

THE

# LADIES' GARTER.

BY GREENHORN.

AUTHOR OF

"Jack Harold," "City Crimes," "Lady Washington," etc.

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# THE LADY'S GARTER;

OR,

# THE PLATONIC MARRIAGE.

## CHAPTER I.

WE entreat the reader to listen, not to our apology—for we owe none—but to our explanation. We have taken up the *Lady's Garter* with all due reverence, and with the design of merely making it the circlet which shall closely and inseparably bind together the various events of the following tale. The *Garter* will play merely a subordinate part in our little drama; yet it must not be despised, for it gave rise to the rather curious and somewhat startling developments which constitute the materials of the narrative that bears its name.

Trusting that we have pacified our fair friend whose half angry words began this chapter, we will now, without further preface, plunge boldly into our theme.

It was a lovely day in midsummer—the hour, noon—the place, Boston. Along a retired street, and in a contemplative mood, with his eyes bent musingly upon the clean and shining flag-stones, there slowly walked a young man of perhaps thirty years of age. His arms were folded behind him, and he seemed sad. He was dressed in the garb of a gentleman, and possessed an air of decided refinement—yet his well-brushed, and rather unfashionable hat, his frail looking boots, and the as yet hardly perceptible seediness of his coat, proclaimed that

he was poor. He was sufficiently well-formed to “pass muster,” though rather thin—but, alas for the romance of our story!—his face was certainly not in the least degree handsome—for he was very pale, and care had done the work of time, by planting wrinkles where they had no business to be, on the brow of so young a man. Who and what this very uninteresting person was, will be seen anon.

The weather was lovely, as we have said; the breeze, soft and balmy as the breath of her whom you love most, gently rustled the foliage of the trees that lined the side-walk, and seemed to whisper sweet stories of the country, and green meadows, and fine old farm-houses, and lowing cattle, and vast fields of golden grain. All was silence and repose, for that was a genteel and aristocratic quarter of the city, where vulgar noises were never permitted to intrude. The houses were all spacious and elegant; and, as the stranger passed on, his ear occasionally caught the sounds of melody from the piano, sometimes accompanied by female voices of exquisite and thrilling harmony.

Suddenly the stranger paused, and gazed intently upon some object which lay directly before him upon the side-walk, and which had attracted his notice. Looking about him with an air of distrust, as though he were about to commit a felony, he stooped down and picked up

the article. Of course, reader, you have already guessed what that object was?

It was a *lady's garter*.

But how to determine the sex of a garter, you ask. A single glance at the article in question would have satisfied any one that it was the property of a lady. In the first place, it was of silk, delicately embroidered;—then it had a golden clasp, upon which was minutely but exquisitely engraved a figure of Cupid, and beneath it the following lines, said to have once been written by Voltaire under a marble statue of the amorous deity:

"Whoe'er thou art, thy master see—  
He was, or is, or is to be!"

The dimensions of the garter indicated that its fair owner possessed a limb of full development and voluptuous proportions; but here we are treading on delicate ground, and shall say no more. If the reader has a taste for highly-wrought descriptions, he must employ his imagination, for we cannot really degrade our chaste pen by recording things which may shock our very sensitive modesty.

The stranger continued his walk, holding his prize in his hands, and examining it with a quiet smile upon his countenance. He was evidently amused at the oddity of the circumstance. As he was passing a splendid edifice which was even more aristocratic in its appearance than its neighbors, a window was hastily raised, and a silvery voice eagerly exclaimed—

"Here, sir, that belongs to me!"

The man looked up, and beheld a vision of such dazzling loveliness, in the shape of a woman, that, for a moment, his brain fairly reeled. But, accustomed to control his emotions, he instantly recovered himself, and, with a bow and a smile, both of which announced that he had been used to good society, he said—

"Then, madam, I shall be extremely happy to restore your property."

The lady turned her head, and the next moment the front door was opened by a liveried servant, who civilly requested the stranger to enter. The request was of course complied with; and the fortunate discoverer of the garter soon found himself standing in the presence of her

whose beauty had made so strong an impression upon him.

"Be seated, sir," said the lady, with a winning smile—yet not without some signs of confusion, when she saw her garter twined around the fingers of its finder.

The stranger bowed his thanks, and sat down. The apartment was magnificently furnished; but not upon the rare paintings, nor the exquisite statuary, nor the flowers blooming in classically-formed vases, nor the thousand elegant and costly trifles which wealth alone can purchase;—not upon these did the eyes of the stranger dwell. No—he saw not the splendor that surrounded him, for his attention was wholly engrossed by the lovely being before him. Her form was *petite*, but of faultless symmetry, exhibiting a wonderfully fine bust, and a delicate foot and ankle, the latter of which was just sufficiently exposed to indicate that it swelled into a limb of ample redundancy to fill out to its utmost capacity, the garter that remained twined around the hand of the stranger. The lady's face was bewilderingly beautiful—arch, captivating, teeming with expression, and lighted up by a pair of eyes in whose black and sparkling depths a million of mischievous devils seemed to be dancing an amorous fandango to the inspiring music of her gay, rollicking and soul-thrilling voice. Conscious that in attempting to depict so fascinating a creature, we are going beyond our depth, we shall try to give no further description of her, merely remarking that she was about eighteen years of age, and that she wore a very stylish and becoming walking dress, which indicated that she had been out, and had just returned home.

She had thrown herself upon a sofa, in an attitude both graceful and picturesque, and one well calculated to display to advantage the divine perfection of her form. The stranger sat very near her, and was thus enabled to devour with his eyes the many beauties which were spread out before his view.

But we must reserve the conversation which followed, for another chapter.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE PICTURE ON THE WALL.

"I AM SORRY, sir, to occasion you so much trouble," said the charming young lady from whose matchless limb had accidentally slipped the garter which has furnished us with the materials of this "ower true tale,"—"had I not been very careless you would not have been detained. 'Tis very provoking, and very embarrassing too, when I remember that the article which you are about to restore to me, is—"

She paused, blushed, and then laughed. The stranger hastened to say—

"Believe me, madam, I rejoice at the accident, since it has resulted in affording me the pleasure of enjoying your society, even for a few moments. I am glad that I can give back this pretty trifle to its rightful owner."

These words were spoken with a refinement of accent and a grace of delivery that arrested the attention of the lady, emanating as they did from the lips of a person whose *garb*, at least, was not particularly indicative of a high station in society. She now, for the first time, looked at the speaker with interest, and discovered that although he was not a handsome man, he had very fine eyes, an engaging but rather melancholy smile, and an air altogether *distingue*.

"Excuse me, sir," said she, with all the politeness and grace of a true lady—"I am about to ask a very impertinent question. You seem superior to your present station and circumstances. I am rich—can I do anything for you? Come—there should be no delicacy between a man and a woman, in matters of money. This affair has a spice of romance in it, which relieves me of *ennui*. The saucy question which I would ask of you, is this—*Who and what are you?*"

The stranger, without any embarrassment, and smiling at this amiable instance of woman's curiosity, replied—

"Your question, my dear madam, is

easily answered. My name is Philip Ravellon; I am of French descent, an American by birth, a republican by principle, and a gentleman by family and education. I lost all my relatives, and became poor, whereupon I of course lost all my *friends*, who, discovering my impoverished condition, deserted me with an indecent haste which amused rather than pained me. I can at least enjoy the luxury of despising them. I gain a precarious subsistence by contributing to the various periodicals of the day; in short, madam, I am a professional writer, living in a garret, dining on bread and cheese, and banqueting on cold water. My story is told."

The lady raised her richly embroidered handkerchief to her moist eyes, for her benevolent heart truly sympathized with the misfortunes of a man of genius, who was thus compelled to labor with his pen for the wherewithal to support an unhappy existence. She knew, by experience perhaps, that literature is the most pleasant pursuit in the world, when it is cultivated at leisure, and as a source of enjoyment alone; and she also understood that it must be a terribly irksome and laborious occupation when it is followed for daily bread, and when the sad heart and the over-taxed brain are obliged to produce images of gaiety, which but too often mock the unhappiness of the writer, whose pen is the magic wand which summons those images from the mysterious realms of imagination, for the amusement of an unthinking, and sometimes unappreciating public.

Ravellon was deeply affected by the emotion of the lady, who soon, however, recovered herself; and ringing a bell, she desired the servant who appeared, to bring in refreshments. It cannot be denied, that on hearing this order the countenance of Ravellon exhibited every sign of satisfaction, for, poor fellow! he was very hungry, having eaten nothing that day.

The servant soon re-appeared, bearing a tray containing an abundance of such solids and liquids as might be supposed to constitute a lunch served up in a princely

and luxurious mansion like that. Urged by the lady's cordial invitation as well as by his own hunger, Ravellon partook freely and heartily of the tempting fare, being kept in countenance by his beautiful hostess herself, whose recent walk had given her an appetite, and whose gastronomic exploits were almost equal to the half-famished man of literary pursuits.

The generous repast, washed down by a few glasses of choice wine, soon put the hostess and her guest in very good humor. Ravellon, who was slightly elevated, felt particularly at his ease; yet he was too much of a gentleman in principle, and too discreet a man of the world, to misinterpret the smiles and attentions of the charming young lady into whose delightful society he had been thrown in a manner so curious. It is very certain, that had he attempted to take even the slightest liberty with her person, he would have been ignominiously ejected from the house by the servants, whom the lady would have summoned for that purpose.

