exclaimed the old hunter, while a sudden shade of anguish passed over his features. "You must have been misinformed."

"'Tis true," asserted the baronet, with a troubled look, "for couriers have already been dispatched in search of him. This morning his cell was found empty and the bars of his window had been forced from their sockets."

"But he could not have escaped unaided," said Chiron, in a tone that bore a slight shade of hope that he had done so.

"No. There were marks of a ladder below his window, and also the footprints of two beside himself, so he must have had plenty of assistance."

"Then," uttered Chiron, while a fearful convulsion shook his frame, "'tis the work of an enemy. Orlando has fallen into an adroitly laid snare. The black-hearted villain who has persecuted him knew that he could not sustain his charge, and he has adopted some new plan for the youth's ruin. Listen, sir, and I will tell you what has happened this morning, and then you may judge for yourself."

Thereupon Chiron related to the baronet all that had transpired; and as he closed his story,

Sir Oliver seemed too deeply struck with indignation and wonder to make any reply; but Ada sprang forward and grasping the old hunter by the arm, she cried, in a tone of touching agony: "O, save him! save him! Bring him back to me, and I will bless you ever."

Chiron gazed with mingled anguish and pity into the fair features that beamed upon him, and laying his hand upon Ada's smooth brow, he said:

"Sweet, faithful girl, if the earth holds the youth I will find him, or I will lay down my life in the search. I love him, too."

"O, bless you, bless you!" murmured the gentle, grief-stricken girl, and then bursting into tears, she fell upon her knees and pillowed her head in her mother's lap.

By this time Sir Oliver had recovered his composure, and after gazing a moment upon the bending form of his child, he said:

"Seek him out, Chiron, and if I can render assistance you may command me."

"I thank you, sir," returned Chiron. "But tell me—were there no traces by which to tell the way the prisoner took?"

"They were traced only to the river," answered the baronet.

For some time the hunter remained in deep thought, but at length he started himself from his reverie, and taking his cap in his hand, he said:

"When I came here I thought my work was almost done, but now, alas! I fear me that new obstacles are in my way. I'll surmount them,

though, and you, Sir Oliver, shall be advised of my success." Then turning to Ada, he said:

"Cheer up, lady, for all is not yet so dark but that some light gleams upon us; and when that light gleams in its full lustre upon you, you will be astonished and pleased with its effulgence. I must go now, but I will return to-morrow morning and give you the result of my investigation."

As the old hunter ceased speaking he took his leave and withdrew, and as soon as he was once more in his canoe, he plied himself with all his might. He had not expressed in the presence of the baronet's family all the fears he felt; but now that he was alone, his countenance worked and flashed in fearful anguish. His own life had been openly and boldly aimed at, and why might not the same evil hand be aimed at the life of young Chester? It was the first time Chiron had given the thought a home in his bosom, but now that he had conceived it, it grew stronger and stronger, until it became almost a belief.

The hunter landed at the jail, and ere long he had a full confirmation of the youth's abduction from his cell. He examined the footprints in the jail-yard, then traced them to the river; but from the officers of the prison he could learn nothing new, and with his heart tortured by a thousand fearful emotions, he started for the town. Could Chiron have been assured at that moment that Orlando lived, he would have been happy, and scarcely have held a fear; but in his heart he felt a sad foreboding that such was not the case.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE ENTRAPMENT.

LET us now return to our youthful hero whom we left just after his escape from the jail. The boat was rowed swiftly down the river, and though Orlando repeatedly asked to be informed whither they were conveying him they answered him not. At length, as the boat turned a point of land that projected into the stream, the youth caught sight of a heavy brig that lay at anchor only a short distance below, and in an instant the whole truth flashed across his mind, and springing from his seat he exclaimed, while his eyes flashed fire:

"Put me ashore, or I will sink the boat, and you with it. You have betrayed me, villains, but you shall not succeed!"

"Keep quiet, my young sir," said Nolan. "We aint going to hurt you."

"But do you mean to convey me on board that brig?"

"Guess we shall stop there for the present."

"Then turn your boat's head towards the shore, or I'll jump and swim for it."

"You can try it," coolly returned Nolan, as he drew a heavy pistol from his pocket and cocked it.

Orlando settled back upon his thwart with a groan, while Nolan laid the pistol down by his side and resumed his oar. The youth had no weapon, and no means of procuring one, and from the manner of his companion he was assured that they would not hesitate to shoot him

if he attempted to escape. He was not foolish enough to risk his life without even a hope of ultimate success, though he was now fully convinced that he had been cruelly deceived and betrayed.

Shortly after Orlando had reseated himself he saw a boat put off from the brig and start up the river. The moon was yet shining, and as the boat came nearer our hero thought he recognized the man who occupied the stern-sheets. Ere long the boats met and the young hunter saw, in the person of him who had caught his attention, Mr. Roswell Berkley! That gentleman nodded his head in a significant manner to Nolan, and a dark, lowering smile rested upon his countenance, as his glance fell upon the prisoner.

At that moment, Orlando could not have spoken if he would, for his soul was too full of indignation. He had no difficulty now in knowing into whose power he had fallen, and he really felt that his case was almost hopeless; yet he resolved to be quiet—to maintain a steady, unmoved demeanor, and not allow his anger, under any circumstances, to betray him into needless danger, hoping thereby to move the more kindly feelings of his guardians, and be the better able to take advantage of the first opportunity that might present itself for his escape.

When the boat at length hauled up under the

gangway of the brig the youth was requested to step on board, and with a readiness which somewhat astonished his companions he obeyed. The men were already at the windlass, the gaskets and furling-lines were cast off, and the sails were hanging loose in the buntlines.

"Mr. Chester, I believe," said the captain, who stepped down from the raised quarter-deck, as the youth came on board.

"That's my name," returned Orlando, in a mild tone, at the same time casting his eyes about the deck. He was not much acquainted with marine tactics, but yet he knew from the appearance of things about him that the vessel was being gotten underweigh.

"So we are to have you for a passenger," continued the captain.

"I know nothing of it, sir. I have been betrayed into my present position; and, as you see I am without the means of resistance, of course I must submit to the will of him who has brought this about."

"Better be here than on the gallows," said the captain, with a tinge of sarcasm in his voice.

"Whether my present position is for good or for evil to myself and those who depend on me, I trust that you will not taunt me or trifle with my feelings. I know, sir, why I am brought hither, and I know, too, at whose will. The gallows stood not in my path."

The captain's countenance assumed a less chilling tone as the youth thus spoke, and with more of forbearance in his manner, he said:

"All I know about the matter is, that you are put here to escape the gallows, and if that offends you, I can't help it."

"I am not offended at what you have said," replied Orlando. "I know that I am your prisoner, and that for the present I must obey the will of those who have only a physical power over me, but I only ask that I may be treated as a man."

"I'm glad you know so much, for I sha'n't have the disagreeable news to break to you," said the captain, in a careless tone. "So if you know you're a prisoner, of course you'll expect to be treated like one."

"If I treat others kindly I shall expect the same in return."

"Of course; we sha'n't make you miserable if we can help it."

"There is one question I should like to ask," said the youth.

"Well, what is it?"

"Where do you intend to carry me?"

"Really, Mr. Chester, I couldn't tell you."

At this moment the anchor was reported to be a-peak, and the captain started back to the quarter-deck to attend to making sail. Our hero, though but little acquainted with the world, could not fail to see that the commander of the brig was a man capable of any sort of villany, and that he was a fit tool for the execution of Berkley's purposes, and in his heart he resolved that he would embrace the first opportunity to escape from his clutches, even though death stared him in the face upon the attempt.

The brig was soon on her way towards the mouth of the river, and shortly after the anchors had been stowed, Orlando was shown to a bed which had been prepared for him beneath the cover of the long-boat. The night passed slowly and heavily away, and from what our hero could hear of the conversation of the men, he found that it was the general impression among the crew that he was actually taken on board to save his neck from the gallows. At first he thought of making them understand his case, but he soon saw that such a course would only be likely to make his situation worse, and he at length resolved to keep his counsel to himself.

When the youth got out upon the deck in the morning the brig had cleared the bay, and Cape Henry bore upon the starboard quarter. He gazed back upon the land that just lifted its blue, vapory bosom to view beyond the jaws of the bay, and he thought of those he was leaving behind—of those from whom he was being thus separated, and perhaps forever! He fancied he saw the tears coursing down the pale cheeks of his poor maniac mother, and he could hear her piteous moans as she gradually should awake to the knowledge that she had no son! Then the sweet form of his loved Ada rose to his view, and he found a new pang in his heart as he thought of her. Less and less distinct grew the inner shore, until at length it seemed to sink into the bosom of the ocean between the two capes; and when the youth could no longer gaze upon it, he turned back towards his rough resting-place, and laying his hands upon the side of the boat he bent his brow upon them. Again the picture of his mother came before his mind, and, with his heart almost rending with anguish, he gave way to his grief, and the bitter, burning tears of a soul without hope started forth from his eyes.

"Come, come, Mr. Chester, you'd better go

to the galley and get some grub," said some one who came up and touched him upon the back.

Orlando turned and beheld Dick Nolan.

"Nolan," said he, as he wiped the tears from his cheeks, "why did you deceive me so?"

"How?" coolly returned the sailor.

"By telling me that Chiron had sent for me, and that I was to be carried to my mother."

"O, I was only obeyin' orders, sir. That's what I was directed to tell you if I couldn't make you budge without; so you wont blame me, sir."

"Nolan," said the youth, in a tone of anguish so touching, and so sweetly melancholy, that the old sailor started, "suppose that you had a mother—one whom you loved as your own life, and whose every drop of joy was derived from you. Suppose that misfortune had shattered that mother's mind, and that you alone could give peace to her soul, or shed a ray of sunlight across her path, would you, when calling to mind that fond mother's bitter agony—when dwelling upon her tears and prayers, and picturing her sad loneliness, blame him who had lent himself an instrument to tear you from her? Could you feel it in your heart to think he had been unkind?"

Dick Nolan could have withstood a torrent of curses and abuse with right good will, but this attack touched him at a defenceless point, and he turned away his head. In a moment, however, he turned back, and in a tone made tremulous by the calling up of his better feelings, he said: "I'm sorry for you, but I couldn't help it; though perhaps if I had known all this before, I might have done differently. But it's too late now to cry for the milk, for it's all spilt. Come, you can have your breakfast now."

"No, Nolan, I have no appetite for food now."

The sailor gazed a moment into the sad, pensive features of the youth, and something like a shade of pitying sorrow passed over his bronzed features, as he silently turned away.

"Ah," murmured Orlando to himself, as he was left alone, "how easy a thing it is to touch the human heart if there be one generous spark left within it. Now, had I given way to passion, or berated that man for the part he had taken against me, he would have exulted in my downfall, and only returned me anger for anger; but now he pities me, and pity is surely generous. If I can make no friends, I will at least endeavor to make no new enemies."



## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE BUCCANER.

For three days the brig stood on in an easterly direction, and during that time the young hunter had been constantly on the watch. There had been but little said to him, though he had been allowed a free range of the decks, and as yet he had been enabled to gain but little intelligence with regard to his destination. It was between nine and ten o'clock on the evening of the third day that Orlando turned into his bunk beneath the cover of the long-boat, and endeavored to compose himself to sleep. Nearly an hour had he lain thus, but no sleep had as yet visited his eyelids, though a sort of dreamy, troubled forgetfulness had begun to creep over him, when the sound of voices directly below him aroused him to a state of consciousness. One of them he recognized as Nolan's, and as he heard his own name pronounced he placed his ear nearer to the edge of the boat.

"I really pity the poor fellow," said Nolan, in reply to something that had been said, "and if I'd have known what they were goin' to do with him, blow me if I'd have had anything to do with it."

"It's a curious affair, any how," remarked another. "I can't see why a quiet chap like him should trouble anybody. Why, he don't look as though he'd harm a mouse."

"O, as for that," returned Nolan, "you'd find

him a hard customer at a pinch—rather a dangerous man to trifle with on equal ground. But, you know, even a child may sometimes be in the way. I rather think the youngster knows too much for them shore chaps, and for that they want to get him out of the way."

"But where are they goin' to carry him?" asked a third speaker.

"Well, if I should just put this and that together, I think I could hit pretty near the truth," answered Nolan.

"Then put it together, Dick."

"Well, I s'pose you know all our cargo of tobacco is shipped for England."

"Yes."

"And don't you see that we're steering off to the south'rd of that?"

"Yes, I noticed it."

"Well, now we have no earthly reason for such a course, unless it be to leave part of our cargo at some other port. I heard the captain—you'll be mum, shipmates."

"Yes," replied three or four voices.

"Then I heard the captain sayin' something to the mate yesterday about the coast of Africa, and about *white slaves*. Now can't you guess?"

For a few moments all was silent, but at length a low murmur of surprise, slightly tinged with disapprobation, fell from the lips of the men, and in a moment more Nolan said:

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"Now keep dark, and let things go on as they may. I'm sorry for the poor fellow, for if my suspicions are correct he'll have a hard time of it; but we can't help it now—it's none of our business. —sh! Here comes the mate. Mum's the word."

Orlando Chester sank back upon his pillow, and an audible groan escaped from his lips. He had feared death, but now such a fate would have seemed comparatively light. He had no doubt, from what he had heard, that he was to be sold into slavery! All thoughts of sleep were banished from his mind, and long did he ponder upon what he had heard; but at length the feeling came over him that such a diabolical plan could not be carried out against him. Up through all his doubts and fears there then struggled a hope that a way of escape might yet be opened before him, and he gradually wrought his mind into a state of comparative calm. He resolved that he would not, by a word or look, betray his knowledge of the fiendish purpose held against him, but that he would, by every means in his power, endeavor to cultivate the friendship and good will of the crew, and then, when the crisis should come, he would arm himself and stake his life for the result. God and right were on his side, and with a heart now bent to a firm purpose, the youth ere long passed into the land of dreams.

When Orlando awoke in the morning the sun had been some time up from his watery bed, and the crew were all on deck. Near the wheel stood the captain, with his spy-glass in his hand, and huddled around him were the two mates and some half dozen of the men. The brig was steering S. S. E., with the wind quite fresh from the westward, so that she took it full upon the quarter, and with her starboard studding-sails set she was dashing along through the water at a rapid rate.

"Is anything the matter?" asked our hero of one of the men who was passing along the gangway.

"There's a sail in sight, that's all," returned the man thus addressed.

As the sailor spoke he pointed with his finger over the weather beam, and after gazing in that direction a few moments the youth made out a small white speck just visible to the naked eye above the horizon. There seemed nothing strange about the circumstance, however, and without bestowing further thought upon it, he went to the galley after his breakfast. The fore-

noon passed away without any occurrence worthy of note; but shortly after dinner Orlando's attention was arrested by the strange manner of the captain, who was evidently laboring under some powerful excitement, and walking aft he followed the commander's glass, and found that the sail he had seen in the morning was only about a quarter of a mile distant, coming down with all her canvass set. She was a brigantine, and for the first time the young man noticed that she carried guns.

"Chester," said the captain, as he noticed the form of his prisoner, "step this way. Do you see that brigantine?"

"Yes sir."

"Well, what do you take her to be?"

"Perhaps a pirate," said Orlando, as for the first time the thought passed through his mind.

"And you are right. Now what do you intend to do?"

"If any one seeks to harm me I shall endeavor to defend myself," returned Orlando.

"May I be shot if you don't take it coolly," uttered the captain, not a little surprised at the perfect coolness of the young man.

"And why should I not? No benefit can result from any undue excitement; and besides, I know not that I have much to choose between my present situation and the one that may be threatened by a capture of our vessel."

"But you will fight in behalf of the brig, will you not?" asked the captain.

"I have no arms, sir."

"We have plenty on board, so you need not fear on that account."

"Then you may arm me, sir, and if my own judgment tells me that my portion of strength is necessary for the defence of your crew, I will use it. I have no desire to see these ocean robbers trample upon the rights of others, for human right is sacred, and he who would abuse it deserves a just retribution."

The young hunter spoke in a low, meaningful tone, and the eyes of the captain fell to the deck as he met the keen glance of the speaker. He read at once the meaning of the language, and though anything like repentance or sorrow might never enter his soul, yet he could not but realize his own baseness and shame in the presence of one like his prisoner. He did not care to encounter the gaze of the youth at that moment, so, raising his glass to his eye, he took another look at the approaching brigantine.

"Mr. Cowley," said the captain to his first

mate, "the pirates are aiming their long gun. Call the men aft and distribute the arms. Look well to the pistols."

"Then you are determined to resist them," said the mate, in a tone that betrayed considerable fear.

"We must do it," returned the captain, exhibiting a quantity and quality of courage that must have cost a strong effort in its production. "I know the character of those men too well. They never leave live men to tell tales against them."

The mate shuddered as he thought of the coming conflict, but he strove hard to keep his fear to himself, and calling upon one or two of the men, he went below to bring up the arms.

The brig's crew consisted, all told, of eighteen men, Orlando making nineteen, and ere long each man was armed with a heavy cutlass and a brace of pistols. Our hero readily took the weapons which the mate handed to him, but he did it with no fixed purpose, only he felt that his own life should be sold as dearly as possible. As soon as the men were all armed, the captain called them aft and explained to them the situation in which they were placed—he knew that if the pirates captured the brig, the crew would be mercilessly put to death; and he appealed to his sailors to sell their lives at a dear cost. They could but die, and they had better die like men than be killed like dogs—and, they might drive the enemy off.

During the captain's speech he seemed actually to have worked himself up to a pitch of real courage by the fearful picture he had drawn for the purpose of inciting his men to a bold resistance, and his new found fearlessness had considerable effect upon the crew.

The brig carried two carriage-guns upon her deck, each capable of throwing a twelve pound ball. They were lashed to the bulwarks, one on each side, and pointed fore and aft, the ports having not yet been opened, nor the guns cast loose. At length a wreath of smoke curled up from the deck of the brigantine, and on the next instant an eighteen pound ball came dashing along directly under the brig's bows.

The pirate was yet at a considerable distance from the brig, though she was gaining vantage rapidly, the latter vessel having kept steadily on her course, and the former only varying sufficiently to keep her head towards the object of her chase. As soon as all other matters had been arranged on board the brig, the two heavy

guns were cast from their lashings and drawn aft, where they were loaded half way to their muzzles with every sort of missile that could be procured, such as iron bolts, nuts, spikes, etc. and then they were both pointed towards the spot where the pirates would probably board, though if the point of attack should be varied they could be moved in a moment.

Again the long gun of the pirate sent forth her iron messenger; and it came with some effect, for it struck the brig's side just abaft the main chains, and went crashing and ploughing across the deck. The splinters flew in every direction, one of them wounding Orlando slightly upon the leg. The youth started, as he felt the twinge of pain, and casting his eyes toward the brigantine, he uttered:

"If I had my trusty rifle here you'd not fire that gun again."

The captain heard the youth's exclamation, and stepping up to his side, he asked:

"Are you sure of your aim with a rifle?"

"With a good one I am."

"I have two on board."

"Then bring them to me," said our hero, as he stooped down and bound his handkerchief around his leg.

In a few moments the captain produced two long, heavy rifles, and at the first glance the youth knew them to have been made for the best. They were speedily loaded, and taking one of them in his hand Orlando walked aft to where he could command a view of the pirate's long gun. He had not been long on the watch when he saw one of the enemy, with a match in his hand, approach the dreaded gun.

"You won't do anything at that distance," said the captain.

Orlando made no reply, but on the next moment he raised his piece and fired. To the crew it seemed as though he had taken no aim, and they expressed themselves by a low murmur to that effect; but their disappointment was changed to astonishment when they saw the pirate, who was just in the act of raising a match to the priming of the long gun, drop backwards from sight.

"Load that rifle, quick," exclaimed the youth, as he took the other in his hand.

Another of the pirates stepped up to the long gun and raised the lighted match, but ere he could accomplish his purpose, the unerring aim of the young hunter sent a bullet through his head. Again and again was the pirate's match

raised to the gun by the hand of a fresh recruit, but the captain of the brig made out to keep the rifles ready for use, and the youth used them with fatal precision. Six men had been picked off in this way, when the pirates seemed to have abandoned their favorite engine entirely; for though the gun might by some means have been touched off from a secure hiding-place, yet its aim was now false, and they had found to their cost that he who would go forth to point it anew went only to his certain death.

By the time, however, that the pirates abandoned their long gun they had ranged near enough to make effectual use of their batteries, and in a few moments after Orlando had fired his last shot, the brigantine let drive her broadside of six twelve pounders. Some of the shot took effect upon the brig's side, for she trembled beneath the concussion, while one or two came whizzing harmlessly over the deck. At this moment the brigantine ran up the black flag at her peak, and fired a gun to windward.

"That means for us to heave-to," said the mate.

"Yes," returned the captain, "and the fellow means that we shall know his errand, too."

Then turning to the man at the wheel he ordered the helm to be put down and the fore yards braced sharp up. In a few moments more the mainsail was clewed up, and the brig lay almost motionless upon the water. The pirates, however, even though their request had been thus readily complied with, proved most treacherous; for the laying of the brig to the wind had brought her head into exactly the position to receive a raking fire, and on the next moment she got it from the pirate's broadside. None of the brig's crew were harmed, however, for at that instant their vessel's bows were raised upon the bosom of a rolling sea, and the enemy's shot struck low, though some of them hit the brig.

As had been anticipated, the pirates prepared to board at the bows, for already had she run under the brig's forefeet and luffed short up. The captain of the merchantman called all his men aft, and having hidden the two guns as much as possible by lowering the main spencer across them, he saw that they were aimed prop-

erly, and then, with a lighted match behind him, —while the mate stood prepared in the same manner—he awaited the onset.

At length the pirate's bows grated along under the brig's fore-chains, and as the grapplings were thrown on board, the buccaneers began to swarm in by the fore-rigging. Some twenty of them had gained the deck, and were upon the point of rushing aft, when the captain applied his match, and from beneath the innocent looking sail there poured forth a sheet of flame and smoke, as the myriad messengers of death went on their way. The captain was not disappointed in the result of his shot, for the spikes and bolts had been packed in such a manner that they spread in all directions, and the havoc they made among the advancing men was fearful. As the pirates saw the fate of their comrades they set up a wild yell of rage, and those who were behind dashed madly on, but ere they reached the gangway they were met by the mate's shot, and for a few moments they hesitated. Twenty, at least, of their men were either killed or totally disabled, and they had not many over the same number left.

"Pistols, my men! pistols!" shouted the captain of the brig, as the pirates once more started aft.

The pistols were discharged, but only one or two of the enemy fell, and the remainder came dashing wildly on. The crew of the brig drew their cutlasses, and with a fearful clashing of thirsty steel the combatants met.

Orlando Chester stood apart in the weather gangway. In one hand he held his heavy cutlass, and in the other a loaded pistol, but as yet he had mingled not in the fight. At length he saw the captain of the brig fall beneath the cutlass of the buccaneer chief, and ere long the mate sank dead upon the deck. The pirates were gaining ground! All the men who were now left were favorably disposed towards the youth—at least, in their sympathies; and as the thought came to our hero's mind he grasped the cutlass more firmly in his hand, brought his pistol to its rest, and then, with the hope of liberty beckoning him on, he rushed forward to the scene of conflict.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A FEARFUL DISCOVERY, AND ITS RESULTS.

DURING any period of a battle the appearance of a new enemy in the field—no matter how insignificant that enemy may be—cannot fail of producing some effect upon the opposing party. Until the young hunter rushed forward from the gangway he had not been observed by the pirates, and as his first blow was aimed at their chieftain they were for a moment so startled that the points of their weapons were involuntarily allowed to drop. Orlando's blow had been calculated for an effective one, and the pirate chieftain fell beneath it never to rise again to earthly life. In a moment the buccaneers recovered their suspended senses, and two bright cutlasses gleamed at once above young Chester's head, but he was calm in his purpose of self-redemption, and his quick eye served him faithfully. With his own weapon, still red with the fallen chieftain's blood, he struck off the blow of the assailant upon the right, and with his ready pistol he shot the other through the head.

This feat of Orlando's, as terrible as it was unexpected, served a double purpose. It not only struck terror to the hearts of the pirates, but it also gave new courage to the crew of the brig. Nolan sprang forward to the youth's side—the rest followed his example, and with a loud shout of victory they set with almost demoniac bravery upon the enemy. Foot after foot did

the pirates give up of their ground, as one after another of their number fell beneath the determined strokes of Orlando and his companions, until at length, with not over a dozen of them alive, they turned at the fore rigging, and leaped upon their own deck. Dick Nolan threw their grappling after them, and in a few minutes the brigantine's head swung off and she started away from the scene of her unsuccessful combat.

"Chester," said Nolan, as he grasped the young man by the hand, after the pirate was fairly off, "will you forgive me for the part I took against you? You've proved yourself a noble man, and I never could rest easy if I thought you'd laid up anything against me. Only say you'll pardon me."

"You have my pardon, fully and freely," replied the youth, as he returned the warm grip of the old sailor, "and now I trust I am at liberty, at least, as much as the present confines of ship-board will admit of."

"That you are, and if you desire it, the brig shall be at once put back," said Nolan.

"I could wish, at least, that you would land me as near Jamestown as possible."

"I don't know but we shall have to put back there at any rate. The captain and mate are both gone, and I don't much feel like putting the brig through to England myself."

The crew were loud and enthusiastic in their thanks to our hero; and from a doomed prisoner he found himself at once transformed into a hero and commander, for all hands expressed themselves ready to obey his wishes.

Upon examination it was found that eight of the crew had been killed, while two were so badly wounded that they were completely disabled, so there were only nine men, including Orlando, left for duty. The first thing done was to get the decks cleared of the dead, and though from the bosom of the victorious youth there issued a silent prayer for the souls of the departed, yet their bodies were consigned to the blue deep without any other ceremony than the lashing to the cold feet of a sinking weight. Then the brig was filled away, and after a short consultation her head was put back, the wind allowing her to lay, close-hauled, just up to her true course for the Chesapeake. The second mate knew but very little of navigation, so the command of the vessel was given, by unanimous consent, to Nolan.

As soon as the decks were washed, and the true course marked out, attention was turned to the moving of the two guns, but before they were got back to their respective places one of the men came running up from below, with his face all blanched with fear, and pointing down to his shoes, which were full of water, he exclaimed:

"We're sinking! See there—it's already over my shoes in the cabin!"

For a moment Nolan was horror-struck, but he soon regained his self-possession, and bidding the man at the wheel look well to his charge, he called upon the rest to follow him and hunt up the leaks.

As soon as the hatches were taken off, it was found that the water was already deep in the hold; and even Nolan started back aghast as he found that there was a shot-hole through the side of the brig, and that it was now over a foot below the water-line. He sprang back upon the deck, and having rigged the pumps, he set four of the men at work upon them, and with the rest he went again upon the search. In the excitement of their victory the men had entirely forgotten the shots they had received from the pirate, and now they found out their effects too late! Half the cargo in the hold was covered, and it soon became evident that there were other leaks than that on the side, and ere long they found that they had three more shot-holes in the

larboard bow, through which the water was pouring in torrents.

An hour earlier the shot-holes might have been stopped, but now it was too late. With a fearful energy the men worked away at the pumps, but still the water gained upon them alarmingly, and upon sounding the well it was found that the intruding element had gained nearly two feet since the pumps were rigged!

"It's no use!" uttered Nolan, as the men let go of the pump-brakes in despair. "We might as well try to pump out the ocean."

"Then the brig must sink," said Orlando, in a half-inquiring tone.

"Yes, there is no help for it," returned Nolan, as he stepped to the main hatchway and looked once more into the hold.

"How long will she be able to float?" inquired the young hunter, over whose mind a new fear was beginning to creep.