Ravellon observed, hanging upon the wall, the life-sized portrait of an old man of majestic presence, clad in military costume. The artist had evidently done his work faithfully, for he had transmitted to the canvass a peculiar expression of face which he could only have derived from a living subject—an expression which is the almost certain index of a strongly sensual nature.

Curious to learn whom this portrait was designed to represent, Ravellon abruptly asked—

"Pray, madam, what old fellow is that up there, in the uniform of a general officer?"

The lady arose with dignity, and said in a tone of withering rebuke—

"You are impertinent, sir, and forget yourself. That *old fellow*, as you call him, is General St. Croix, and he is no other than *my husband*."

Poor Ravellon! had a bomb-shell exploded at his feet, he could not have been more shocked than he was by this unexpected announcement. He had of course imagined the young lady to be single, and, conceiving her to be a wealthy heir-

ess, he had begun to cherish the hope of being able to create a tender interest within her fair bosom—an interest which *might* eventually result in his elevation to her hand and fortune—though, to do him justice, her money was of far less importance, in his estimation, than her peerless person and her princely love. Yet he felt that "filthy lucre" was not to be entirely disregarded by a poor, half-starved writer like himself.

No wonder, then, that he was thunder-struck—no wonder that he felt a keen pang of disappointment—when the beautiful object of his hopes thus proclaimed herself to be the wife of another. Nor could he entirely suppress an inward feeling of disgust, in view of the fact that she was united to a man old enough to be her grandfather.

"But perhaps," thought he—"she is merely jesting. But no, no—those flashing eyes—that bosom swelling with indignation—evince her perfect sincerity. I must hasten to make amends for my disrespectful allusion to her liege lord."

"Madam," said he, aloud—"I humbly crave your pardon. Had I the slightest idea that —"

"There, there, that will do," interrupted the young wife of the aged General, as a smile again rested upon her ravishingly beautiful countenance—"there is my hand, in token that we are good friends again. I know that you did not design to insult either my husband or myself. I do not wonder that you are astonished at such an ill assorted union. There is a story connected with our marriage, which, if you would like to hear —"

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure, madam," cried Ravellon, with eagerness.

"Well, then, you shall be gratified provided that you will promise not to interrupt me, no matter how surprising may be my revelations."

Ravellon promised, and the young lady began her narrative.

## CHAPTER III.

WHEREIN THE YOUNG WIFE RELATETH HER HISTORY, AND DESCRIBETH ALL THE PARTICULARS OF THE PLATONIC MARRIAGE.

"THE first surprise that I shall give you," said Mrs. St. Croix, for we shall hereafter designate her by that title—"is the assurance that I am of lowly, perhaps of dishonorable origin. I am not ashamed of this; why should I be? We are all the creatures of circumstances; princes have sprung from peasants, and kings have become beggars. Although but a woman, I am somewhat of a philosopher; and I flatter myself that I have sufficient good sense to despise that more contemptible of all follies—the *pride of birth*."

"The first that I recollect of myself, I was a ragged, dirty little girl, living in a wretched cellar, with a squalid and ferocious man, who insisted that I should consider him as my father, although every instinct of my nature revolted against the belief that I was his child, for he treated me with the utmost cruelty, and, when I was old enough, forced me to adopt his loathsome profession—that of a rag-picker in the streets. Yes, my friend, she who now sits before you, arrayed in the garb of fashion, and surrounded by every luxury which the heart can possibly desire, was once a miserable collector of rags and rubbish in the filthy streets!"

Ravellon was profoundly astonished; but, remembering his promise not to interrupt the lady, he remained silent.

Mrs. St. Croix resumed:—

"I reached the age of twelve. Strange to say, I had formed no bad associations, and contracted no vices, for the ruffian who claimed me as his child, carefully kept me secluded in his den; never suffering me to go abroad unless in pursuit of our *profession*, and then he always kept near me, it being his custom to search for rags on one side of the street, while I did the same on the other. Thus I never was out of his sight. Why he exercised

this constant vigilance over me, I never could understand, for I certainly had no intention of running away, as I knew of no other home than that which he afforded me. Once, when he was intoxicated, I overheard him boast to a brother rag-picker, that when I had "grown up" he intended to make a handsome sum of money on me, in a way best known to himself. What he meant by these words, I know not; but perhaps he meant to dispose of my person to some rich libertine, for, ragged and dirty as I was, I gave promise of extraordinary beauty. How far that promise has been fulfilled, you, my friend, can judge. My mirror tells me that I am not *very* ugly."

These words were accompanied by an arch smile; and Mrs. St. Croix continued her history, in which Ravellon was already strongly interested.

"At the age of twelve, I was one day slowly and painfully plying my dreadful trade along a rather fashionable thoroughfare, when my iron hook turned up something from the mud, which glittered so brilliantly in the rays of the sun, that I was almost blinded. It was a diamond ring, of great value. That ring laid the foundation of my present seemingly happy and fortunate position. I say *seemingly*; for, alas! I am not happy!"

The lady turned aside her face, as if to conceal her tears. Her bosom heaved, and she seemed much agitated. Ravellon observed these signs of her unhappiness with secret satisfaction.

"It is evident" thought he—"that she detests her old dotard of a husband, and sighs for the love of a more congenial companion. Come! there is hope for me yet!"

Mrs. St. Croix recovered herself by an effort, and went on:—

"Yes, my friend, that diamond ring which I found in the streets, was productive of the most important results. Would you behold the magical trinket which wrought such a wonderful change as to transform the filthy rag-picking girl into the elegant and wealthy lady? See, it is here!"

Mrs. St. Croix extended her fair and

delicate hand, upon one of the fingers of which glittered the ring to which she had referred. Ravellon bent forward to examine it, and ventured to press the lady's hand, which he had taken in his. She hastily withdrew it, however, and continued:

"I concealed the ring in my bosom, and resolved to escape with my prize from the power of Braxley, for that was the name of my pretended father. I was sick and tired of the life I was leading; I had grown to be quite a large girl, and beginning to feel within me the natural modesty of my sex, I was shocked at the obscene comments which were frequently made upon me by the passers-by in the streets. Besides I remembered Braxley's remark, that he meant to make money out of me. Knowing him to be capable of any atrocity that could be suggested by his depraved heart, and attaching a fearful significance to his words, I determined to avert the impending evil by flight. An opportunity fortunately presented itself within five minutes after I had found the ring. Braxley, with his back turned towards me, was busily engaged in the investigation of a heap of street rubbish; throwing down my hook, I ran around a neighboring corner, and did not cease running until I was out of breath and far away from the locality of my affectionate would-be parent.

"Pausing to take breath and reflect, I found myself standing opposite the shop of a respectable jeweller. I immediately entered, and exhibiting the ring, and telling him the manner in which I had found it in the street, asked his advice. He carefully examined the article, and found engraved on the inside the name of *General St. Croix*. Being an honest man, and equally desirous that I should be rewarded and that the General should recover his property, he bade me follow him. I did so, and soon stood trembling like a culprit in the presence of the man who was destined to become my husband—in name only; for, my friend, between General St. Croix and myself there never has existed any intimacy which might not properly exist between a father and his daughter. It was on that condition alone that I consented to marry him."

The lady blushed scarlet as she uttered these words, and cast down her eyes upon the carpet; while Ravellon, thrilling with the excitement caused by her strange narrative, regarded her with an intense gaze. He was inexpressibly gratified at the state of affairs between the old General and the lovely young wife.

"The ring was restored," continued Mrs. St. Croix—"the jeweller departed, and I was left alone with the General. After regarding me intently for some time, he placed me in charge of his housekeeper, in order, as he said, that I might be cleansed; for, as you may well suppose, I was in a very filthy and ragged condition. In half an hour I was quite a different looking object; and, when I again entered the General's presence, I was, he declared, quite a young lady, for not only had I been thoroughly washed, but I was neatly and even elegantly dressed, and my hair was arranged in a tasteful and becoming manner. The General seemed very much pleased, and calling me to him, took me upon his knee, somewhat to my surprise, for I was a large girl of twelve. But I became terrified when he proceeded to take improper liberties with my person; the instinct of modesty prompted me to break away from his arms, and retreat to a distant corner of the room. The General did not attempt to re-capture me, but merely laughed, and muttered something about my being very coy for a rag-picking girl. He did not molest me further at that time; and, in a few days, I found myself the inmate of a fashionable young ladies' seminary, where I was first taught the rudiments of a common English education, and afterwards instructed in such accomplishments as were necessary to qualify me for the high position in society which, I was given to understand, I was destined to occupy. At the age of sixteen—two years ago—I completed my education; I can now speak several languages, for my progress was very rapid, I being an exceedingly apt scholar. I sing, play and dance well, and am, in short, an accomplished lady of fashion. Don't laugh at me—I am not vain; I am simply illustrating the fact that the roughest stone

may be polished until it becomes as smooth as glass.