"Not over an hour at the furthest," returned Nolan, "for the more water she takes in the faster she'll go."

The *pro tempore* commander knew that it would be useless to bestow any more time upon the pumps, so he turned his attention at once upon casting loose the long boat and rigging up the stay and yard bittens for hoisting her out. In half an hour the boat was safe alongside, and provisions and water enough for a fortnight's allowance were with considerable difficulty got out from the store-room and stowed away in her stern-sheets. The boat's mast was next stepped, with its sail brailled snugly up, the stays were hauled taut, and the jib rigged in its place. The men took with them such arms and ammunition as they could procure, besides the charts, compasses, quadrant, and other small articles of value that could be got at, then the two wounded men were assisted into the boat, and shortly afterwards Nolan and his companions followed.

All was now in readiness, and at the word from Nolan the painter was cast off, the boat's head shoved off, the sails loosened, and with a bound almost of animation, the frail bark started from the vessel's side. The sea was not very heavy, and the swells, though somewhat high, were long and steady. The young hunter cast his eyes back upon the brig, and a strange feeling of awe crept over his soul as he saw the heavy fabric reeling to and fro upon the verge of its grave. While yet he looked, the vessel rocked more heavily—then stood for a moment still, as if contemplating her doom—then a per-

ceptible tremor shook her vast frame, and with one heavy throe she pitched forward, plunged her bows into the flood, and in a few moments more the blue water closed over her forever!

In half an hour after the men had taken the last look at their old ocean dwelling the dark curtain of night settled over the vast deep, and Nolan divided his men into watches, giving to the second mate the charge of one, while he took charge of the other, and after making arrangements for the course through the night, half of the men drew their blankets around them and laid down beneath the thwarts to seek repose for their weary limbs.

When the morning dawned, the wind, which had been comparatively low during the night, began to freshen, so much so that it was found necessary to take a reef in the mainsail, and as soon as this was accomplished Nolan and the mate distributed the morning's meal. While the men were engaged in eating their breakfast, one of them, who had stationed himself in the bows, uttered a sudden exclamation of joy, and as the boat rose upon the bosom of the next sea a sail was distinctly made out to the northward and eastward.

A new hope instantly sprang up in the bosom of the men, and putting up the helm they eased off the sheets and stood towards the discovered sail. The pistols were loaded, and one after another they were discharged into the air, with a sort of reckless hope that the sound might reach those who could save them. Nolan had stationed

himself against the mast with a glass, and for a long time he gazed steadily upon the distant sail. The men watched his countenance as though it were an index to their prospects, and they hung upon each varying lineament of his features for the raising or the crushing of their hopes. At length the glass trembled in Nolan's hand, a shade of deep disappointment overspread his face, and with a groan he stepped down from the thwart.

"My men," said he, as he closed the glass, "she's steering from us, and is already more than hull down!"

The boat was once more hauled upon the wind, and with sad and heavy hearts the crew turned their eyes towards the point in the horizon where the object of their sudden hopes had disappeared. They were nearly five hundred miles from land, with nothing but a single inch of plank between themselves and eternity, a heavy sea running against them, and a prospect of having their provisions destroyed by the salt water that came dashing over the bows.

Hearts that had been tied to earth for years now began to turn towards a Power mightier than their own, for their own late conquering strength, and the weapons that lay about them, were utterly void against the relentless storm-god, and as they lay upon the bosom of the treacherous ocean the ill-fated men knew not how soon it might open its broad, deep grave to receive them!

## CHAPTER XXI.

### UNEXPECTED INTERVIEWS.

It was one month after the mysterious disappearance of young Chester from the Jamestown jail. Night had succeeded a pleasant day, and shortly after its sable curtains had been drawn over the colony, Chiron sought the dwelling of Roswell Berkley. Upon the brow of the old hunter there was a stamp of deep suffering, and his kindly speaking features were tortured with vivid lines of unmistakeable anguish; yet over all there was a firm set cast of a powerful determination which bespoke a will that was not to be crushed by misfortune or disappointment.

Mr. Berkley was alone in his private study, and though his appearance was indicative of much emotion, yet it would have been difficult to decide whether 'twas a cowardly fear, or a demoniac satisfaction, that moved him. He was engaged in looking over some papers, when he heard the door of his room opened, and on looking up he beheld the towering form of Chiron.

"Now, by the saints of heaven!" uttered Mr. Berkley, as he recovered from the first shock of the meeting, "your insolence is becoming unbearable. If you do not leave me on the instant, your arrest and commitment shall be the consequence."

"Soft, soft, my dear sir," said the old hunter. "I think you would find it hard to have me arrested."

"Not so hard as you imagine. The deaths of Gilman and Colton may yet have to be answered for."

"So, so; then your accommodating doctor has been blabbing. But look ye, Mr. Berkley, do you wish a thorough investigation of that affair before the public?"

Mr. Berkley met the keen glance of the hunter, and he quailed before it. In his soul he dared not meet the steady gaze of his visitor, for there was something in his tone and manner, and his very appearance, that struck a dread to his heart. But he had sense enough to know that if he did fear, he had better keep it as much as possible to himself, so he endeavored to conquer his emotions, and turning to Chiron, he said:

"I fear no investigation, sir, of any of my acts; but I can inform you that the laws protect the dwellings of our citizens from the intrusion of common brawlers, and you had better beware how you lay yourself liable to them. I would be alone."

"And in a few moments you shall," returned Chiron, who could not help smiling at the sudden change in his host's ground of complaint; "but first I would ask you once more, what has become of Orlando Chester?"

"I know not."

"Beware, Mr. Berkley! What have you done with him?"

"I tell you I know nothing of him, only that he has escaped from jail," answered the agent, in trembling, fearful accents, but yet with an apparent coolness upon his features.

"Then you will not give me a clue to his whereabouts?" continued Chiron.

"If he were upon the gallows, I would give you a passage in the same direction."

"Thank you kindly, sir; but I shall have no need of your services," said the hunter, and then lowering his voice to a tone of the deepest import, he continued:

"Now let me tell you, sir, that though you refuse to acknowledge your hand in this matter, yet I know 'twas you who did it; but 'twill avail you little. Your ends will not be so easily answered. You have in some way disposed of the son, and you tried to dispose of the mother, but there I thwarted you. And now, Roswell Berkley, I tell thee that thy dreaded secret is not locked up in the maniac bosom of Morgiana Chester. I know that secret, and there is another beside whose ears have drank it in, so you need not think to save yourself by the death of the mother and her child."

"Villain, you lie!" shrieked Berkley, utterly frantic with passion. "I have no secret. I care not for Mrs. Chester, save to place her in safety."

"No secret?"

"No!"

"Not even with regard to a certain duel once fought, wherein you figured behind the scenes?" uttered Chiron.

Roswell Berkley sprang from his chair, and the words, "*Villain! Liar!*" broke from his bloodless lips, but ere he could speak further his power of utterance seemed to fail him, and grasping his desk for support, he sank back into his seat. The old hunter regarded him for a moment with a look of utter contempt, and then turning away, he left the villain alone.

"It's of no use," murmured Chiron to himself, as he stepped from Berkley's house, "he won't criminate himself further by acknowledging his agency in the removal of Orlando; but I don't believe he'll trouble Morgiana again, after what he has just learned."

The hunter's course lay towards the house of Sir Oliver Wimple, and when he reached it he hauled his canoe to the shore, and was just turning to pass on through the garden, when the sound of distant oars struck upon his ear, coming

from down the river. At first he thought of waiting to see who it might be, but the idea was thrown out, and he turned towards the house. Sir Oliver, his wife and daughter were in the sitting-room when Chiron entered, and the first question was from the baronet:

"What of the youth? Have you learned anything yet?"

The old hunter's answer was a mournful shake of the head.

Poor Ada! How that silent answer fell upon her soul. She had hung upon the looks of the old hunter for his answer to the question that instinctively rose in her mind, and that answer had crushed the bud of hope that had struggled to put forth its fragrant leaves. Her elbow rested upon the table by her side, and with a bursting heart she laid her brow into her open palm, but no tears came to her relief. Her fair countenance, whereon had rested such sunbeams of joyous happiness, was now marked by deep shades of sorrow, and the round cheek seemed almost channelled by the heart-floods that had rolled over them. Sad, sad, was poor Ada.

"No tidings?—no word of hope?—no glimmer of his whereabouts?" uttered the baronet.

"None! none!" sorrowfully returned Chiron. "I can find no traces of him. I have been up the bay two hundred miles, and searched in every corner, but not a word can I hear of him. But Morgiana, poor Morgiana, have you seen her?"

"Yes," returned Sir Oliver, "I saw her the day before yesterday."

"And how fared she?"

"Sad and sorrowful. Her heart seemed melting away in the fire of fitful agony—now streaming with a glare of rushing anguish, and anon sinking into a pitiful melancholy. O, Chiron, what a subject for the moving of the heart's dormant, slumbering sympathies, is she. An angel, and yet an inhabitant of earth; a being bereft of reason, and yet with a soul entirely celestial. Chiron, I love her for her pure emanations, and I pity her for the wrongs she has suffered. Loving her, I will protect her, and pitying, I will sorrow with her."

The old hunter arose from his seat. A big tear glistened upon either cheek; his lips trembled with emotion, and grasping the baronet by the hand, he exclaimed:

"A load is even now taken from my heart. She is an angel, and when she is known she

shall be loved.—Hark! Heard you that foot-step?"

"Yes. 'Tis approaching the house," said the baronet.

"Some one would speak with you," said a servant, opening the door a moment afterwards.

Whether this remark was addressed to Chiron or himself, the baronet waited not to ascertain, but he bade the servant show the applicant in.

A moment passed—the door was re-opened, and the entrance was occupied by a human form. Two individuals in that room recognized the new comer. The old hunter started back and shaded his eyes with his broad palm, while Ada uttered one wild cry of joy and delight, and sprang forward. Orlando Chester opened his arms, and when they closed again the fair form of Ada was encircled within them.

"Orlando, Orlando," uttered Chiron, as soon as he could grasp the youth by the hand, "what kind angel has given thee back to us?"

"God!" answered Orlando, as with one hand in the keeping of the old hunter, he raised the other towards heaven. "Praise him, Chiron, and you, sweet, gentle Ada, bless this holy name!"

Sir Oliver waited for the first joy passages of old acquaintances, and then he stepped forward and claimed the acquaintance of the youth who had been thus unexpectedly restored. A strange light beamed in the young man's eyes as he received the warm, heart-gushing welcome of the father of her he loved, and in his soul he knew that his suit was not rejected. The mother, too, gave him a hearty welcome.

"Now, now," said Chiron, "let us know the secret of your absence, and the events that have transpired."

"My mother, my mother, first," uttered Orlando. "Tell me of her."

"She is well, and early in the morning we will go to her."

"But does she think I have forsaken her?"

"No. She sorrows deeply, but she believes you will come back to her."

Thus assured, the youth took a seat, and with Ada nestled closely at his side, he began with his flight from the jail, and minutely gave every circumstance to the present time. The long boat, after battling with the elements over a week, made land some two hundred miles south of Cape Henry, and from thence she was kept close in shore and made a safe passage to James River.

Many times during the narrative did Orlando have to go back and explain, or repeat his words, and when he closed there was a dead silence of several moments, broken only by the perceptible beatings of Ada's heart.

"Then 'twas Roswell Berkley who sought thus your life?" said the old hunter at length.

"Yes," returned the youth. "Nolan told me all."

"And the villain would have sold you into slavery," said Chiron, with a shudder.

"Yes—so he intended. But God permitted it not," the youth returned.

"But these sailors," remarked Chiron, with a seeming sudden thought, "I hope they will not see Berkley till our plans are arranged."

"No fear of that. I left them at the plantation of the king's bay, some fifteen miles below Jamestown, with directions that they should not come up until they were sent for."

"That is good," the old hunter uttered. "And now, Mr. Roswell Berkley, you are mine."

"Chiron," said the young man, with a half-imploring, half-earnest look, "know you not now what all this means?—Why that wicked man thus hunts me down?"

"I know, Orlando, but the secret must yet a little longer be mine. Blame me not for this. But you are weak—you look faint and sick."

"I am weary," returned the youth, "for I have suffered much. For the last three weeks I have hardly slept, and my mind has been constantly on the rack, but this night's rest will restore me, at least, to comfortable health."

"Then you had better at once to your repose," said Sir Oliver.

"I will," returned the youth, "for I would be astir with the first beams of the morrow's sun. Chiron, early, early will we seek my poor mother. I can but pray for her to-night—to-morrow myself will bless her. Ada, good night, and all sweet angels watch thy pillow. I claim this as the genius of my dreams."

As he spoke he bent forward and imprinted a warm kiss upon the fair girl's brow, and she gave him one in exchange.

As Orlando followed the baronet to the room where he was to rest, Lady Wimple called Ada to her side, and placing her arms about her slender form, she said:

"Ah, my child, I wonder not that you loved him; for who, who could help it?"

"Bless you, mother," murmured Ada, as the



tears of joyous gratitude rolled down her cheeks.

"I knew you would love him."

"Now," said the baronet, after he had returned, "how shall we proceed in this matter?"

"I have it all marked out," returned Chiron, "and, save the unfortunate mental aberration of Morgiana, there will be no difficulty."

"But some of the charges against Berkley cannot be proved, and, after all, I fear we shall be unable to actually criminate him in the eyes of the law."

"Sir Oliver," Chiron said, while the intensity of his feelings was kindled in every feature, "God never made the heart that might not be crushed. Roswell Berkley has long carried a load of sin sufficient to break the peace of a thousand souls, and a feeling of security has sustained him; but let the hand of another hurl these searing sins back upon his heart, and you shall see how he will condemn himself. The voice of the murdered has only spoken to him in his seclusion, and hence the world has seen not his reeking soul; but let another speak for the unavenged dead—let another interpret the language of that blood that cries out from the green sod of its native land, and you shall see how like heaven's dread thunder its trumpet tones shall strike home to his tortured soul."