"At sixteen, as I said, I finished my studies, and returned to the abode of my venerable patron—my husband in *embryo*. He was charmed with my appearance, and delighted with my manners and conversation, so different from those of the shy, awkward and ignorant girl which I had been four years before. He immediately began to enact the most contemptible and ridiculous part which an old man can play—that of an antiquated lover. Had it not been for these amorous manifestations, I might have loved and respected the old gentleman for his kindness in having educated me and placed me in a most desirable situation in life. But, no sooner did he begin to make love to me than I began to hate him. Perceiving my aversion, he tried to overcome it by costly presents. But in vain. I would not listen to his protestations of love. I told him that I would regard and reverence him as a father, but that I could not think of receiving him as a lover. My resistance to his suit increased the violence of his passion. He swore to possess me, even were he obliged to resort to force in order to accomplish his wicked object. This threat made me resolve to leave him, at the sacrifice of all my brilliant prospects; but he caught me while I was preparing to decamp, and, locking the door—this scene took place in my bed-chamber—he upbraided me with ingratitude, and stated that his only object in rescuing me from the streets and educating me was that I might be reserved as a delicate tit-bit for his fastidious appetite when I should become old enough to answer his lascivious purpose. My only answer to this brutal speech was a flood of tears. Being partially *en dishabille*, the sight of my virgin charms (here Mrs. St. Croix blushed deeply, and turned away her head,) inflamed the old gentleman's passions to a furious extent, and clasping me in his arms he covered my lips and cheeks with his odious kisses. My virtue was just about to take its flight forever—for I was almost helpless in his powerful grasp—when my eyes fell upon an open pen-knife that lay upon the

table. Seizing this I attacked my venerable protector with such fury, that he was forced to release me, having received several trifling wounds. He swore horribly at first; but, finding that he was not materially injured, he laughed, called me a young tigress, swore that I was a girl of spirit, and declared that he loved me all the better on account of my courageous resistance.

"The infatuated old man," continued the fair narrator—"after being repulsed in the manner which I have described, and seeing that he could not accomplish his object of seducing me, adopted a new tone. He offered to make me his wife. Here was a temptation for the rag-picking girl! The wife of a General and a millionaire! That was quite a different thing from being his mistress—his mere play-thing, which, whenever he grew tired of it, he could throw aside. I was about to accept of his proposal, when the thought struck me how loathsome it would be to receive the matrimonial caresses of a man old enough to be my grandfather. To me, there was something in the idea that was inexpressibly disgusting. It then occurred to me that the old gentleman would not probably live a great while, and that, at his decease, I would be an immensely rich young widow, and an eligible match for any desirable young man to whom I might take a fancy. But then again did the horrible dread of having an *old husband* obtrude itself into my mind, causing me to shudder as if the grim Ice King of the North held me in his frozen arms.

"I frankly told the General my scruples; and I saw that he felt vexed and mortified. After a few moments' reflection, he said, that since his person was so repulsive to me, he was willing to marry me with the explicit understanding that our union should be *purely Platonic*. He solemnly pledged his honor, both as a soldier and a gentleman, that after our nuptials he would not claim any of the *privileges of matrimony*. He promised never to approach me but with the respect and reserve



which exist between mere acquaintances. He agreed never to demand even a kiss or a smile; but I *generously* promised to give him both, occasionally—but nothing more—provided that he behaved himself. Ah, my friend! I know that I played the part of a capricious, exacting and tyrannical coquette, taking advantage of the poor General's insane passion to make him subscribe to the most ridiculous terms. But pray, do me the justice to believe that I never could have done so with a man whom I loved. Do you know that a love-struck man is the most humble, abject and obedient creature in the world, when once he falls prostrate before a pretty woman and suffers her to place her tiny foot upon his neck?"

"My Platonic lover," continued Mrs. St. Croix—"stated, as his reason for desiring our union, that the residence beneath his roof of a beautiful young girl might give rise to scandalous reports to the prejudice of the latter; especially as he (the General) was known to be a worshipper of the sex and a lover of gallantry and intrigue. 'Our union by marriage (said he) will prevent these injurious reports—will sanctify our dwelling together—and, although we shall be man and wife but in *name*, we can enjoy each other's society and continue to be good friends, while the world will know nothing of our peculiar arrangements, and will attribute our want of offspring to the disparity of our ages. So you see, my dear Lydia, that, after all, my motives are quite disinterested, and that they have in view the preservation of your character.'

"Not to weary your patience, my friend, I will state at once, that General St. Croix and myself were 'duly united in the holy bonds of matrimony'—a beautiful phrase, which is of course perfectly original. The marriage of a young girl of sixteen to an old man of sixty-eight, excited much comment and created not a little scandal in the fashionable and newspaper worlds, particularly as the General was a man of considerable military distinction while

I was utterly unknown. Young men who had seen me and admired my beauty, envied the old General on account of his having secured, as they thought, so luscious and youthful a partner for his bed and bosom. I could not help thinking that, if they but knew the private arrangements which existed between the 'happy pair,' they would regard the hoary bridegroom as an object of *pity*, rather than of *envy*."

"Well," continued the lady, who was evidently desirous of bringing her narrative to a close—"the ceremony was performed, the cake was eaten, the wine was drank, the congratulations were uttered, and the friends departed. My husband and myself were left alone in this very apartment. Having implicit confidence in his honor, and remembering his solemn promise not to approach me with any design of an amorous nature, I reclined upon the sofa on which I am now sitting, and chatted familiarly and pleasantly with him. He sat in a chair, exactly where you do now. I may say, without egotism, that I looked splendidly that night. Of course, I was arrayed in my bridal attire—a magnificent robe of white satin; my bosom, wrists, neck and brow were radiant with precious gems, which he had given me. The hour grew late, and I arose to retire to my apartment. The General begged for a parting kiss, and I gave him two; for I was delighted beyond measure with my newly attained position, as the wife of a General and a millionaire, and the mistress of this princely house with its myriad of servants, its piles of costly plate, its mirrors extending from floor to ceiling, its grand pianos, its pictures and statues, and its thousand wonders of luxury and art, which combine to make it a residence fit for a king. As the General's lips met mine, I saw a wild glare in his eyes which betokened that the fires of passion were raging in his soul. I did not like this—but I said nothing. Having bade him good night, I proceeded towards my chamber, followed by my maid, who bore two lighted wax candles

I was soon disrobed, and ready, not for the embraces of my newly-made husband, but for the arms of Morpheus. Having dismissed my maid—who of course knew nothing of the *Platonic* arrangement, and who, naturally supposing that I was about to receive my husband, parted from me with an arch and significant smile—having dismissed her, I say, I locked the door of my chamber, and proceeded to pile against that door every article of furniture which I could possibly move. This done, I retired to bed to await the issue. I had a presentiment that the General would forfeit his word of honor, and attempt to enter my chamber. 'We shall see who will come off victorious in this conflict,' said I to myself—'sooner than yield to him I will destroy myself.' I carefully placed in my bosom a small dagger which I had secretly purchased, for the express purpose of protecting me from my husband. That dagger I always carry. Here it is."

With these words, Mrs. St. Croix drew from her bosom and exhibited to Ravellon a small, golden-hilted dagger, of exquisite workmanship. Replacing the pretty but dangerous weapon in its voluptuous depository, the lady resumed:—

"Scarcely had an hour passed away, when my anticipations were realized.—A low and timid rap upon the door announced the arrival of my liege lord, who had come, regardless of his promise, to claim his marital rights. So much for his 'word of honor as a soldier and a gentleman,' forsooth! But, poor man, he was carried away by the warmth of his feelings, and we must not judge him too harshly. Well, I permitted him to rap away at the door for awhile without answering him; but finally I demanded—

"'Who is there?'"

"'It is *me*,' was the reply, in the voice of the General—'your devoted slave.'"

"'I own no slaves,' said I—I am a strong abolitionist. So go away.'"

"'But I am your husband,' said the General—'and must come in.'"

"'Are you not a soldier and a gentleman?' I asked, indignantly."

"'I profess to be both,' was the meek response."

"Then, sir, said I—what do you mean by coming here and molesting me in this outrageous manner—seeking to enter my bed-chamber, and desecrating the holy hour of midnight by your impure advances? Did you not pledge me your sacred word of honor, as a soldier and a gentleman, not to annoy me with anything of this kind? What am I to think of this conduct?"

"'But,' urged the poor General—'you are so divinely beautiful that I can't go to sleep, thinking about you. Your lovely image raises my feelings to a painful height of tender desire. Besides, I have a legal right to enter the sanctuary of your apartment. The solemn ceremony through which we passed this evening, makes me master of your person. So open the door.'"

"I saw that the General was getting angry, but I cared not a single straw for his anger. I feared him not; for, when once a woman's mind is made up, an army of fiends, trooping and yelling from the bottomless pit, and headed by old Beelzebub himself, would not make her swerve a single hair's breadth from her purpose."

"After a pause which lasted two or three minutes, I heard the voice of the General issuing through the key-hole, and saying, in piteous accents"—

"'My dear little wife, do you want me to perish and leave you a widow on your wedding night?'"

"'Do you mean to hang, or drown yourself?' inquired I, nearly choking with laughter, for the affair had certainly assumed a very ludicrous complexion."

"'Neither,' was the reply of my lord and master—'but I am actually perishing with cold, for I have nothing on but my dressing-gown, slippers, and—and—*my most intimate garment*. If you possess a single spark of humanity, you will let me come in and warm

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myself, for my limbs are frozen, and my teeth chatter like the castanets of Fanny Ellsler in *La Cachucha*."

"Go to your bed, then, and warm yourself," said I impatiently; for I was beginning to get tired of the old gentleman's useless importunities."

"But, angel of my soul," said the amorous military commander—"I'd much rather come to *your* bed and warm myself. Come, do be reasonable, Lydia."