"You are right," said the baronet, after a few

moments' reflection; "and now when shall we commence?"

"We must first look to Orlando's safety from another arrest, for he is still under commitment."

"That I will attend to on the morrow. While you are gone to Mrs. Chester's I will go and see the royal governor, and I am confident I can obtain present bail for the youth, and a conditional pardon."

"Then, if that be done, we may go on at once. Berkley shall know not of the young man's return till the youth appears to confound him, and then he shall know it to his sorrow."

"Ay, that he shall," uttered the baronet. "By my faith, Chiron, but Orlando's a noble youth. It speaks from every look and movement. There's no evil can live behind that face."

"You speak the truth, Sir Oliver."

"I believe I do. But now, Chiron, let's to bed. On the morrow you shall see Morgiana, and bring her here, while I make Orlando's peace with the governor."

When Chiron laid his head upon the pillow that night the sea of his prospects looked all calm and unruffled, and the horizon was clear. He knew not, he dreamed not, of the cloud that was gathering over him, and 'twas well he did not, for in his ignorance he slept sweetly and soundly.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE COLD FOREST BED.

THE sky lark was just mounting upon her celestial throne of song when Chiron and Orlando set forth from the mansion of Sir Oliver. The youth pressed the fair Ada to his bosom, received the hearty God-speed of the baronet and his lady, and then he turned towards the river. There had been a gentle rain during the night, but the sun rose clear and bright, and as its golden beams began to kiss the pearly rain-drops that trembled upon the shrubs and flowers a sweet fragrance loaded the grateful air, and from a thousand mossy banks and umbrageous nooks went forth the incense of joyous nature to her God.

The canoe was launched, and once more the young hunter's heart leaped wildly in his bosom as his way was marked towards his forest home. He bent himself to his paddle, and all his weakness, his privations, and his past sufferings, were forgotten, as the canoe almost flew up the rolling river. The landing-cove was reached, the canoe hauled up among the bushes, and with rapid strides our two friends set off through the path.

As the opening was gained, the young hunter looked forth over the garden, to see if his mother was at her accustomed morning's task; but he could see her not. The flowers, the shrubs, and the vine were there, glittering with their dewy

diamond-drops, but the genius of the place was absent. A fear-phantom stole through the mind of the youth, but he endeavored to push it from him. He entered the garden, passed up the vine-clad walk, and as his hand rested upon the latch a low sob broke upon his ear. Quickly, but yet almost noiselessly, he opened the door and sprang into the house. Upon the old oaken chest sat Elpsey, with her face running streams of tears, and her bosom heaving with deep sobs.

As the old woman heard the sound of the present footsteps she raised her eyes from her apron, and as they rested upon the form of her young master she sprang from her seat and darted forward.

"God be praised," uttered the faithful old creature, as she caught Orlando by the arm. "He gib my young massa back in safety. You no dead—dey no kill you! O, bress de Lord!"

"But my mother, where is she?" asked Orlando.

Elpsey raised her eyes—there was a glare of painful intelligence in their burning depths, but she spoke not.

"Speak, Elpsey—where is my mother?" exclaimed the youth, while he trembled with a frightful fear.

"O, God!" murmured the old woman, as if afraid of her own voice, "poor missus gone!"



"Gone! gone! Not dead, Elpsey!" cried Orlando, in a shrieking whisper.

"Poor Elpsey don't know. Missus gone, and Elpsey can't find her."

"But when did she go, and how?" asked Chiron, at this moment stepping forward, for Orlando seemed for the moment to have lost his power of utterance.

"She go yesterday morning," returned the old woman, over whose face a slight shade of hope seemed to pass as she beheld the old hunter. "She went out into de garden, an' I tink she was goin' to take care ob her flowers. One hour, two hour went away, and de sun bimeby reach to noon, but missus no come back. I hunt for her, an' I couldn't find her. I went all trough de woods, hunt in de brook—but—but—she gone, an' poor Elpsey left alone!"

"But the dogs—the dogs!" uttered Chiron, "did you not set them on the track?"

"Ah, Chiron," answered Elpsey, with a significant shake of the head, "de dogs no dogs now same as dey used to be. Since Massa Orlando gone dey do nothin' but mope 'round an' whine."

"This is indeed a dark cloud upon our prospects," murmured the old hunter. "But courage, Orlando. Let us not faint by the wayside, for as yet all is not lost."

"If my mother be gone, then is all the world lost to me," ejaculated the youth. "I'll bid farewell to joy forevermore on earth."

"No, no—there are others on earth for whom you must live. But give not up yet. Let us search first, and not until all search proves fruitless must we sink in despair."

"Search! search!" cried the youth, throwing off his dejection. "I'll search till there's not a tree in the forest but bears its image to my sight! On, on, Chiron!"

The energetic, frenzied tones of Orlando's voice went ringing through the air, and in a moment more a suppressed cry from the hounds announced that they had heard it. Chiron stepped through the kitchen, opened the back door, and the dogs rushed in. They sprang to the feet of their returned master, leaped upon him, licked his hands and his face, and from out their sparkling eyes there spoke a language of true, disinterested affection, such as the sons of men might emulate with profit.

Old Elpsey could give no account of which way her mistress had taken, and the trails from the house in all directions were so numerous

that the footprints of Morgiana could not be distinguished from the others. The hunters placed some reliance upon the dogs, however, and calling them to his side, Orlando took his rifle from its becket and went forth into the garden. Here he made a show of search, and called several times for his mother. The hounds watched his movements with anxious looks, and at length they seemed to comprehend their master's object, for with that beam of intelligence which the bloodhound so quickly shows, they bent their nostrils to the earth, and after running over the garden in various directions, they darted off towards the brook. Here they crossed, and after searching a few moments upon the other side they started for the forest.

Chiron and Orlando followed quickly on, and ere long they were buried in the depths of the forest. They could hear the dry bushes and boughs crackle beneath the feet of the hounds ahead, and, regardless of the thorns and underbrush, they kept on in pursuit.

"My mother could not have taken such a course as this," said Orlando, as he struggled through the thick undergrowth.

"It does seem strange that she should have chosen such a way," Chiron replied, "but let's follow the dogs."

"Ha! what's this?" uttered the youth, as his eye caught a fluttering shred ahead of him. "Heavens! 'tis a piece of my mother's mantle!" he continued, as he picked from a branch of wild thorn a strip of white muslin.

Orlando's eyes sparkled with a new hope, as he placed the shred within his bosom, and with an impulsive energy both he and Chiron darted forward.

"Hark!" uttered Chiron, as he stopped and bent his ears to the ground. "Can you hear the dogs?"

"No," Orlando answered, also listening.

"See, 'tis high noon. Look, where the sunbeams fall through yonder opening in the trees. Can it be we have missed the trail?"

"I fear we have," returned the young hunter, in a tone of dejection.

Chiron was upon the point of speaking, when a sharp, prolonged, simultaneous cry from both the hounds broke through the forest.

"On! on!" shouted the young hunter. "O, God grant that they have found her!"

The two hunters sprang forward, and while yet the barking of the dogs made the deep forest ring, they glided through the tangled wildwood

towards the spot from whence the sounds proceeded.

Wildly, fearfully beat young Chester's heart, as he approached the dogs, and he almost dreaded to come upon them, lest disappointment only should meet him; and another thought, frightful and chilling, swept through his mind—might not he find his mother's form in the cold grasp of death! On he dashed, and at length he caught sight of the dogs. One bound brought him to their side, and ere his companion reached the spot he uttered one low cry of hopeful anguish, and sank down by the side of his mother's form.

Wet and cold was Morgiana, for the rain had found her unprotected—her lips were set and colorless, and no mark of animation dwelt upon her marble features. Orlando placed his hand beneath her neck, and raised her head to his knee; and then, with his own heart hushed to a fearful stillness, he placed his hand upon the bosom of his mother to see if hers had motion in it.

"It beats, it beats!" the young hunter cried. "O, Chiron, my mother lives!"

The excitement of the moment came near overpowering the youth, for long suffering had made him weak, and closing his eyes beneath the unerring spell, he sunk back upon the damp moss, and the form of his mother settled once more upon the ground. Chiron stooped over the forms of both mother and son, and ere many moments, the latter was aroused to consciousness, and when reason once began to come to his aid, the situation of his parent flashed upon him, and strength returned to his every nerve and muscle. Chiron had raised the form of Morgiana upon his own bended knees, and was chafing her temples with the seal-skin pouch he wore at his girdle.

"Can she live?" asked Orlando, as he took one of the cold, alabaster hands in his own.

"There is hope," returned Chiron, "for her heart already beats stronger, and warmth begins to reach her temples. Take off your frock, Orlando, and place it here upon this gentle mound of moss. We will let her rest here while we prepare a litter."

The youth did as directed; then Chiron laid Morgiana's head back upon the rough pillow thus prepared, and taking off his own shirt of soft fur, he placed it over her. This having

been done, the old hunter drew his hatchet from his belt, and proceeded to get out the proper materials for a litter, and ere long, one of sufficient capacity was formed, and upon it Morgiana Chester was laid. The two hunters raised the litter to their shoulders, and with eager steps they started homeward. The way was difficult and tedious, but at the distance of quarter of a mile they struck into a hunting-path, and they moved on with more ease. Often did Orlando find himself obliged to stop and rest, but at length, just as the sun had sunk below the towering tree-tops, they reached the forest cot. Old Elpsey bounded forth, and with a wild cry of anguish, she fell upon the form of her mistress; but as soon as she could be made to comprehend that there was life in that cold form, she clasped it in her arms and carried it into the house, where she placed it carefully, tenderly, upon the bed.

With a fond heart did the faithful old negress chafe the temples of her mistress, and apply such restoratives as she could command. Chiron and Orlando stood by with earnest, eager watching, and at length, as the last soft shades of twilight were deepening into darkness, the maniac mother's eyes opened—but O, what a fire burned in their bright depths! She put forth her white hand and grasped Old Elpsey by the wrist.

"Ha! you black fiend!" she cried, as she started up in her bed. "'Twas you, you who carried off my boy!"

Chiron sprang forward and pressed the raving woman back upon her pillow. Orlando seemed for a moment riveted to the spot—then he sank upon his knees, buried his face in the bed-clothes, and sobbed aloud.

Poor Morgiana Chester! She had indeed come back to life, but she had been awakened only to find all reason gone. The soft light of her mild eye, the heavenly purity of her passive countenance, and the gentle dew-drops of her soul's sorrow were gone—all gone! She was mad! The frail throne of her mind that had been tottering for years upon its foundations, had now fallen, and beneath its weight the soul fell crashing to utter chaos!

A moment Chiron gazed tearlessly upon the scene—then he took the young hunter gently by the arm and led him unresistingly from the spot.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE MENTAL MORN HAS BROKEN FROM ITS NIGHT.

A WEEK had passed away since the melancholy development recorded in our last chapter. In a quiet, handsomely furnished chamber in the stately mansion of Sir Oliver Wimple, reposed, upon a bed of downy softness, the form of the poor maniac mother. A raging fever had set in, caused by her exposure in the forest, and, at the earnest request of the good baronet, sustained by the permission of an excellent physician, she had been removed to her present comfortable quarters. The gentle Ada had nursed her with a fond daughter's care—Elpsey never left her side, while Lady Wimple left nothing undone for her comfort.

Morgiana had raved exceedingly—sometimes it was for her husband, sometimes for her son, and anon her mind would turn upon the secret of the old oaken chest. Her ravings were wild and incoherent, but they lasted only for an hour or so at a time, her physical strength soon giving way beneath them. She recognized no one, not even her own son, for her mind seemed utterly uprooted.

It was towards the close of the day that the physician called, in his daily visit, and as he entered his patient's chamber a smile of satisfaction lit up his features. Morgiana had just sunk into an easy, grateful slumber, and a profuse perspiration was upon her brow and temples. Her

skin was moist and soft, and her pulse—that index to the beating heart—was steadier than it had been before for a week. Those hard, painful lines that had marked the maniac's fair countenance, had softened to a more pensive look, and the blue veins, which had been so long swollen almost to bursting, left now only their azure tracings beneath the transparent skin. The right hand was thrown over her head, and the left arm was outstretched, as if to give more room for the heart.

Orlando stood at the foot of the bed, and by his side leaned Ada. Upon the countenance of the youth there was a broad ray of hope, which seemed a reflection of the physician's own smile, and yet he watched the latter's movements with nervous anxiety. As the doctor turned to leave the room, he beckoned for Orlando to follow him.

"Mr. Chester," said the physician, as soon as they had reached the hall, "your mother is past all present danger."

"Great God, I thank thee!" ejaculated the youth, as he clasped his hands together.

"Let her not be disturbed to-night," continued the physician, "for if I am not greatly mistaken she will sleep quietly till morning. Yet she must be narrowly watched, and properly cared for."

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At this moment Chiron entered the hall, and a joyous look overspread his face as he heard the result of the doctor's investigation.

"Doctor," said he, as that individual was upon the point of turning to depart, "you have not liped a word of Mrs. Chester's whereabouts, have you?"

"Not a word."

"Nor of her son's?"

"No, not a syllable, nor does any one in the town seem to mistrust that the youth has returned."

"I am glad of that," returned Chiron, and then turning to Orlando, he said, in an undertone:

"Berkley mistrusts not the retribution I have in store for him."

As the physician departed, the youth gazed long and earnestly into the face of the old hunter, and at length, laying his hand upon the arm of his mysterious friend, he said:

"Chiron, I would ask you a question. Since I have known you I have troubled you with but few questions. I once promised you that I would not seek to rend the veil from your secret—have I not kept that promise?"

"Most faithfully," returned Chiron.

"Then I would now be absolved from its further claims."

"I grant you the absolution," Chiron rejoined, with a smile.

"Now, now, Chiron, tell me who and what you are. You say the crisis is near at hand, and before it comes, I would at least know you for what you really are."

"Then know me for your friend."

"No, no—not that, Chiron. That I have long known."

"Orlando," said the strange man, while a peculiar shade of mingled hope and anxiety passed over his features, "if you do not receive what you ask from other lips than mine on the morrow, I will myself open the seal and hold it up to your view. The mission of years is soon to be accomplished, and when the veil is lifted you shall know wherefore I am your friend. Sleep quietly to-night, and on the morrow your soul shall be moved by things of which you never dared to even dream. Part of the crew of the brig will be here, and Roswell Berkley is also summoned. The villain knows not yet that we are domiciled here, and at the request of Sir Oliver he will come most unhesitatingly. Let

your dreams be happy to-night, and let your hope range to heaven if it can."

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Bright and joyous danced the beams of the morning sun over the forests and streams, and gaily sung the lark as it dipped its light plumage in the golden flood. At an early hour Orlando glided softly from his chamber, and approached the apartment where lay his mother. His heart beat with a hushed motion as he gently raised the latch, and in a moment more he stood by his parent's bedside. Elpsey was drowsing in her chair, and as the youth entered he gave her permission to slip out and take the fresh air.

The negress was gone, and the son was alone with his mother! He bent low over the bed and kissed the white brow. That simple kiss—so sweet, so gentle, so pure, and so loving! That son's token of undying affection—so heart-felt and so gushing, and yet so quiet and unobtrusive, seemed like the rod of God's chosen redeemer of Israel!

Morgiana opened her eyes and gazed for a moment about her—then she closed them, and placed her hands hard upon her brow. Again she opened them, and murmured:

"Where am I?"

"Here, here, dearest mother," cried Orlando, as he took her hand in his own.

"Orlando," uttered she, in a tone so strange that the youth was startled.

"Yes, yes, dear mother—your own Orlando—your own loving son. Do you not know me?"

Long and steadily did that mother gaze into the face of that boy. Shade after shade, and light after light, passed over her features, but her eyes varied not—their light was deep, intense, and a thousand souls seemed struggling in their lustrous depths. At length her lips parted, and she murmured:

"If this be not real, then what a dream has been mine."

"It must be like a dream to you, mother," said the youth, still moved most strangely by the peculiar manner of his parent, "for during the past week you have been low, very low; but you are better now."

"A week!" uttered Morgiana. "Raise me up, Orlando, and let me look upon you."

Tremblingly the youth obeyed, and as the mother reclined upon the arm of her child, she continued:

"A week! No, no; it must have been years—long, long years! I remember I had a child—a

laughing babe—an infant boy—and I called it Orlando! And I remember, too, that my boy once had a father; but, alas, that father—"

Big tears gathered in the poor woman's eyes, and for a moment she hesitated, but at length she wiped her tears away, and while yet a fearful shudder ran through her frame she continued:

"I see it all! My husband went out on that pleasant morning—he kissed me before he went, and his hand trembled as he left me. I was frightened at his looks, but he promised me he would soon return. My husband I never saw again!"

"And he deserted you?" uttered Orlando, in accents of fearful suspense.

"Deserted me! Who ever told thee that?" exclaimed Morgiana, with sudden energy.

Orlando hesitated for a moment how to answer, but soon he resolved to speak the truth, and in a kind, soft tone, he said:

"You told me so, mother. Ever since I can remember—and that is sixteen years—you have given me to understand that my father deserted you."

"And thus my dream passes before my eyes," murmured she, as she placed her hand again upon her brow. "No, no, my son—for such I know thou art—my husband loved me truly, faithfully. He promised to come back, but he never came. In an hour after he left me some men brought a body into the house. I lifted the pall from the face, and beheld the features of my husband! He was cold and stiff, and his cloak was all bloody! They told me had fallen in a duel! I fell upon that lifeless clay, and there my soul sunk into a slumber of memory's oblivion! Now, now, I feel that I am awakening from my life-dream; yet that dream has some pictures which my memory still clings to. Your image is graven upon my heart, even as the unconscious lake receives the image of the tree that grows upon its margin. My son, my son, what a dream has been mine! How fraught with tears and woe—with smiles and flowers!"

As Morgiana spoke she sunk back upon her pillow and closed her eyes. She was weak, and she needed repose. At that moment Elpsey came back, and without a word the youth slipped from the apartment. In the hall he met Chiron who had just come in from the garden.

"Orlando," said the old hunter, as he grasped the youth by the hand with astonishment, "what is the matter?"

The young man fell upon Chiron's bosom, and bursting into tears, he murmured:

"My mother! my mother!"

"What has happened? Speak! speak!" uttered Chiron, in breathless anxiety. "Morgiana is not more ill—she is not dead!"

"Dead! ah, no," returned the youth, while the sun of a refulgent joy beamed softly from his every feature. "Chiron, the sun of reason has risen upon her—the dark clouds of her mental night have rolled away, and, in all its pristine strength and purity, her mind has assumed its throne! She spoke to me—she called me Orlando—her son! She told me of that fearful, terrible morning, when, upon the cold corpse of my father, she sank into the chaos of her mental world!"

A moment that powerful man gazed into the features of the youth, and then, with his hands clasped above his head, he sunk upon his knees. No sound broke from his lips, but yet the prayer of thanksgiving that went forth from his heart was such an one as angels love to receive upon their celestial tablets and bear to the throne of the Father!

As Chiron arose to his feet the physician entered the hall, and having been informed of what had transpired, he proceeded at once to his patient's chamber. Ada came down from her apartment, and drawing her arm within his own, Orlando led her forth into the garden, there to pour into her ears the joyful intelligence of his mother's return to reason, while Chiron went to his own room to prepare his morning's toilet, and when he returned to the hall he looked almost like another being. The long beard was shaven from his face, so that the kind, benevolent look which had before been confined about his mouth and eyes, now spread its beams over his whole face. His rough suit of furs and deer-skins had been replaced by a neat citizen's dress, and when Orlando saw him again it was some moments before he could realize that in the noble form before him he really beheld his mysterious friend. Ada was delighted with the transformation, and so was Lady Wimple, and even in the presence of the gentlemen they both declared they loved him.

When the doctor returned from his visit to the invalid, his countenance was all smiles and joy, and he assured the assembled household that Morgiana was beyond all danger. Chiron drew him one side, and conversed earnestly with him for some minutes, after which the trans-

formed hunter took Orlando by the hand, remarking as he did so:

"The doctor says I may see her. Come, my boy, let us to Morgiana's chamber."

When Orlando entered his mother's room she was sitting up in her bed, with the pillows so arranged as to give a comfortable support for her back, while her eyes were dwelling upon Ada's flower-garden, which opened its fragrant beds in front of her window. With reason once more sending its beams of intelligence athwart her features she looked more beautiful than ever, and, almost transported, Orlando stood and gazed upon her ere he stepped forward.

"Orlando, my son," uttered Morgiana, as her eyes rested upon the form of her boy, "come to my side and let me look upon thee. Kiss me. —There, now tell me of the past. I've dreamed of forests and ruins, of flowery gardens and running brooks. Upon my mind there is pictured a sylvan paradise—a wood-embowered home in the sweet wilderness. I would know—"

She did not speak further, for at that moment her eyes rested upon the powerful form of Chiron. She did not gaze upon him wildly, nor did she start with sudden excitement, but calmly, steadily she gazed, and then placing her hand upon her brow, she murmured:

"Orlando."

"Well, mother," softly returned the youth.

"I fear me I am going back again to my dreamland home. I dwell again in the realms of phantasy," and as the woman spoke, she pressed her hand over her eyes.

"How—what—of whom do you dream?" asked Orlando, placing his hand upon his mother's brow, and bending over her with earnest solicitude.

"Did you not see that form that stood but now by my bedside?—that airy phantom?"

"Tis no phantom, mother," urged Orlando. "Look up again. He is still here, and he has been our best friend."

"Here! here!" murmured Morgiana. "No, no, my son—that may not be. It cannot be."

"Morgiana," said Chiron, in a tone of the softest, richest melody, while he stepped forward and took one of her hands in his own.

Slowly Morgiana gazed up into the powerful man's face. For a full minute she looked, and then, while an expression made all of earnest,

hopeful prayer, rested upon her features, she said:

"Speak to me again. Call me Morgiana. Call me—no, no—O, God, that cannot be."

"Morgiana, it can be—it is!" said Chiron, and while he spoke, a loving smile shone upon his broad, kind face.

"Then speak to me again. Call me—"

"My wife!" cried the old hunter; and as he stooped further forward, Morgiana fell upon his bosom and was clasped within his strong arms.

"Has kind Heaven played me false in this, or do I see my father?" ejaculated Orlando, in trembling, fearful accents, as he drew nearer to his strange friend.

"My son, my son," murmured Chiron, as he drew one arm about the form of the youth, "you do indeed see in me your father. My wife—my child!"

As the stout man spoke he drew his priceless burdens more closely to his bosom, and then wept like a child. In a few moments, however, he laid Morgiana's head back upon her pillow, and wiping the tears from his cheeks, he gazed upon her sweet face.

"Let no doubt cloud your joy, my own dear wife," he said, while yet both the mother and son were regarding him with speechless wonder.

"I am your own husband—I am the man to whom you pledged your heart's early love—the father of your boy, and the fond worshipper of your goodness and truth. Look up, sweet wife, and be happy, for ere this sun that now illumines the earth shall sink again to its rest, there shall not be a cloud to darken the horizon of your peace. You now have a husband and a son to live for—you have other hopes to realize, and many scenes yet to come shall be blessed with the sunlight of your smiles. Look up, my wife, and smile."

Morgiana did smile, so happily and so sweetly, that heaven itself seemed reflected upon her countenance. Again she placed her arm about her husband's neck, and murmured her thanksgiving with an overflowing heart.

"But tell me, my husband," said Morgiana, as soon as she could bring her mind down to a cool reflection, "how is it that you live? I saw your bloody form, all stiff and cold, and they told me you were dead. Why have we thus been separated?"

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## THE REVELATION OF VILLANY.

At that moment Orlando cast his eyes out at the window, and an exclamation of some sudden emotion escaped from his lips as he noticed Roswell Berkley coming up from the river. Chiron's eyes wandered in the same direction, and pulling his son by the sleeve, he bade him seek Sir Oliver and inform him of the arrival, at the same time promising that he soon would follow.

As Orlando passed out he saw Chiron take Morgiana's hand again in his own, and though anxious curiosity ran wild in his bosom, yet he endeavored to curb it by the self-assurance that all would ere long be revealed to him. He had seen his mother in the possession of her long-lost reason, and he had found in the person of his mysterious friend a dear father, but yet there was much more for him to know. The life-lots had not yet all been drawn.

At the same moment that Roswell Berkley entered the hall of Sir Oliver Wimple's dwelling Dick Nolan and three of his shipmates came up from the river, and remained within hailing distance. Berkley was not without some slight shade of suspicion as he entered the baronet's dwelling, for the servants had eyed him with strange glances as he passed them; but, remembering that the old baronet was his friend, he strove to banish all unpleasant suspicions, and

in a moment more he greeted Sir Oliver with a bland smile.

"Ah, whom have we here?" uttered Berkley, as the remodelled hunter entered the room.

"Let me introduce you," said the baronet, "Mr. Berkley, my friend, Lord Chiron."

"Chiron! Lord Chiron!" repeated Berkley, starting with a sudden fear, as he recognized the noble form of the old hunter.

"Have you forgotten me?" asked Chiron, as he regarded the dumbfounded man with a bitter smile.

"Sir Oliver, what means this?" cried Berkley, in a tone which seemed to indicate that he still counted upon the baronet's friendship, but at the same time evincing a fear that might not be easily shaken off.

"It simply means that Lord Chiron, and one or two other friends, have business to transact, and your presence was deemed absolutely necessary. Ah, here comes another," continued Sir Oliver, as the young hunter entered the room. "Mr. Berkley, Orlando Chester."

"Fiends of darkness!" shrieked the villain, as his eyes rested upon him whom he thought either dead, or far away. "Sir Oliver, let me go hence."

"Easy," said Chiron, as he motioned Berkley to a seat. "I have business with you, and when

that is done you can be relieved of our presence."

Roswell Berkley gazed first upon one, and then upon another of those present, and, while his gaze seemed wavering between Chiron and Orlando, he sank into a seat. A deep struggle was apparent upon his countenance, but at length his native impudence seemed to triumph, and with a forced look of offended dignity, he said:

"Then go on—but be quick about it."

"You will find the business quickly enough transacted for your own pleasure," returned Chiron, as he quietly took a seat.

"And who are you that thus assumes to dictate?" asked Berkley, with considerable distrust. "If you be Lord Chiron, you can be nothing to me."

"I am the Lord of Chiron, and I am something to you; but it is of your brother that I would now speak."

Roswell Berkley started and turned pale.

"I would ask you," continued Chiron, "if you remember of your brother's making his will and leaving the colony for England?"

"Since I hold all my property by virtue of that will, I should not be likely to forget it," returned Berkley, through whose perturbation there was a tone of assumed sarcasm and contempt.

"And, if I remember rightly, your brother never returned to America."

"No sir; he died in England."

"And do you remember how Sir Wallace Berkley came to his death?"

Again the villain turned pale, for he remembered the dark hint about the *duel* which Chiron had thrown out a week before.

"I will help you," continued Chiron. "Sir Wallace Berkley fell in a duel with one Vincent Gilman."

"Well, sir, and what of that?" uttered Berkley, vainly endeavoring to curb his swelling fears.

"The fatal will which the unfortunate baronet placed in your hands you made his death-warrant; for you sent Gilman over to pick the quarrel, and when he returned he bore to you the intelligence of your brother's death!"

"It's a lie!" cried Berkley, "a base, infernal lie, coined for the purpose of my ruin. There dwells not the power on earth that can prove it!"

"Perhaps not," replied Chiron, "for the man who did the deed now lives no more—his bones

are lying beneath the deep shade of yonder forest. But I will help you further. When Gilman returned, he informed you, also, that your brother had left a wife and child. Almost immediately after Sir Wallace's arrival in England he fell in with a lovely companion of his childhood's years, and he married her, of which fact he informed you by letter."