"To this appeal I made no answer. I overheard the poor, shivering General muttering the most terrible curses and threats of vengeance. At length, rendered furious by what he termed my 'damnable obstinacy' he swore that he would break in the door, and thus force an entrance into my chamber, where he said he had a perfect right to come."

"I am tired of this infernal nonsense," said he—"and I am determined to possess my rights as a husband. Therefore, if you do not open this door within the space of one minute, I will procure an axe and break down all impediments."

"Do so, most gallant soldier, was my derisive answer—but, General, as you are, you will find it hard to conquer a woman. The room is my fortress, and it is in a state of siege. If you succeed in making a breach in the walls and entering, you must prepare to encounter a desperate resistance, for I am armed."

"I will follow out the simile which you have so cleverly begun," cried the General—"since you will not capitulate, I shall surround your fortress with my troops (or servants) and starve you out! Yes, madam—you shall be deprived of both liberty and food until you consent to lay down your arms—or rather, until you promise to receive me *into* your arms, and behave in every respect like an obedient and loving little wife, who has no will but that of her husband."

"With these words the disappointed bridegroom took his departure, and I went to sleep and dreamed of having for a husband, a fresh, vigorous and handsome youth, whose burning eyes penetrated my soul, and whose eloquent protestations of love filled my heart with an intense and

thrilling rapture which it had never known before."

As Mrs. St. Croix uttered these words, her bosom heaved with some powerful and mysterious emotion, which we shall not attempt to explain. Ravellon moved uneasily in his chair, and he also seemed to be laboring under some strange excitement. Possibly the wine affected him. Yes, that must have been the cause of his agitation.

Mrs. St. Croix resumed:

"When I awoke in the morning, and found that my youthful husband was but the creature of a dream—and when I remembered that I was the wife of an old man whom I actually detested—I felt very wretched. However, I tried to comfort myself with the reflection that the General could not last a *great* while, and that at his death I should be at liberty to select as a partner a youth as beautiful as he whose sweet presence had blessed my dream."

"The General was as good as his word. For three whole days I remained a close prisoner in my chamber. My tyrant imagined that I was without food during that time; but in this he was woefully mistaken, for my faithful maid found means to convey to me all the provisions I wanted. Every night the General would come to my door and demand to know if I was ready to succumb to his wishes. I never made him any answer; and, at the end of the third day, he began to get frightened, fearing that I might starve to death. So he reluctantly caused me to be liberated; and, on seeing me he expressed his surprise at my plump and healthy condition. His surprise would have ceased had he known that during my confinement, I had lived on wine and poultry in abundance, and that I had beguiled my time by reading several delicious (but forbidden) French novels, by a certain free-and-easy author whose name cannot with strict propriety be pronounced by female lips."

"Two years have since passed away. I am now just eighteen years of age—and my husband is seventy. Oh! how I loathe the word *husband*, when

it is applied to General St. Croix, a man whom I cannot approach without a shudder of disgust! Not that there is anything repulsive in his appearance—on the contrary, he is a remarkably fine-looking old man, as that portrait, which is an excellent one, will assure you. But is there not something horribly unnatural in the union of a young girl of eighteen to a man of seventy—and must not my situation be one of torture, to be compelled to bear the name of a wife without enjoying any of the pleasures with which the matrimonial relation is usually associated!"

"To do the General justice, I must say that he gives me all the money I ask for. But he is terribly jealous, fearing that I may allow a *lover* those privileges which I deny to *him*. Sometimes he attempts to obtain those privileges; but, on such occasions, I have only to show him my dagger, and he instantly desists, for he rightly believes that I will destroy myself sooner than yield to him. Holding a high office under government, which demands his almost constant attention, he is generally absent from home all day—and, during his absence, I amuse myself in any way that suits my fancy. When he returns in the evening, I sing and play for him, and treat him with every respect and attention consistent with our *Platonic* arrangement. The moment that he attempts to turn the conversation into an amorous channel, I arise and leave the room, and he sees me no more until we meet at the breakfast table next morning. In his moments of angry disappointment, he is sometimes ungenerous and unfeeling enough to allude to my miserable origin, and to the great service which he has rendered me in elevating me from the condition of a rag-picker to the sphere of a lady. These taunts I invariably treat with the silent contempt which they merit; and by assuming the most perfect indifference, I goad the old gentleman almost to madness, and thus enjoy my revenge. Once, he ordered me to quit the house, forever. Well knowing that the law would oblige him to provide me with a handsome maintenance, I prepared

to obey him. When I was about to depart, he requested me to remain, saying that he meant not what he said. I insisted upon going; he expostulated, entreated, but all in vain—I declared that I *would* go. Finally—would you believe it?—the proud old aristocrat, in whose presence poor people stand confused and almost trembling, knelt at my feet and begged me not to leave him. After I had humbled him in the dust before me, I consented to remain the mistress of his palace and the squanderer of his thousands—but merely, be it understood, to *oblige him*!"

"My friend, I have done."

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE FIEND OF THE CHIMNEY.

Thus ended the story of Mrs. St. Croix, concerning her Platonic marriage with the General. During her recital of the more delicate portions of her history, the lady had exhibited a degree of confusion which greatly enhanced her beauty; so, at least, thought Ravellon, whose admiring eyes were now eagerly fixed upon the glowing countenance and superb form of the fair narrator.

A somewhat embarrassing pause now ensued, which was at length broken by Ravellon, who, with the well-bred courtesy of a gentleman, arose and said—

"I fear, madam, that I have already unwarrantably intruded upon your time and attention. I will therefore—"

"Sit down again," interrupted the lady, with a gay laugh; you needn't be in a hurry, and I beg that you will dispense with all ceremony. Besides, you haven't yet restored my *garter*."

"By Jove!" thought Ravellon, as he audaciously sat down close to the lady; "she doesn't want me to go, and my presence gives her pleasure. Well, well, something may grow out of this yet."

"Madam," said he aloud, "will you grant me a very great favor?"

"The lady glanced at him with a searching look, and replied, not without some hesitation—

"If the favor which you wish me to grant is one that can I bestow without compromising—"

"You will compromise nothing by it," hastily and rather uncourtously interrupted Ravellon; "I wish you to let me retain possession of this garter."

"It is a singular request, sir," observed Mrs. St. Croix, with a quiet smile; "of what possible use can a lady's garter be to you? You must permit me to bestow upon you a more substantial token of friendship. I am rich—you are poor; let me assume the privilege of a friend, and relieve your necessities. You must accept of a sum of money."

"Excuse me, madam, I cannot receive money," said Ravellon, whose pale face became suffused with the burning blush of shame.

"I understand and respect your scruples," said Mrs. St. Croix, warmly. Then, after a short pause, she added—

"You shall keep the garter, as a memento of this hour, which witnesses the beginning of our friendship. And remember, Philip—for hereafter I shall call you by that name, and you may, if you please, call me Lydia—remember this, that the garter which you now hold in your hand shall be the magic talisman which shall always, and under all circumstances, procure you admission to my presence. You have but to send that garter to me, at any time, as a token of your wish to see me, and your desire shall be granted at once. Feeling confident that I am dealing with a man of honor, I have no fear that you will abuse this privilege. You have inspired me with a strong interest in your favor, and I like you. Observe, I say that I like you; do not confound the term with love, Philip, for if you do you will make a grand mistake. To a man of the world like you it is scarcely necessary to say that like and love are two very different things."

Ravellon did not exactly relish these last remarks, which seemed to put a damper on certain delicious hopes which had arisen in his breast. The lady's unreserved revelations of her private matrimonial affairs—her off-hand, free-and-easy manner—the ardor of her temperament, as evinced by every look and every action—and, above all, the circumstance of her being united to an aged man whom she hated and with whom she could not have any intimacy—all these things, combined, had induced Ravellon to imagine that he would have little or no difficulty in making a conquest of the charming Mrs. St. Croix, particularly as she was evidently prepossessed in his favor, and had invited him to remain after he had arisen to depart. When, therefore, the lady so significantly descanted upon the vast difference between like and love—and when she so plainly intimated that he would make a "grand mistake" if he confounded the two terms—Mr. Philip Ravellon felt all his fond and new-born hopes vanish like snow before the noon-day sun. However, trusting that time, and a more intimate acquaintance with the lady, might enable him to accomplish his object, he veiled his chagrin beneath a look of cheerfulness, and said—

"I understand you, Lydia; your assurance that you like me, makes me inexpressibly happy. This garter, which will at all times admit me to your presence—and which now I kiss with all the devotion of a chivalrous knight—is more precious to me than a necklace of diamonds. Yes, Lydia, let us be friends from this hour—let us be *Platonic lovers*."

"With all my heart," laughed Mrs. St. Croix, as she arose from the sofa—"upon my word, I am now very delightfully situated, having both a husband and a lover whom I associate with on terms of Platonic chastity. Excuse my absence for a few moments, Philip; I will soon return."

So saying, she tripped lightly out of the room, humming an air from a popular opera.