"I never received it! He did not write!" shrieked the villain, while the white foam actually stood upon his lips. "My brother was never married! That maniac—"

The speaker did not finish his sentence, for with a bound like a royal tiger Chiron sprang forward and grasped the dastard by the throat.

"Villain," whispered the powerful man, in a tone that resembled the rushing whirlwind, "Morgiana Chester was your brother's wedded wife, and she is one near and dear to me. Let your lips give utterance to but a whisper against her fair fame again, and I'll crush you as I would a viper. You *did* receive your brother's letter wherein he informed you of his marriage, and you destroyed it. You then sought his death, and when you learned from Gilman that his poor wife was made crazy by her misfortune, you resolved that she should pass before the world as a dishonored woman!"

Chiron released his hold upon the villain's throat as he ceased speaking, and went back to where Orlando stood trembling with amazed astonishment.

"Sit down, sit down for the present," said Chiron, as he saw the youth about to speak. "I will bring this matter to a close ere long."

As the old hunter—for so we may still call him—thus spoke, he turned once more towards where Berkley sat, and he was just in time to see that individual fumbling within the bosom of his vest, as if in search of something, but the moment he met the fiery glance of the powerful man he half withdrew his hand, and with a tinge of insolence he uttered:

"It seems strange that if my brother took to himself a wife, he should have withheld from her his family name."

"Sir Wallace did not withhold from his wife his family name," returned Chiron, "but she, poor woman, wandered from it. After her mind fell from its throne of reason she conceived the idea that her husband had deserted her, her mind was filled with a fearful phantom of his faithfulness, and seeming to forget the past, she took her own pure virgin name, and shrank

from the society of those whom she had known in her happiness."

"It's a lie!—It's all a lie!" cried the excited villain, seeming ready to grasp at the least straw that might float before him. "My brother's will gave to me all his property, and nothing can gainsay it."

"Do you not know that by the laws of England the will of a bachelor or widower is made null and void by a subsequent marriage and birth of issue?" asked Chiron, with a look of utter contempt.

"Prove it! prove it!" cried Berkley, while a flash of demoniac hope shot athwart his livid features. "You cannot prove this cursed marriage. The mother is a maniac, and there is no proof!"

"The mother is not a maniac," returned Chiron, at the same time putting forth his hand to keep Orlando in his seat. "Her reason has returned to her, and even now she is almost within sound of my voice."

"Her word will not pass against me," uttered Berkley.

"But this will!" returned Chiron, as he took from his pocket a small parchment roll. "'Tis the secret of your mother's old oaken chest," he continued to Orlando, and then spreading it open to the gaze of Berkley, he added:

"Here, thou heartless villain, is the marriage certificate of Wallace Berkley, baronet, and Morgiana Chester, and it bears the seals and signatures of the Earl of Boston, Sir Thomas Warren, together with that of the rector who married them. Is that evidence enough?"

For some time Roswell Berkley had been sustained upon the expiring embers of his own hopes, and like the cornered rat, he had turned at bay; but now all, all was crushed, and with a groan he fell back in his chair, his glassy eyes still glaring wildly upon his powerful antagonist.

"Now, villain," continued Chiron, as he noticed Berkley's manner, "you will plot no more. The same fate which you planned for Orlando may yet be yours. There's murder, deep and black, upon your soul, and you cannot escape its just punishment. 'Twas you who plotted for the death of the young hunter, and then you plotted for mine. You attempted to sell the youth into Algerine slavery, and you tried to

gain the mother into your power; but through all your wickedness the finger of a just God has been visible, and He seems to have saved you till this moment only that your crimes might be exposed, and yourself given over to the laws you have outraged."

"But, by the torments of the fiends! thou shalt not live to witness thy triumph," roared the villain, starting from his seat and springing forward.

The movement of the wicked man was so quick that he seized the parchment from Chiron's hand before the latter could prevent it, and then darting back he drew a pistol from his bosom.

"Now die, tattler!" he gasped; and as he spoke, he pressed his finger upon the trigger of the weapon he held.

If Berkley's movements had been quick, Chiron's eyes had been quicker, for the last movement of the villain he had anticipated, and springing nimbly on one side he dashed the pistol from its owner's grasp.

"There, miserable scoundrel!" uttered Chiron, as the weapon bounded across the room. "Thus are you foiled. Dost think that the destruction of that marriage certificate would benefit thee? Roswell Berkley, do you not know me?"

"Know thee?" iterated the foiled man, in a fearful, horror-laden whisper, while his knees trembled beneath him? *Know thee!*"

"Ay, Roswell, do you know me?" again asked Lord Chiron, while he bent upon the man before him a sharp, searching gaze.

Roswell Berkley arose slowly from his seat, stepped breathlessly forward, and laid his hand upon the strange man's arm. He gazed deeply searchingly into his opponent's face, a livid, deathly hue overspread his features, and, while his heart seemed to shrink back from the very blackness of the soul that held it, he sank back into his seat, and murmured:

"The grave itself has turned against me! Wallace—my brother! O, that the earth had swallowed you ere you came to thwart me thus. Not dead, but living—and living to curse me!"

"Your own black heart shall alone curse you," returned Chiron. "I am indeed Sir Wallace Berkley, and I am your brother. I am Lord Chiron, too."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE DENOUEMENT.

ROSWELL BERKLEY seemed ready to speak, but he had not the power. The crushing of all his hopes had been so utter, so overwhelming, that his tongue could find no utterance. In the meantime Orlando came forward and caught his father's arm.

"Father," he said, "is this, too, all real, or do I dream?"

"It's all real, my boy," returned Chiron, while his face softened with a beam of affection as he gazed upon his son. "It's all real, and you shall no longer be kept in suspense; for your own and my brother's information, I will explain it all:

"Shortly after you were born, my son," commenced Sir Wallace, "I was one day grossly insulted by a perfect stranger. At first I took no notice of it. The insult was repeated, and at length I struck the miscreant with my fist. He challenged me. His own insults had been too public to leave me room for any other course than to fight him. My moral nature shrank from the deed, but I was too much of a coward to stand out against a false public opinion; and so I accepted his challenge. The scoundrel fired before his time! His bullet entered my side, and with one or two quick, painful bounds, the surrounding scenes swam before me, and I sunk unconscious upon the ground.

When I came to my senses I found myself in the house of an old physician, who informed me that I had been two weeks under his roof. The hail had been extracted, and I was told that I should recover; and when I asked for my wife, they told me that she could not see me now, but that she was safe. But they had deceived me; for when I was sufficiently recovered to go out, they confessed to me that Morgiana had disappeared with her child. I learned that I was carried to my house all bloody and insensible from the sanguinary field, and to all appearance dead. The sight threw the reason of my fond wife crashing from its throne, and, unknown to her friends, she had disappeared. They told me that she had raved some, and that she thought I had deserted her, and that she also spoke of going in search of me. Before I had made much arrangement for seeking out my poor night-stricken wife, the old physician, who had so kindly had me taken to his own dwelling, gave to me a small portmanteau which had been left by the man who had shot me, and who had been obliged to take such sudden flight that he had no time to return to his hotel for it. Within that portmanteau I found certain letters which revealed to me at once the whole dark plot that had been concocted against me, and which opened my eyes to the horrible fact that



my own brother had been at the bottom of the whole. At first I resolved to come directly back to Virginia and punish him as he deserved; but then I could not leave till I had learned something of my wife and child, and at length, when I found that the impression was abroad that I was dead, I resolved to let Roswell remain under the pressure of his own conscience, for I knew his grasping, penurious disposition, and I knew that he would not waste my estate. After much searching and inquiry I made out to trace a woman and her child into Scotland, but I found them not. About six months after the disappearance of my wife I received from the king the lands and titles of Chiron. I had been a firm adherent to the interests of Charles, and this was my reward. I accepted the lordship, and at the same time received from my sovereign the promise that he would keep the affair of my identity as secret as possible. From that time I threw off my family name, and wore only the title of my new grant. I was known only as Chiron. Some thought that Sir Wallace Berkley was dead, while others thought him safe in the American colonies, but only a chosen few knew him in his new disguise. I had sworn that I would not reveal myself to my brother till I had found my wife, or learned something of her fate.

"Year after year passed away, and I became convinced that my Morgiana and her child were dead. Charles had passed from the throne; James had worn the English crown for his brief day, then fled into France, and William was now the monarch. In the troubles that ensued from James trying to regain his lost sceptre, I was called upon for my aid, and I could not refuse. At length, as I was one day sailing down the Thames, a woman and her child were discovered upon the shore, upon which an old sailor made some remark about a poor insane woman, with an infant boy, who had many years before gone over to America in a ship to which he was attached. I started from my seat, drew the old sailor aside, and soon I knew that the poor woman of whom he spoke was my wife. I gave the man some gold, and as soon as possible I set forth for the colonies. I landed in Boston. I there gained intelligence of a maniac mother and her child, and at length I followed them here, where I arrived in season to save them from the fangs of the serpent that would have devoured them. The rest you know, my son, and at some future time you shall know of my

wearisome searches through Great Britain, and of other things which might prove interesting to you. For the present I will only tell you further that the governor has had the accusation against you withdrawn, and that you have nothing more to fear."

"O, my father, my father!" murmured Orlando. It was all he could say, and he only fell upon his parent's neck and gave way to the gushing emotions of his rapture-wrought soul. So thick and so fast had come these strange and startling developments upon his understanding, that it was some time ere he could comprehend the full force of their eventful meaning; but when, at length, they became comprehensively arranged in his mind, he shook back the flowing locks from his brow, and turned his wondering, speaking gaze upon the form of his miserable uncle.

Roswell Berkley spoke not a word after his brother had closed; but after casting his eyes for a moment about him, he arose from his seat, and turned towards the door. There was a strange gleam in his eyes, a peculiar twitching about his mouth, and his hand trembled violently as he placed it upon the latch. None moved to detain him, none thought of it, for his manner struck them with awe. A bitter curse rested upon his lips, the whole weight of his sins seemed dwelling upon his heart, but above all came the chaotic crashing of his grasping, unnatural ambition, rumbling and thundering about his shrinking soul. For a moment after the villain had passed out, all was quiet, and Chiron was just upon the point of following his brother, when the sharp report of a pistol broke the air.

The party rushed out from the hall, and within a rod of the door-stone, they found the wretched man weltering in his own blood! He had carried a second pistol, and that life which he had blackened by his heinous crimes, he had himself taken!

"Poor Roswell!" murmured Lord Chiron, as he stood and gazed upon the fearful scene. "For all thy sins I could not have wished thee so terrible an end as this. But God's will be done!"

Nolan and his companions were soon called, but instead of carrying Roswell Berkley back to Jamestown a prisoner, they carried his cold corpse to its burial! His brother placed a marble slab above his grave, but on the next day afterwards, the heavens lowered upon the spot, and a

lightning-bolt shivered the pale marble into fragments! It was never replaced!

\* \* \* \* \*

Soft and gentle twilight had spread its grateful influence abroad, when within the chamber of Lady Morgiana Berkley were assembled the principal living characters of our tale. The happy wife and mother, now almost entirely recovered, was sitting up in her bed. Upon her left hand stood Sir Oliver and Lady Wimple, and their gentle Ada, while upon her right stood her husband and son.

Lady Berkley had been informed of all that had transpired. She had listened to the interpretation of her maniac dream—she had heard her husband's story, and she had read the heart of her noble-minded son, and from the deepest fountains of her heart, she had thanked God for His boundless mercies, and the kindness she had received.

"Sir Oliver," she said, while a joyous light danced in her dark, lustrous eyes, "Orlando has imparted to me a secret, and he assured me that you have, for some time, known and admitted its import. In addition to your many kind favors I would now ask you for another, my husband having given the mission into my hands. Will

you give to my bestowal the hand of your sweet daughter, Ada?"

A happy smile irradiated the features of the old baronet as he took the hand of his blushing child, and without a word he passed it over to his wife. Lady Wimple kissed her fair daughter's brow, and led her to the head of the bed, and placed her hand in that of the Lady Morgiana. The latter drew the gentle girl to her bosom, and after having embraced her with a gushing fondness, she put forth her thin, white hands—one to Ada and the other to her son.

"There," she said, as she joined their hands together, "let each take the other as the best gift of earth. Look back upon the past and cull such lessons of experience as shall enable you to live for peace and joy in the future. Misfortune is the lot of all, but to those whose souls are pure it can only cloud for a time, and when it passes away it leaves no sting, no grief behind, but serves to make brighter still the sunlight of our new-found joys. May God bless us each and all, and long continue to us the joy of this blissful moment."

The happy mother raised her eyes to heaven as she spoke—the others followed her example, and they all responded,—*"AMEN!"*

THE END.



[FROM GLEASON'S PICTORIAL DRAWING-ROOM COMPANION.]

## THE FARMER'S DAUGHTERS:

—OR—

## MOVING INTO TOWN.

BY MISS R. A. ACKERMAN.

"DEBBY, Debby! you can't guess what glorious news,—Steve, do stop shaking that tree, so that I can get somewhere within a mile of you to tell my story."

The speaker bounded, panting for breath, into the orchard where the persons addressed were engaged in collecting the fruit of a large apple-tree; she was a young girl of apparently not more than sixteen, the image of health and happiness; her eyes sparkled, and her cheeks glowed with excitement; flinging herself down upon a wheelbarrow, standing nigh, and employing her sun-bonnet as a fan, she exclaimed, "O, I am so glad, Deb, we are really going!"

"Steve," a pleasant, thoughtful-looking youth, of some nineteen or twenty years, sprang from the bough of the tree that he had been stripping of its honors, and gazed with a look of anxious inquiry into her face.

"What did you say, Nell?" said he.

"I said," replied Nell, with great emphasis, "that we are actually going to move to the city."

The apples that Debby had gathered in her

apron fell to the ground, as she said, in a tone of reproachful astonishment, "after all our coaxing, too! it is too bad! what has made you so crazy to go to the city, Nell?"