"She is divine!" said Ravellon, half

aloud, when he found himself alone.—

"Ye gods, what grace of form and what loveliness of face! And she likes me, too—me, the pale, melancholy and somewhat shabby writer, whom she never saw before. Well, well—perhaps I may be able to change like into love, after all. I can see that a perfect volcano of passion is slumbering in her breast; a little skilful management on my part, will most assuredly make her mine. She is worth the trial, at all events—for, as Shakspeare says, 'She is sport for Jove.' Now, I never was a libertine, and recent privations have considerably diminished whatever natural ardor I may possess; but I swear that I cannot look upon that splendid woman without feeling my blood rush like burning lava through my veins. She's an extraordinary woman, too—for there are very few ladies who could practice sufficient restraint to resist the solicitations of their husband, even although the said husbands were as old as Methuseleth. Well, this day's adventure is a curious one; just as I was wondering where the devil I was to get a dinner, I pick up a garter which is the means of my becoming acquainted with a lady who has thousands at her command; I enjoy a charming *tete-a-tete* with her, lunch and drink wine with her, listen to the spicy story of her Platonic marriage, and finally form a compact of friendship with her, and receive, in the shape of her garter, a ticket of admission to her presence at all times and under all circumstances—a privilege which I must not abuse, for, unless I can conquer her honorably, I will abandon the field, rather than resort to meanness or stratagem of any kind. Ah, Ravellon! thou art a lucky dog, and thy star is on the ascendent. What hast thou ever done, or thy father before thee, that Fortune should thus smile upon thee! But here comes my beautiful friend."

Mrs. St. Croix re-entered the room, bearing in her hand a small book elegantly bound and fastened with silver

clasps. This she presented to Ravellon, saying—

"There, my friend, is a most learned, eloquent and convincing treatise in favor of Platonic marriages and friendships. Do not open the book until you get home, and then try to appreciate its contents. You must let me see you often, and remember that the garter which I have given you will never fail as a passport to my presence. Good heavens! is it possible!"

As the lady uttered this ejaculation, she turned very pale, and pointed, in a distracted manner, towards the window. Ravellon looked, and saw, coming up the street at a very leisurely pace, an old gentleman whom he at once recognized as the original of the portrait which hung upon the wall.

"It is your husband, madam," said Ravellon, calmly—for he did not consider that there was anything extraordinary or improper in one gentleman's finding another in company with his wife.

"Yes," was the agitated response of Mrs. St. Croix—"and, finding you here, his furious jealousy will be aroused, for he allows me no male acquaintances. He will not pause to listen to reason, but will attack you at once; and I tremble for the result!"

"He shall have satisfaction in any shape he may desire," said Ravellon, proudly.

"But, for my sake, do not engage in a quarrel with my husband," implored the lady.

"Enough," said the writer—"I will escape at once from the house."

"But you cannot," cried Mrs. St. Croix, wringing her hands—"the General will see you if you issue from the front door, and there is no means of egress from the rear of the house. I have it! Conceal yourself in the chimney, until the General takes his departure, which he is sure to do immediately after he has dined. He does not dine at home once in an age, and it is a great misfortune that he should have



taken it into his head to come home to-day. Be quick, for he is almost here!"

"Damnation, madam! do you think that I am going to get into the chimney, like a sweep?" demanded Ravellon, with strong disgust.

"But, for *my* sake, *dear* Philip," said Mrs. St. Croix, accompanying her words with a look that would have driven any poor devil of a man, not only into a chimney, but into the very bowels of Mount Vesuvius.

"There's no help for it, and I must submit," groaned poor Ravellon, as he prepared to enter the sooty retreat. Mrs. St. Croix hastily removed the highly ornamented fire-board, which she carefully replaced after the writer had stepped into the chimney. Confident that there was now not the slightest trace of a man's having been in her company, the lady assumed an appearance of the utmost serenity; and, when her husband entered the room, she was seemingly deeply absorbed in the perusal of a volume of religious poems.

"Well, chick," said the General, as he deposited his hat, cane and gloves upon a table—"didn't expect me home to-day, eh? Unexpected pleasure, eh? Didn't feel well—got a damned bad cold, so I thought I'd come home and spend the rest of the day with you. Ugh! ugh!"

Here the gallant military chieftain coughed and wheezed in a manner that amply confirmed his rather profane assertion that he had 'got a d—d bad cold.'

Mrs. St. Croix assumed a cheerfulness of tone, look and manner, which she was far from feeling. The General's announcement that he was going to spend the rest of the day at home, naturally led her to wonder what would become of the poor writer in the chimney. But, trusting that her woman's wit would suggest some means of getting Ravellon out of the house unobserved by her husband, she devoted herself to the rather hateful task of making the General comfortable. Having, at his request, brought him his dressing-gown

and slippers, and placed a bottle of wine within his reach, she pretended to resume the reading of her book. But it must be confessed that her thoughts, instead of being concentrated in the volume before her, were in the chimney and with the very unhappy inmate thereof.

The General having swallowed two or three bumpers of wine, seemed disposed to have a chat with his young wife, who laid aside her book, and prepared to sustain her part in the conversation. The old gentleman was in the very midst of a very warm complimentary oration relative to her good looks upon that day in particular, when he was suddenly seized with a violent fit of coughing which threatened to "carry him off," and make Mrs. St. Croix a widow upon the spot—a consummation that was devoutly wished for, both by the lady herself and by her Platonic lover in the chimney. However, the General partially recovered himself, and growled out—

"This comes of sleeping alone—ugh! This comes of having a wife and leading the life of a bachelor—ugh! This comes of my damned stupidity in submitting to your ridiculous whims, madam—ugh! I believe that I have not to this day—ugh!—recovered from the infernal cold which I caught on our wedding night—ugh!—in consequence of my standing, half undressed, at the door of your chamber, vainly imploring to be admitted—ugh! You will be the death of me yet, madam."

If Mrs. St. Croix had but dared to give verbal utterance to the thoughts that were busy in her mind, she would have entreated the old gentleman to die as soon as he conveniently could, and thus rid her of what she regarded as an intolerable bore. But, being a sensible woman, she remained discreetly silent.

The General having regained his accustomed equanimity, remarked—

"I was saying, my dear Lydia, that you look unusually charming to-day. You have been out walking?"

"Yes, sir—I went to make a few

purchases in Washington street," was the reply.

"Don't be so cold and formal," rejoined the General, with some impatience—"and, above all, don't 'sir' me. Let us be a little more familiar and sociable together. Here, won't that bribe you to give me a smile and a kiss?"

With these words, the General drew from his pocket a bank-note, which he crumpled up into a ball and then threw to his wife, who caught it in her lap. While she was smoothing it out in order to ascertain its value, the General quickly arose, and, before she was aware of his approach, she was closely enfolded in his powerful arms, for the old gentleman was unusually hale and hearty for one of his advanced years.

"I have caught you at last, my little bird," said he, in a tone of triumph, as, despite her struggles, he showered numberless kisses upon her dewy lips—"come, you may as well submit to your inevitable fate with a good grace, for it is time that this absurd Platonic arrangement should be terminated. Nay, do not seek to draw forth that ugly dagger, which has so often prevented me from accomplishing my dearest wishes. You see that you are powerless in my grasp; and I swear that I will not release you from my embraces until you have become my wife in fact as well as in name."

Ravellon, in his place of concealment, was a deeply interested and highly excited witness of this extraordinary scene, wherein a husband was attempting to commit violence upon his own wife—for the writer had with his pen-knife made a small hole in the fire-board which enabled him to see all that was passing. He longed to rush forth to the assistance of the lady—but he reflected that such a movement would seemingly compromise her honor, and he refrained, trusting that his fair friend would be able to foil the General in his attempt to violate the conditions of the Platonic marriage.

Ravellon, however, determined that, sooner than witness the defeat of the lady, he would risk everything and astonish the General by loaning that venerable person-

age a 'punch in the head,' which might have a tendency to cool his amorous heat, for a time at least.

Mrs. St. Croix, panting and well nigh exhausted, turned an imploring look towards the fire-place, as if she wished her concealed friend to come to her assistance. During her frantic struggles, her dress had become disarranged and torn; and the sight of her ivory shoulders and voluptuous bust—in addition to the delights whose enjoyment he now confidently anticipated—produced upon the General every indication of raging passion. His eyes seemed to shoot forth sparks of fire, his face assumed a purple hue, while every part of his aged but still vigorous frame trembled with tremendous agitation.

The lady, mentally cursing the cowardice or indifference of her friend in the chimney, and unable to offer any further resistance, resigned herself to a fate which seemed to be unavoidable. Her husband was just about to consummate his triumph and destroy the Platonic nature of the relation which had, until then existed between his young wife and himself, when he was suddenly astounded by hearing a deep, sepulchral voice exclaim—

"Beware—beware—beware!"

The general was not naturally superstitious, but this mysterious voice, seeming to proceed from some person in the room, completely nonplussed him. Releasing his wife from his grasp, he looked quickly around, but could see nobody. Mrs. St. Croix was not slow to improve the opportunity thus afforded to escape. Springing from the sofa, she ran out of the room, exclaiming—

"Thank heaven, I am saved!"

The General swore a horrible oath, but he did not attempt to follow his wife, well knowing that she would barricade herself in her chamber and defend herself desperately with her dagger. He began to search all about in order to discover, if possible, from whence had emanated the voice which had been the means of cheating him of his anticipated triumph. At last he came to the fire-place; he tore away

the screen, but found nobody. Ravellon had climbed up the chimney, out of sight, and thus escaped being caught by the infuriated husband of his fair friend.

"Humph!" growled the General, as he threw himself discontentedly into a chair—"there's nobody here, that's certain. Yet who the devil could have uttered that word, 'Beware,' three times? Perhaps, after all, 'twas mere fancy. I was in such a terrible state of excitement, that my imagination probably imposed upon me. At all events, it is certain that I have lost the game, just as it was about to become mine. Curses on the luck! How beautiful she looked, as, completely exhausted by her vain resistance, she lay quietly in my arms, with her snowy bosom heaving and her youthful cheeks flushed and glowing with the tints of the rose! Well, well, another opportunity may soon present itself, and then the devil himself and all his imps may cry 'Beware!' but I shall not heed them. Ugh! ugh! That damned cough again! The air grows chilly, too, or else my blood, which just now seemed all on fire, has suddenly turned into ice. Summer though it be, I must have a cheerful blaze upon that hearth to temper the chilly atmosphere with its genial warmth."

With these words, General St. Croix rang the bell, and ordered the servant who appeared in answer to the summons to make a fire. Ravellon, up the chimney, overheard the order and trembled. He was already half stifled with soot; and the prospect of having a fire built under him, did not add to the pleasures of his situation, by any means.

A cheerful fire was soon blazing and crackling upon the hearth, before which sat the General with his legs comfortably stretched out and a tumbler of brandy and water in his hand.

Meanwhile, poor Ravellon was being suffocated by the smoke and roasted by the fire. He supported himself in the chimney with difficulty, by bracing

himself against the brick-work with his back and knees.

"I am a martyr to Platonic friendship," he gasped—"but curse me if I can stand this *much* longer!"

The General drew nearer to the fire and sipped his brandy, which, having been in his cellar full fifty years, was most pleasant to the taste and exhilarating to the feelings. Under its inspiring influence the gallant chieftain rapidly recovered from the dispiriting effects of his recent disappointment; and, as he emptied his glass, he exclaimed, with a round oath—

"I have played the fool long enough, and now that fascinating little witch shall be mine, even if the devil himself should appear and try to snatch her from me!"

Scarcely had he uttered these words, when he heard a terrible rumbling noise in the chimney, and instantly there stood upon the hearth a horrible looking figure, black as midnight, and having the appearance of the Evil One. Uttering a terrible yell, this fearful being sprang forward, upsetting the General in his chair, and overturning the table, creating a grand crash among decanters, glasses, plates, and other destructible articles. When the affrightened and bewildered chieftain arose to his feet and looked around, he discovered,—somewhat to his relief, it must be confessed,—that the fiend had vanished.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PRIVATE-BOX AT THE THEATRE.

RAVELLON, having escaped from the chimney and the house of General St. Croix in the manner related at the conclusion of the last chapter, hurried towards the lodgings in Sudbury street, followed by a crowd of noisy urchins who were attracted by his very *unique* appearance, for he was completely cov-

ered with soot and ashes, and looked like a newly-arrived delegate from the bottomless pit. Having arrived at the place of his abode, he bolted in, and then bolted the door, to the great disappointment of the aforesaid urchins, who were thus deprived of their "fun." The writer ascended to the garret, which served the three purposes of parlor, chamber and study. This elevated portion of the building he had for some time occupied in consideration of the fact that the nigher to heaven a man gets, the cheaper becomes his rent.

The garret was precisely one of those places which would have been selected as a literary *sanctum* by any quaint, old-fashioned writer, who might wish to infuse into his productions a sort of dusty antiquity so fascinating to many readers. There can be no doubt that an author's *locality*, at the time of writing, has a great influence on the effusions of his pen. At all events, a garret has its charms for a literary man, although, for our part, we confess that we have an absurd prejudice in favor of a comfortably carpeted room, a cushioned easy chair, and all the other appliances of modern civilization. Ravellon's garret was of considerable extent, and the vast beams overhead, as well as the dim light that stole in through the single smoke-stained window, gave it a gloomy and mysterious aspect. The furniture consisted of a lowly but clean bed; a chair and table, the latter covered with writing materials, and standing opposite the window; a few culinary utensils, a Dutch clock, a shelf full of books, and—a gray cat.

Ravellon threw himself into his only chair, for he was breathless and exhausted. Having in some measure recovered himself, he remembered the book which Mrs. St. Croix had given him, and which he still retained in his possession. Drawing it from his pocket, he opened and examined it. But, instead of being a "Treatise on Platonic Marriages and Friendships," the volume was simply entitled "Friendship's Offending." While turning over the leaves,

and wondering what the lady meant by misrepresenting the character of the book, Ravellon discovered what seemed to be a folded piece of tissue paper. This he quickly unfolded, and it turned out to be a bank note for five hundred dollars. Written upon the wide margin of the page were the following words, inscribed in an elegant and graceful style of penmanship:—

"Do not, my dear friend, refuse to accept this trifle, or you will seriously offend me. When it is expended, do not hesitate to apply to me for more. No false delicacy should exist between us."

LYDIA.

Ravellon rapturously pressed his lips to the page which had been touched by the fair hand of Lydia. Her generosity deeply affected him, and he admired the delicate manner in which she had bestowed this liberal present. He then drew forth the precious garter, which he would not have parted with for worlds. He kissed it again and again, and then, having secured both it and the bank-note about his person, he proceeded to remove the black stains from his face and hands. He was soon in a condition to appear abroad with decency; and leaving the garret, he descended the stairs and passed out into the street.

At the expiration of one hour, Mr. Philip Ravellon was quite a different looking man. He had attired himself, from head to foot, in a splendid and fashionable suit of clothes; and he now presented the appearance of a gentleman of fortune, for there was something eminently aristocratic in his air and manner. Having supped sumptuously at a celebrated *càfé*, he hired an opera glass and went to the theatre.

Lounging about the lobbies, as usual, were many newspaper editors and reporters, with whom Ravellon had been accustomed to associate. These gentlemen stared with astonishment when they beheld their once seedy companion dressed in the most costly and elegant manner; but, without paying any attention to them, Ravellon placed himself in a conspicuous seat, and took a leisurely survey of the

large and fashionable audience, through the medium of his opera glass.

At last his gaze became fixed upon a beautiful and superbly dressed lady, who was seated opposite him, in a private box. Surprise and pleasure were depicted upon his countenance, as he recognised Mrs. St. Croix.

She was not alone. Beside her sat a young and particularly handsome man; and a thrill of jealousy ran through Ravellon's frame, when he saw that the young couple were whispering to each other in the most tender and familiar manner, while their eyes eloquently announced the pleasure which they derived from each other's society.

"I will spoil that *tete-a-tete*, at all events," muttered the writer, as he arose from his seat and traversed the lobby. Having arrived at the box in which sat the object of his regard, he tapped lightly upon the door, which was soon opened by the lady's handsome cavalier, who politely demanded what Ravellon wanted?

"I wish to see Mrs. St. Croix, who is a friend of mine," replied the writer.

The cavalier bowed with the most ceremonious courtesy, for Ravellon's appearance was distinguished, and commanded respect. The writer entered the box and greeted Mrs. St. Croix, who scarcely recognised him, so altered were his looks. Having shaken hands with him in the most cordial manner, and expressed the pleasure which she felt at seeing him, she invited him to sit beside her, and then, in a whisper congratulated him upon the immense improvement which had taken place in his appearance. Meanwhile, the handsome cavalier, with well-bred consideration, had placed himself upon a back seat in the box, thus affording the Platonic friends an opportunity to converse at their ease.

"My dear Philip," said Mrs. St. Croix, warmly—"you are now attired in a manner befitting your birth, character, and talents, and you must permit me to keep you well supplied with money, in order that you may continue

to appear as a gentleman. You are aware that as the world goes, a man wearing a shabby coat is thought nothing of, and seldom can make any progress, even though he be a perfect prodigy of respectability and learning; while a well dressed fool often makes the most rapid advancement. This is humiliating, but it is true. And, now, to change the subject, let me tell you the result of our afternoon's adventure. Thanks to you, I was released from the embrace of the General, and escaped from the room. Repairing to my chamber, which I fortified in the usual manner by piling furniture against the door; I was tormented by a thousand fears in view of your very critical situation in the chimney. Excuse my laughing, but doesn't the affair strike you as being richly ludicrous?"

Ravellon protested that 'twas the funniest thing he had ever heard of; and the lady continued:—

"I trusted that your ingenuity would enable you to come out of the difficulty with flying colors, and I was not disappointed. Hearing a terrible racket down stairs and the crash of glass, I knew that the *denouement* was taking place. Looking out of my chamber window, which commands a view of the street, I saw you burst out of the house in a frightfully dirty condition, and tear along at a frantic pace as if Satan himself were at your heels. I congratulate you upon your agility, Philip, for never before did I see a man pick up his feet with such marvellous rapidity."

Ravellon bowed with mock solemnity in honor of this compliment to his merits as a pedestrian, and Mrs. St. Croix resumed:—

"Having no fears that the General would renew his anti-Platonic attempt, I issued from my chamber and went down stairs. There I found the floor covered with broken glass, the table upset, and the poor General half frightened to death, for he knew not what to make of the terrible spectre which he had seen. I hastened to calm him by assuring him that the apparition must

have been some robber who had hidden himself in the chimney for the purpose of plundering the house when night should arrive. The General at last, admitted that such must have been the case, and thus, you see everything is all right again. This evening I came to the theatre in order to pass away the time. The General came with me, but he has gone away to transact some important business. He will, however, return before the end of the performance, so as to go home with me."

"And who, may I ask," said Ravellon, earnestly—"is this good looking young fellow behind us?"