"O, Letty has told me such magnificent stories about it, ever since she has been home from school; of the beautiful streets, and the splendid houses, and the music, and sights, and wonders, and the crowds of people, and the elegant dresses, and all that; it's a wonder that I've as many senses left as I have. We have an old friend living there, who has promised to see about buying the house for us, and anything else that we want him to do. Father went to New York, on purpose to look at some of the houses that were for sale; he told us of half a dozen, but there is one that suits our fancy better than the others; it is a three story brick, with stone stoop, iron rail, and what they call a gothic doorway; Letty has seen it; she says it is in one of the most fashionable streets, and stands in the middle of a long row of the same kind; so father has written this afternoon, to say that he will take the house and move into it as soon as possible. I

am so rejoiced that we are going to get out of this dismal, lonely place!"

"Dismal and lonely! why you never thought it so, till lately, Nell," said Debby.

"Well I know, but then it seems so, compared with the city, and such a city as New York! I shall be too happy to live!" exclaimed the delighted girl; "but I forgot!" continued she, suddenly springing up, "I was sent on an errand to the bush down yonder. I will tell you all about it at singing-school to-night; don't forget to be there," and she disappeared like a flash, leaving Debby and Steve to make the best of her communication.

Nell and the Letty she had mentioned, were the only daughters of wealthy farmer Hilton; he owned, to be sure, but the one homestead in which he resided, and which had descended to him from his forefathers; but its far-reaching acres were the finest looking and most fertile of any for miles around. Letty was about two years older than Nelly, being about eighteen at the period of which we speak; she had a short time before returned from a boarding-school in the city of New York, where she had been for two years acquiring some of the accomplishments of that city. Before she left home, she was a quiet, dreaming girl, happy in the rural occupations and companions that surrounded her; but contact with the thousand attractions that New York possesses for a youthful stranger's mind, had produced a revolution in her character. She returned home, longing for the delights of the distant city; the friends of her childhood seemed to her disagreeable and rough. So long and so repeatedly did she dwell upon the pleasures she had left, that Nell, who had no idea of what a great city was, having never approached, what Letty called civilized life, nearer than a small market town, had her head completely turned by her sister's eloquent descriptions, and grew almost as discontented as she. After Letty's return from school, there was no more peace for farmer Hilton. The two girls pleaded with him incessantly to sell his farm and remove to the city; their mother, like many others, fond and foolish, thinking of the grand match that by the capture of some rich merchant or something of the kind, might thus be made for her two handsome daughters, joined in their entreaties. Farmer Hilton was a good natured, easy soul, loving his wife and children above everything on earth, and willing to do anything to please them; at last, though it was terribly

against his conscience to do so, he sold his farm with all its appurtenances, and bought a dwelling in one of the fashionable streets of New York. It was their contemplated removal thither, which had occasioned Nelly's outburst of glee.

The young persons whom Nelly addressed as "Debby" and "Steve," were Deborah and Stephen Boughton, the daughter and son of the good Dominie, who for some dozen years had officiated as clergyman of the township. Deborah was a mild, pleasing girl, a year older than Nell; Stephen, as we have said, was a young man nearly twenty, of much the same disposition and appearance as his sister. He was fond of retirement, and was studying with his father for the ministry, preparatory to entering college, which he intended doing at the commencement of the next term. For many years farmer Hilton had served in the capacity of either deacon or elder in the church presided over by Dominie Boughton. Between the family of the elder and his worthy Dominie, there had always existed the greatest possible intimacy and friendship, and sorrowful indeed was the household of the Boughtons when the removal of the Hiltons first began to be a subject of conversation; the younger portion, however, among whom were Debby and her brother, hoped to the last, that something would happen to prevent their going.

It was the custom of Dominie Boughton's parishioners, to devote an hour or so after the prayer meeting of every Friday evening, to the rehearsal of tunes for the service of the following Sabbath. Stephen Boughton was generally the leader of these rehearsals. The district school-house being the most central point, was the spot chosen for such meetings; many of the younger ones, who did not wish to attend prayers, came when they were over, to "singing-school," as they called it. Among these latter, on the evening referred to by Nelly, was herself and her sister Letty. They came unattended, for it was a beautiful moonlight evening, and their house was not quite a mile from the place of meeting; besides, they were accustomed to travelling the roads alone. They entertained their companions with a long, rapturous account of their home that was to be, till the interest of even the most unconcerned was awakened, and many envied them their anticipated departure for the glories of the city; some of the young men, however, declared that they could not see for the life of them what attraction there was about it all.

For some reason which did not appear, the singing never was worse than on that evening. The base was audible only in a sleepy sort of growl, and the tenor squeaked by fits and starts in the most listless, unmusical manner. Perhaps it was because the chorister was out of humor; for he certainly was unaccountably cross. He scolded the treble unmercifully for not keeping time, and looked at the alto as if he meant to annihilate them for singing out of tune.

"Steve Boughton acts as if he had lost his wits," remarked one young lady to another.

"Or his heart," replied her companion, somewhat frightened at the vengeful glances he ever and anon cast in the direction of the Hilton girls, who were amusing themselves by a flirtation with some young gentlemen across the room.

The rehearsal was terminated at an early hour, by an open rebellion of the persecuted treble and alto, who declared that Mr. Boughton was finding fault without the slightest cause or provocation, and that they would not practise another note without redress of some kind, if the singing on Sunday had to be omitted because of them; redress, Mr. Boughton did not seem inclined to offer, and the meeting was unanimously voted adjourned.

Stephen, as he had always done, escorted Letty home, but her lively sallies had not the least effect in rousing him from an unusual reserve.

"Are you ill, Stephen?" she inquired, when after walking some moments in silence, he heaved a deep sigh.

"No, I thank you," was the laconic answer.

Another silence ensued, which was broken by Letty's exclaiming:

"How strange it will seem to leave the farm, after all!"

"Are you really so glad as you seem to be, to leave all your old friends and associations, Letty?" The dark eyes of the young man looked with an expression of anxious inquiry into the face of the beautiful girl leaning so confidently upon his arm; her eyes met fully his troubled, melancholy gaze, but there was no change in their expression, no shadow upon their brilliancy, as she replied gaily:

"Certainly, Stephen, I am not glad to leave my friends; I should like it extremely if they were all to accompany us; but since that cannot be, you know, it would be all nonsense to mourn over it. If you should ever stroll in our direc-

tion, when we are established in New York, you won't fail to make us a visit, will you, Steve?"

"Thank you—of course not," replied Stephen, laconically as before.

A few moments brought them to Letty's home; relinquishing her arm, and bidding her a hasty good-night, he took his solitary road across the fields to his own dwelling.

"How I wish that Letty had never seen that detestable boarding-school!" was the thought of bitter regret that again and again arose in his mind. "How can two or three years so have changed her? She used to smile so sweetly and affectionately when she spoke to me; now she is so fashionable and indifferent; it is no coolness on my part, no change in myself, that has produced the alteration in her conduct; nothing, nothing but city flatteries and folly; but she shall not think that I am grieving for the loss of her regard; I will show her that I can be as cold and careless as she!"

Of the two sisters, Letty had always been Stephen's favorite; her tastes and feelings were so much more like his own than those of Nelly. Growing up together from childhood, they cherished for each other the affection of brother and sister. But Letty's departure for boarding-school had been on her part the herald of a change in her feelings toward the dearest friend of her early days—Stephen Boughton. She had been caressed and flattered by the foppish gallants of the city, till her thoughts, which were not given to deep reflection, had been completely diverted from their old channel. Stephen's brotherly regard for Letty had passed insensibly into a feeling deeper and more dangerous to his peace; but even of his words and looks she took now so little notice, that she had no suspicion of the change. Since her return she had mixed so seldom with the associates of former years—not exactly because she felt herself above them—but because meditation upon the acquaintances she had left, had rendered their society, as we have said, uncongenial to her, that she seemed almost a stranger in the scenes so long familiar.

Stephen's resolution of coolness toward Letty did not forsake him, though it cost him a terrible effort; for when he next met her, on the Sabbath, his heart beat almost audibly, and his frame trembled so that he could scarcely stand, as he returned her morning salutation with a bow and smile, polite and indifferent as her own. From that time till the departure of the Hiltons, which took place as soon as the house in the

city could be arranged for their reception, Stephen never betrayed by word or glance the slightest sign of his disappointment with regard to Letty; and when he took leave of her, for anything that he knew to the contrary, forever—for many hundred miles lay between New York and his quiet home—it was with a calm eye and steady voice, that would have done credit to a stoic. He stood by the window of his study, watching the carriage that bore them away, till the last trace of it disappeared; he glanced toward their old homestead; the smoke curled up as usual from among the trees around it, that were just putting on the gorgeous apparel of autumn; but they that to him had given it life and beauty, were gone; strangers trod its pleasant dells, and rejoiced in its bright hearth-fires. Turning hastily from the window, Stephen bowed his head upon his hands, and gave way to the gloomy reflections that overwhelmed him.

"I do wonder who those people are?" mused the fashionable Mr. Augustus Belmonte, as he raised his quizzing-glass to his eyes, at the window of his boarding-house, to survey two young ladies, who were descending the steps of an elegant dwelling opposite. The young ladies were attired completely in superb velvet and ermine, and had a dashing, consequential air.

"Zounds!" exclaimed Belmonte, aloud, to a companion, who was amusing himself upon a sofa with Balzer's last work. "Jake, do come and take a squint at these girls! see how they step off, as if the pavement wasn't good enough for them! I wonder if they wouldn't like to have it carpeted? Who are they?"

"Who are who?" inquired Jake, looking up pettishly from the pages of his book just in time to hear the last part of Belmonte's address.

"Why, those girls in dark blue velvet, that have just left the house directly opposite; they must belong there, for I have seen them dozens of times peeping in and out."

"O, I forget the name just now—I'm not acquainted with them, and never was. All I know about them is that they bought that house, and moved into it last fall, and that they're reputed to be very rich; now don't bother me with any more questions about girls in dark blue velvet, or dark blue tow-cloth, or anything else, for I'm just commencing a new chapter," and he resumed his reading, leaving Belmonte engaged in a variety of speculations respecting the young ladies.

"It wouldn't have been Mr. Augustus Belmonte," thought that gentleman to himself, referring to the time of Jake's sojourn, "that would have been living three months, opposite two such pretty girls, without scraping an acquaintance, by hook or by crook. What a fine substitute either one of them would make for my little Miss Sophonisba Would-be-somebody, who has taken it into her young head to turn up her nose at me in Broadway. By the shades of my ancestors, I'll get an introduction somehow, if I have to introduce myself!"

Belmonte's wishes, in this respect, were gratified sooner than he expected. The same evening, while leisurely sauntering into the drawing-room, his eye fell upon two young ladies engaged in a lively conversation with the daughter of his landlady; they were the same two that had so attracted his attention in the afternoon. Immediately upon the introduction. "Mr. Belmonte, ladies—Miss Hilton, Miss Ellen Hilton," he seated himself between them on the divan and chatted as familiarly as if he had been an acquaintance of years. Upon his return, after escorting them across the street to their residence, he communicated to his friend Jake the intelligence of his introduction to the ladies in dark blue velvet, and announced his intention of calling upon them immediately.

"In the meantime," said Jake, with a sort of contemptuous sneer, "what is to become of Miss Sophonisba Up-town-there, the little heiress that is to be? You'll give me a letter of introduction and a recommend in that quarter, now won't you, Gus?"

"O, no you don't, now, my dear boy; don't be too obliging; I'll find out on which side of the scale the gold weighs the heaviest, and then, ahem! Why, it isn't the first time in my life that I've made love to two ladies at once, Jakey," and erecting himself before the mirror, he fondled his moustache with an air that he had cultivated as being peculiarly irresistible.

The Misses Hilton, who were no other than our friends Letty and Nelly, were exceedingly pleased with their new acquaintance. They were captivated at once by his exquisite bow.

"How different from the awkward country obeisances that we have received all our lives!" exclaimed Letty.

"How much handsomer, and how much more polite he is, than even Steve Boughton, whom you thought such a pattern of perfection, Letty," remarked Nell. "How much handsomer than

any of the New Yorkers that we've been introduced us to as yet. Why don't you set your cap for him, Letty?" continued the young lady. "I would, if I wasn't shut up all day in that plaguy academy; all you've got to do is sit here and cast sheep's-eyes at him through your bewitching ringlets; you won't deserve an offer all your life, if you don't catch that fellow in no time!"

"Mrs. Augustus Belmonte!" said Letty, musingly, "how sweetly it would sound. Nell, I believe I'll take your advice!"

"Do! do!" replied Nell, laughing merrily, as she seated herself at her studies for the ensuing day; "the sooner you're out of the way the better, for then I shall have the field entirely to myself!"

It was not long before Belmonte made his promised call upon the Misses Hilton. At first, he inquired for "the young ladies," and flirted alternately with Letty and Nell, but his regard soon seemed to take a more decided turn, and when his ring at the door-bell was answered, his inquiry was invariably for "Miss Hilton" alone. His visits became more and more frequent, he escorted Letty to the various places of amusement, presented her with elegant gifts, and by a thousand delightful innuendoes, made it very evident that he did not wish longer to be considered by her merely as a common acquaintance or friend. Farmer Hilton and his wife encouraged his addresses by every means in their power, for by his kind attention to themselves he had completely ingratiated himself into their favor. He had won the old gentleman by the gift of a massive, handsome walking-stick, and enraptured the old lady by a magnificent presentation of her favorite woollen yarn and Scotch snuff. "He seems," said the good old farmer, "just like one of the family."

Between Letty and Belmonte the attachment appeared to be mutual; they exchanged rings, containing each other's daguerreotypes, and the sweetest little notes, containing the most touching expressions of affection, went daily back and forth between the boarding-house of Belmonte and the residence of the Hiltons. Nothing was wanting now to complete the happiness of all parties, but the climax of a proposal; but having marched up energetically to this momentous crisis, the affair made a decided halt. Weeks slipped into months, and left him standing still in *statu quo*.