Mrs. St. Croix blushed up to her very eyes, as she answered, hesitatingly.—

"Oh that is a person with whom I have but a very slight acquaintance. He is I believe, a young gentleman of good family and independent fortune. I occasionally meet him in society, and accidentally encountered him here to-night. I like to talk with him for he amuses me vastly. I assure you that he is quite an original."

"In what respect, Lydia?"

"He is so very unsophisticated, and so profoundly ignorant of the manners, customs, and opinions of the world. He is a little past twenty-one years of age, and up to the last two or three months, his fond and doting mamma has always kept him tied to her apron strings, and the consequence is, that Mr. Harry Smallfry has reached the period of manhood without having acquired the slightest knowledge of the world, which is a great pity, for you see that he is handsome in his person, polite in his manners and graceful in his deportment. The young man is not a *fool*, by any means; but many people would mistake him for one, on account of the silly observations which he often makes in consequence of his lack of *experience*. Shall I introduce you?"

Ravellon assented, and was forthwith duly made acquainted with Mr. Harry Smallfry. The two gentlemen immediately fell into conversation.

"Pray, sir," said Mr. Smallfry—"can you tell me what the play is to-night?"

"The tragedy of Macbeth," was the reply of the writer.

"It is a Scotch piece, is it not?"

"The scene of it is laid in Scotland."

"It is a sweet pretty play—who wrote it?"

"A person named Shakspeare, I believe."

"Oh, ah, I remember now. Shakspeare has been dead some time. He was a very clever writer—very clever; but I have heard that he was once taken before the police court and fined for stealing poultry, which was a great perversion of his talents. His farce of '*How to pay the Rent*' is a very good thing. But I don't like Macbeth as well as I do some other plays, because the actors don't wear such handsome, spangled dresses in it. Just look at that big fellow who wears the plaid petticoat—he is inquiring if this is a dagger which he sees before him, when there isn't any dagger there at all. Dear me, how very stupid!"

"Very stupid, indeed," responded Ravellon; but whether he alluded to the tragedy, or to Mr. Smallfry, the reader must judge.

With these, and similar observations, did the handsome but unsophisticated Harry Smallfry continue to amuse both Ravellon and Mrs. St. Croix until the end of the tragedy. It was with difficulty that the writer kept from laughing at the young man; but he was too well bred to commit such a gross breach of decorum.

Mrs. St. Croix now suggested to the two gentlemen that they had perhaps better take their leave, as her husband would probably soon return, and it was not desirable that he, with his strong propensity to jealousy, should find her *tete-a-tete* with two men.

"Let me see you again very soon, Philip," said the lady. Ravellon bowed low, and left the box; but, noticing that Smallfry lingered behind, his suspicions were aroused, and looking in through an oval pane of glass in the door, he saw Mrs. St. Croix slip into the hand of Harry a note, which she had secretly written with her pencil unobserved, during the conversation.

"Oh, ho!" said Ravellon to himself—"an appointment, or assignation, I fancy. I am inclined to believe that the intimacy which exists between this handsome fool and my fair Lydia, is not strictly Platonic. I must manage to acquaint myself with the contents of that note, and then I shall act as circumstances may dictate."

Mr. Smallfry now came out of the box, and linking arms with Ravellon, the two gentlemen left the theatre.

"What say you to a glass of wine and a segar?" suggested the writer.

"I never smoke—it don't agree with me," said Mr. Smallfry—"besides, my mamma says that tobacco smoke will spoil my hair and make me smell unpleasantly. Mamma is very strict with reference to my odor; she makes me bathe every day in Cologne water. I love onions to distraction—but she won't allow me to touch one. As to taking a glass of wine with you, I have no objection, although I seldom drink."

Ravellon led the innocent young gentleman into a gorgeous and brilliantly-lighted saloon, and having obtained a private apartment, called for oysters and a bottle of wine.

## CHAPTER VI.

SHOWING THAT THE EXCESSES OF BACCHUS ARE ENEMIES TO THE JOYS OF VENUS.

THE refreshments were brought in by a rather pretty and very showily dressed young woman, whom the proprietor of the place kept as a sort of *decoy duck*, and a source of attraction to the 'fast men about town.' This lady—whose virtue, by the way, was of the easiest kind—having deposited the tray upon the table, winked sarcastically at Smallfry, whom she recognised as 'a flat,' and smiled benignantly upon Ravellon, whom she knew and respected as a man of genius. Thus,

even in the mind of that wanton female, was the handsome fool despised, while the plain man of letters elicited due admiration and regard. It was not without good reason that Wilkes, the ugliest and at the same time the wittiest man of his day, boasted of his ability to achieve triumphs among the women, where the handsomest men in the kingdom had signally failed. Talent is God-like; but beauty belongs to clay.

Our two adventurers having devoured the savory *bivalves*, applied themselves to the bottle. Mr. Smallfry drank very cautiously at first, but Ravellon pressed the wine upon him, and soon the young gentleman began to lose his discretion under the warming and cheering influence of the juice of the grape. He now drank freely and unreservedly, and his rather weak brain whirled around like a wind-mill. Ravellon's share of the wine slyly found its way into a neighboring spittoon, for he desired to keep perfectly sober. Another bottle was called for and brought in. Smallfry drank profusely, and talked loquaciously; and Ravellon, wishing to profit by his volubility, engaged him in conversation.

"Mrs. St. Croix is a fine woman," remarked the writer, carelessly.

"She's a glorious creature!" exclaimed Smallfry, with enthusiasm—"and between you and I, Mr. What's-your-name, she has fallen desperately in love with me. Yes, I have conquered her, and nothing now remains for me but to pluck the rose that invites me to inhale its fragrance—hic!"

"The wine has made you eloquent and poetic," laughed Ravellon—"but fill your glass and let us drink to the health of the fair Lydia."

"Here's to the—hic—health of the fair Lydia?" cried Smallfry, as he drank off a bumper, which visibly increased his intoxication.

"I observed," said Ravellon—"that Mrs. St. Croix regarded you with looks that were expressive of the most passionate love. Yes, you have evidently made a conquest of her. But you have not yet enjoyed her favors?"

"Not yet," hiccupped Smallfry—"but—to-night, I shall visit—hic—no matter hic—that's a secret—hic."

Here the inebriated young gentleman, whose fond mamma must have been in blissful ignorance of the fact of his being 'out,' drew from his pocket the note which Mrs. St. Croix had given him, and having read it, he kissed it with drunken rapture. This done, he carefully placed the precious *billet* in his pocket-book, and assuming a mysterious look, made a painfully unsuccessful effort to arise from his chair, saying—

"Seuse me, old fellow, but—hic—I must leave you—hic—sorry, but there's a lady in the case—hic—you understand—hic—mum's the word—hic—good night."

Being unable to get up, Mr. Smallfry looked bewildered, as if he didn't exactly comprehend what ailed him. Looking wildly about him, he fancied that all the lights in the room were dancing polkas and minuets; and he also imagined that Ravellon had suddenly been presented with an additional head. He was about to inquire the name of the generous donor, in order to provide himself with another *caput* to be handy in case of accident, when sleep fell upon him; and leaning back in his chair, Mr. Smallfry snored.

This was precisely what Ravellon desired, and what he had been laboring to produce. He deliberately proceeded to draw forth the pocket book, of the sleeping young gentleman, and, having possessed himself of Mrs. St. Croix's note, he replaced the pocket-book, which, by the way, contained a considerable amount of money, for 'mamma' was liberal in her allowances to her darling son.

To tear open the note and acquaint himself with its contents, was but the work of a moment. It read thus:—

"I can no longer, dearest Harry, resist your importunities and the promptings of my own heart. I therefore convey to you, in writing, that which I would blush to utter in words. I know that I am acting very wickedly in proving false to my marriage vows, but will not the peculiar circumstances of my position justify me?

I am a wife, and yet I have no husband in the real sense of that term. Attend now, to my appointment:—this night, at precisely twelve o'clock, you will tap three times upon the door of my residence, with the location of which you are well acquainted. My maid Dorothy, who is entirely in my confidence, will instantly admit you into the house and conduct you to my chamber, where I shall be in waiting to receive you. Have no fears with reference to the General, whose sleeping apartment is remote from mine, and who always retires to bed, half or wholly intoxicated, long before midnight. Be cautious—be circumspect—I need scarcely say, be *punctual*, dear Harry, and believe me, that I shall ever remain, your own.

LYDIA."

"Well, upon my word," exclaimed Ravellon, when he had finished the perusal of this tender and amorous epistle—"my fair friend is 'going it' with a perfect rush! In spite of all my philosophy, I can't help feeling a pang of jealousy, in view of her strong partiality for this weak-brained young fool. It is perfectly astonishing that a woman of her superior intellect, should form an intrigue with such an idiot, handsome as he is. Well, I shall endeavor to penetrate the mystery, for it is of course my intention to *represent* this young gentleman to-night. I flatter myself that I am better capable of doing justice to the cause of the voluptuous Lydia, than *he* is. This adventure promises to be a most spicy and interesting one. Heavens! how my blood boils when I think of the raptures that may be in store for me! But hold, Ravellon, be not too sanguine of success, for 'there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.' It is now half-past eleven o'clock, and high time that I should begin to attend to the business of the night—or, rather, its pleasures."

Without bestowing a single thought upon poor Smallfry—such was his extreme eagerness to engage in the exciting adventure that lay before him—Ravellon strode out of the room, paid his bill at the bar, and then hastened with all speed towards the abode of Mrs. St. Croix.