Nelly, in the meantime, was busied with her school studies and accomplishments, but had

found time to fall in love with a desperate character, who performed upon the stage of one of the fashionable theatres. Actors had always been her father's dread and abhorrence; and this person's reputation for morals did not tend to correct the impression he had formed of them. What was rather singular, Nelly's favorite possessed none even of those qualifications which recommended Belmonte to favor. He was several years older than herself, and not at all good-looking, and rough in manner. Nelly had seen him only in his fictitious characters, and her imagination had transferred the fascinations of those characters to his own; her father had several times forbidden him the house, and of late nothing had been seen of him in her company, either at home or abroad.

To give Letty and Nelly every advantage, no pains or expense had been spared; every whim that seized them had been gratified, and having always lived in the country, neither parents nor daughters had any idea of the expenses attendant upon a city residence. When farmer Hilton sold the homestead, he had from its sale, exclusive of the house in which he now resided, a considerable sum of ready money remaining; what was left, after furnishing this city residence, he laid out in bank stock, as being the best disposal of it. At first he had paid his bills as they were handed in, but as the demands of the young ladies increased, he was obliged to obtain articles upon credit; this it was easy for him to do, as he possessed the reputation of being extremely wealthy. Whenever they tormented the patient old gentleman for new dresses, jewelry and so forth, they would say, playfully, "never mind, pa, we'll both be married in less than a year, and have as much money as we want of our own." Partially consoling the thoughts of their extravagance with this reflection, he allowed them all the jewelry and trappings they desired, and suffered himself to be bored to death with accumulations of splendid furniture, and the uproar of their nightly entertainments.

But though the Hiltons almost forgot that any debts were due, one by one the bills came in at last. One hundred, two hundred, three hundred, and four hundred, thus the several amounts inscribed upon each accumulated. The bank stock was the only resource; but alas! to the utter confusion and affright of the family, when it was all expended, many heavy unrecipited bills still stared them in the face. There was no remedy but to sell the house and its

costly furniture. The idea almost crazed the young ladies, for their father declared if he did, he would move immediately back into the country. Letty exhausted herself in tears and lamentations; Nelly was furious. "I go back into the country, indeed! among such a stupid, uncivilized set!" was her passionate exclamation, in reply to Letty's heart-broken, "What shall we do?" "Go back, indeed!" she continued, "and hire some poor mean hut, and live like beggars and be laughed at, where we once owned the handsomest farm and lived like nabobs, though it was only in the country! No, indeed! Nell Hilton isn't quite such a fool as that!"

"How can you help yourself?" asked Letty.

"You shall see," was Nell's only reply.

Letty felt uneasy; for though she had not mentioned it to any one, there had been, for two or three days past, something in her sister's conduct that excited her suspicions. That same afternoon, she observed Nelly attiring herself in an unusual manner, in her best apparel, and with an uncommon quantity of jewelry. "Where are you going, Nell?" she inquired.

"O, only to take a walk," said Nell, coolly.

At this moment the door-bell rang violently. Letty stepped into the hall and answered it. A note was handed her directed to her father. She carried it up stairs into the sitting-room, where the old gentleman, lost in the smoke from his pipe, was musing over his fallen fortunes. "Read it for me, Letty," said he, as she held it to him. Letty did as she was directed. The note ran thus:

"DEAR SIR:—Your daughter Ellen has made an engagement to meet a certain worthless character at a hotel near some of the steamboat landings, I know not which, for the purpose of marrying him. They intend to leave for Albany by this evening's boat. This is the earliest information I have had it in my power to give you; it may possibly not be too late to save her."

"Quick, father, quick!" said Letty, pale as ashes, and gasping for breath, "it is true! I know it! Perhaps Nell hasn't gone yet, she was putting on her bonnet and shawl when I came up—quick!" And she flew down into the room where she had left Nell a moment before. The room was empty; from the window she caught a glimpse of her wayward sister just disappearing down the street.

"Down street, father! She has just gone! I can overtake her in a moment," said she to the old gentleman who had followed her almost as

excited as herself. Seizing his hat and cane he motioned her back. "Go to your mother, Letty," said he; before she could answer, he was out of sight.

Nelly's steps were swift as a winged arrow, but the old farmer was active and strong; for half an hour he followed her from street to street, but the distance between them increased, and his eyesight failed him. Hastily motioning to the driver of a hack which stood near, he ordered him—"Follow that young woman with the white shawl and white bonnet and veil; let me know where she stops. She is my daughter—I am not crazy," added he, seeing the driver hesitate and scrutinize his wild looks and gestures. "Drive on quick, for your life!"

The vehicle dashed forward, and was soon moving on at an even pace with the swift steps of the deluded girl; her father was just about springing from the hack to her side, when she suddenly stopped and entered a large hotel just before them, just above the steamboat landing. Ordering the driver to wait, the old gentleman followed her. She entered a small side-room; he knocked at the door—it was opened and the father and daughter stood face to face. Nelly looked aghast, uttered a slight scream, and sank, nearly fainting from terror, upon a chair. There were two other persons in the room; one was the actor, with whom Nelly had been forbidden to associate, the other a catholic priest of the city. With a firmness that formed a singular contrast to his usually easy nature, the old gentleman turned to Nelly, and taking her by the arm, said, "Nelly, you are wanted at home."

The priest stood in awe before the gray hairs of the injured father. The actor, putting on as much effrontery as he dared, asked insolently, "What do you mean by this intrusion, sir? The lady is my affianced wife."

Farmer Hilton looked at him with an expression in which indignation strove with contempt for the mastery, and merely replying, "She is my daughter, sir," once more endeavored to draw Nelly toward the door. Nelly drew back, and covering her face with her hands, exclaimed, "I cannot—I cannot go home again!"

"Nelly," said her father, endeavoring to preserve his firmness, while the tears started to his eyes, "a hack is at the door waiting for you; do you wish to be taken back by force to your father's house?"

Seeing that there was no help for her, Nelly rose, and, without removing her hands from her

face, allowed herself to be led away. The old man seated himself by Nelly's side, and leaned his elbows upon his knees, his head bowed upon his hands; not a word was spoken by either till the vehicle stopped before the door of their dwelling. Nelly was overwhelmed with shame and confusion.

Soon after appeared a notice in the newspapers announcing that the residence of the Hilton's, with all its "new and fashionable" furniture was for sale at auction. In a few weeks, the house was completely deserted, the blinds closed, and "To Let," in conspicuous characters inscribed upon the doorway. The Hiltons had departed unheralded, as they came; of all the dear friends who had courted them for their supposed wealth, none knew or cared whither.

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There was a small farm in the township where the Hiltons had formerly resided, that for more than a year had been untenanted. Persons seemed to have an aversion to hiring it, probably on account of its unproductiveness and lonely situation. It was reached by a path-way through a dense wood, on the outskirts of which it lay. To this, with the amount that remained after satisfying the demands of his creditors, Farmer Hilton repaired. It was a poor home, indeed, compared with the one they had sacrificed for city life and society. Letty and Nelly begged piteously that their father would choose some other situation not in the vicinity of their old friends, but this time he was not to be moved by their tears or entreaties; he had determined, he said, to die among the scenes in which his whole life, with the exception of the last two wretched years, had been passed, and till they found better homes of their own, his present one must satisfy them. Dominic Boughton, to whom he had written for advice and whom he had informed of his intended removal, was the first to call upon him.

"I feel as if I could breathe once more," said farmer Hilton, as he returned the eager grasp of his pastor's hand. "I have not had a moment's

peace since I moved into that terrible city. I have come back poor in pocket, but richer in experience."

"Letty and Nelly have changed very much outwardly," said the Dominie, turning towards them; "but they are the same in heart as ever, I hope."

The young ladies looked conscience-stricken, and did not reply.

"Debby will be delighted to see you," continued their friend; "I will send her over with Stephen; we expect him home to-morrow from college to spend a few weeks vacation; let me see: it is just two years this fall since you moved away, isn't it? Debby and Stephen will hardly recognize their old playmates."

"Stephen has probably found other and worthier favorites by this time," remarked Letty, with a slight tinge of sadness in her tone.

The expression upon Nelly's face said plainly as words could have said, that she didn't care whether he had or not.

"Stephen's taste isn't very changeable," said the Dominie, glancing inquiringly toward Letty. After a few moments lively chat, he took his leave, expressing a hope to meet them all at church on the following Sabbath.

Since the news of their bankruptcy first spread abroad, Letty had heard nothing from Belmonte. He had not even called to pay his parting compliments. Still, though she would have been horrified to have him visit her present home, she somehow cherished the idea that there might have been a reason for his conduct, and that time would yet restore him to her affections.

The next evening after the Dominie's visit, according to promise, Debby and Stephen, who had that morning returned home, paid a visit to the Hiltons. Debby seemed a little afraid of Letty and Nell, and called them each "Miss Hilton." Stephen looked considerably older, but otherwise he was not much changed. He greeted the young ladies with all his former friendship, but he felt, with deep regret, the change that two years had wrought in them.

Their beauty had not faded, but it had acquired a bold flashy stamp, and their manner was distressing, artificial and chilly. He hoped, however, that absence from the associations of the city would at length restore the loveliness and simplicity they had so completely lost.

During the few weeks that Stephen remained at home, he labored incessantly to divert the minds of Letty and her sister from the melancholy recollections that seemed to overwhelm them; but his efforts seemed of no avail; for, when he departed again, he left them nearly as reserved and low-spirited as he found them.

There was a partial reason, however, for Letty's continued despondency. She had, just before Stephen left, received intelligence of Belmonte's marriage to a wealthy heiress, of New York; the lady of his choice proved to be the Sophonisba, whom his friend Jake had referred to at the commencement of his acquaintance with the Hiltons; as he intimated his intention of doing them, he had been paying his addresses to this lady, and Letty, at the same time determined to propose to the one that should prove the best provided with the "capital" he so much needed. Some slight misunderstanding with Miss Sophonisba had suggested the idea of one of the Misses Hilton as a "substitute." The embarrassed condition of the Hiltons' affairs fully revealed to him how little he had to expect from a marriage with Letty; and Miss Sophonisba's great grandmother happening just at this period to die, leaving her in possession of a considerable and long-expected property, Mr. Augustus Belmonte capped the climax of his iniquity by proposing to and marrying Miss Sophonisba.

This intelligence with regard to Belmonte, came from a source that Letty could not doubt. It was a sore trial to her, but indignation at his deception, and the strength of womanly pride, gradually overcame her love which was mostly one of the imagination, and the excitement of hope and fear with regard to Belmonte, that had so long agitated her, having nothing more to feed upon, died away. When Letty awoke from

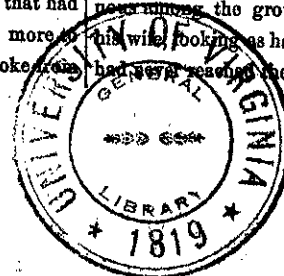
the delusion respecting him, she awoke to a better life. Even Nelly had learned to be ashamed of her stage actor romance, and applied herself with alacrity to household duties, which, a few months before, she would have despised. In a long letter that, at the opening of the spring, Debby wrote to her brother, she concluded thus:

"I am so glad, my dear Steve, that your vacation is again near at hand. Do hurry home; you can't imagine what a change has come over our old friends Letty and Nelly Hilton. Nelly is busying herself about the dairy and farm yard with all the dignity and more than the good nature of an inexperienced housekeeper. I will let you into the secret, however: it is the opinion of all the good people round that we shall soon have an invitation to a wedding at neighbor Hilton's, for it is generally understood that there is an engagement existing between Nell and Haslett, the young widower that purchased their old farm when they moved away.

"Now, a word in your ear, my dear brother; here is something still more interesting for you. I have found out—I will not tell you how—that Letty is not engaged; she has lost all her fantastic city airs, and though she seldom speaks of you herself, she listens with all attention and interest whenever we speak of you. Your heart would beat quicker for a year, if you could only see how delightfully she blushes when we say a word in your praise, or refer to the good old times when you and she used to stand looking at each other's faces in the brook. To tell you the truth, dear Steve, I am in haste to secure my sister-in-law before some one carries her off."

\* \* \* \* \*

Three years have passed. The little farm upon the outskirts of the wood is once more deserted. The homestead formerly owned by farmer Hilton has been enlarged and beautified, and a joyous company are assembled within its walls to grace a Thanksgiving dinner. Conspicuous among the group, are farmer Hilton and his wife, looking as happy as if a thought of care had never reached them; near them is one whom





we recognized in feature, though no longer in name, as Nell Hilton, now the wife of young Haslett, and sole mistress of the home in which her early years were passed. Haslett looks upon Nell with an eye of confiding affection; and farmer Hilton and his wife, as they watch their bright happy faces, thank God that after all the changes through which they have passed, he has given them so pleasant a rest at last in the home of their children. Dominic Boughton and his wife, and Debby, are there, and several others also; but the group does not yet appear to be completed. Every few moments, Debby will jump up and gaze eagerly from the window, with an exclamation of "I wonder why they do not come. Hark! there are sleigh bells. Ah! I see them; there they are!" she shouts, as she runs to the door, followed by the greater part of the company. In a few moments, a neat sleigh drives up and stops; a young gentleman, very much resembling Stephen Boughton, alights, and lifts out carefully and tenderly a lady, with

white silk bonnet, veil and gloves, much befitting a bride.

"Allow me, my dear *Mrs. Boughton*," says Nell, advancing with mock dignity to the lady, "to congratulate you upon this agreeable termination of your bridal tour. How do you relish the idea of settling in the country at last?"

The bride very unceremoniously gives Nell a box upon the ear.

"None of your old capers, Lett! remember that you are a pastor's wife now; you will have to carry yourself rather more straightly than you have done hitherto," and Nell laughingly led the way into the house.

As the company are seated around the bounteously spread board, Debby makes the remark: "I am so glad, Stephen, that you did not accept that call to the city; it will be so much pleasanter to have you and Letty so near us."

"For my part," says Letty, archly, as she returns Stephen's gaze of fond delight, "I have had quite enough of moving into town."

THE END.