Before we follow him, let us see what became of Mr. Harry Smallfry. The 'pride and darling of his mother,' sat snoring in his chair for some time unmolested; but at length a party of riotous and half-tipsy young men entered the room; and, seeing the condition of Mr. Smallfry, they determined to have a 'lark' with him. Taking a burnt cork, they blacked his face, neck and ears so effectually, that he bore a strong resemblance to that notorious negro buffoon, *Mr. Jerry Bryant*, when he is 'made up' for the purpose of going through with his imitations of *Mr. E. Horn*. This done, they left the young gentleman to his repose. The proprietor of the place happening to come in, angrily demanded of his subordinates why they harbored a 'd—d nigger' about the premises, and receiving no satisfactory reply, he forthwith bundled poor Smallfry into the street, where he immediately fell into the grasp of a watchman, who forthwith escorted him to the lock-up, where he remained during the night. In the morning, when he awoke to consciousness, he found himself in a most woful plight, the inmate of a loathsome dungeon, in which were also confined several other persons, some of whom had considerably relieved him of all his money. He retained but a confused recollection of the events of the previous night; and it was not until he was ushered into the police court, and overheard the remarks of the spectators there assembled, that he became aware of the fact that his face had been blacked. Having been severely lectured by the Justice on the enormity of his conduct, he was fined for inebriety. The unhappy young man had no other resource than to send for his 'ma,' who soon came and released him, on being satisfied that he was really her son, a point upon which she at first entertained some doubt, as his appearance was truly frightful, the black having been partially rubbed off his face, giving him the look of an itinerant charcoal merchant. The good lady took her darling home; and having thoroughly purified him, she prohibited him from going out nights until he should have acquired a sufficient amount of experience

and strength of mind to enable him to resist and overcome the manifold temptations which, in a wicked city like Boston, beset the path of a rash, impetuous and thoughtless youth. Mr. Smallfry received the maternal reprimand with all due submission; but he felt keenly annoyed in view of the fact that he had failed to keep the appointment with Mrs. St. Croix, who, he feared, would be so deeply incensed at his want of punctuality, that she would refuse to see him again.

We shall leave our unsophisticated young friend for the present, and follow Ravellon's adventure, which we opine, will be found worthy of a separate chapter.

## CHAPTER VII.

### DESCRIBETH CERTAIN PLATONIC PROCEEDINGS, AND AN UNREASONABLE INTERRUPTION.

It lacked but a few minutes of twelve o'clock when Ravellon arrived at the residence of Mr. St. Croix. The night was dark and starless; and the black clouds that drifted across the sky announced a coming storm. The writer lingered near the house until the clock of a neighboring church steeple proclaimed the midnight hour; then with a beating heart, he softly ascended the steps and tapped thrice upon the door, which was immediately opened without noise. The intense darkness that prevailed, prevented him from seeing the person who admitted him; but he heard the soft voice of Dorothy, Mrs. St. Croix's maid, inquire—

"Is this you, Mr. Smallfry?"

"Yes, my dear," whispered Ravellon, in reply—"this is me."

"My mistress is waiting impatiently for you, sir," said the maid. (Be it understood, reader, that we use the word *maid* not by way of asserting Dorothy's chastity, but solely with reference to the

multifarious offices which she performed for Mrs. St. Croix.)

Had it not been for the darkness, Ravellon would have seen that Dorothy was a very plump, pretty and rosy-checked girl of seventeen, or thereabouts, possessing a pair of particularly roguish black eyes, whose glances were to a man's passions like sparks applied to a magazine of powder.

"Give me your hand, sir," said Dorothy—"and I will lead you up stairs to the chamber of my mistress. I know the way very well, even in the dark."

Ravellon stretched forth his hand in order to take that of the maid. But instead of touching her hand, he came in contact—accidentally, of course with her ripe and exceedingly well-developed bust, which was entirely innocent of drapery, she being attired in her night-dress. This accident considerably agitated Ravellon, and, in his bewilderment, he drew the unresisting Dorothy towards him and began to devour her with kisses, which she returned with compound interest, while her palpitating bosom announced that she also was greatly excited from some mysterious cause which we really cannot explain, for we are of course profoundly ignorant of the peculiar sensations produced by a rapid exchange of kisses in the dark, between two persons of opposite sexes.

"Egad!" thought Ravellon, as, like an amorous epicure, he continued to banquet upon the sweets with which the lips of the pretty maid were laden—"a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and so I shall make sure of the maid, because my success with the mistress is somewhat uncertain. By Jove, this little witch is as ardent and passionate a piece of feminine flesh as ever decoyed a susceptible man from the straight but sometimes d—d unpleasant path of virtue! She is evidently used to the game, and I dare say that the old General has given her more than one lesson. I'll be sworn she's pretty, for such a fine bust, such satin-like skin and such a redundancy of clustering curls, as she possesses, could not possibly

belong to an ugly woman. But, be she handsome or ugly, I cannot resist her. Ah, Ravellon! thou art a sad dog, and, I fear, a most unscrupulous libertine. Verily, I know not what to say to thee!"

A sofa stood in the passage-way, and upon this did the writer and the lady's maid sit down. Kisses and caresses followed, in abundance; and then there ensued between the pair a conversation of a very familiar and affectionate character, but, as we didn't happen to be present, we cannot of course furnish any of the particulars. \* \* \* \*

Ravellon, having sufficiently amused himself with the accommodating Dorothy, generously presented her with enough money to purchase her a new silk dress; and then, after telling her to be discreet and to keep a still tongue in regard to what had happened, he requested her to conduct him to the apartment of her expectant mistress, although, singular to relate, he now felt far less inclined to engage in an adventure with Mrs. St. Croix, than he had before his conversation with Miss Dorothy, who was a thorough adept in all the mysteries of intrigue, and whose society for half an hour would have been perfectly satisfactory to any man, even though he were as insatiable with respect to women as king Solomon himself.

Miss Dorothy of course firmly believed that she was dealing with Mr. Harry Smallfry—and who was secretly surprised and delighted at the excellent capacity for gallantry which had been displayed by our hero—manifested a strong disposition to continue the agreeable *tele-a-tete* in the dark, and evidently wished to renew the interesting dialogue which had just been terminated. Besides, she now considered the supposed Mr. Smallfry to be, in a certain sense, her property; she felt jealous of her mistress, who she imagined was about to enjoy the society of a man whose attentions belonged exclusively to her; and it was therefore with the utmost reluctance that she conducted Ravellon to the door of Mrs. St. Croix's chamber. Having directed him to rap



lightly for admission, she groped her way to her own room, and soon, as usual, received a stealthy visit from the old General, who perfectly consoled for her disappointment, while at the same time he indemnified himself for the connubial deprivations inflicted upon him by his inflexible young wife.

Ravellon—not without some apprehensions as to the final result of this strange adventure—knocked gently upon the chamber door, which was immediately opened. To his inexpressible relief, he found that the room was in darkness, Mrs. St. Croix either wishing to conceal her blushes beneath the veil of night, or else deeming it most prudent and safe to carry on the intrigue in the dark, on account of the old General's jealousy and disposition to play the part of a spy.

Ravellon stepped into the chamber, and the door was carefully closed and fastened. Then a pair of plump, naked arms were thrown around his neck, and a pair of luscious lips were pressed to his in a long and burning kiss, causing a thrill of delicious rapture to rush through his frame, from his feet to the very roots of his hair.

"Dear Harry," said Mrs. St. Croix, in a low voice full of tender reproach—"What detained you? You are full half an hour behind the appointed time."

"Forgive me, Lydia, angel of my soul," whispered Ravellon, in imitation of Mr. Smallfry's rather bombastic style of speech—"my watch being out of order, I was deceived as to the time. Bright star of my destiny and mistress of my heart, am I forgiven?"

"Yes, dear Harry," responded the enamored lady—"but I owe you an apology for receiving you in the dark. Perhaps you would like to have me light a candle?"

"By no means," hastily remarked the daring imposter—"it is best to be on the safe side, and a light in your chamber, at this late hour, might lead to our detection. We can as well enjoy each other's society in the dark, my Lydia. Love can illumine and warm the soul

without the aid of either lamps or candles. Is it not so, my queen of hearts?"

"Come, have done with compliments, Harry, and let us talk common sense. Here, sit down with me upon this sofa, so that we can converse at our ease. but don't squeeze my waist so hard, or you will take away my breath. This is the first time, since our brief acquaintance that we have ever been alone together where we could express our reciprocal sentiments unobserved and without restraint. Ah, me! this is the happiest hour of my life!"

With this softly uttered but intensely passionate exclamation, the lady reclined her head upon the shoulder of Ravellon, whose wanton fingers played with her flowing and luxurious tresses,

"Tell me, Lydia," said the pretended Mr. Smallfry—who is that Mr. Ravellon whom you introduced me to this evening, at the theatre?"

"Oh, he is a newly-made acquaintance of mine," replied Mrs. St. Croix. "A trifling circumstance, not worth mentioning, made us known to each other, and we have mutually agreed to consider ourselves as friends. He is a literary man, and although poor, he is a gentleman by birth and education. His conversational powers are most brilliant, and he is altogether a very agreeable companion; therefore, do I like his society. It is a great pity that a polished and intellectual man like Mr. Ravellon, should be without fortune. He interests me exceedingly, and I intend to adopt some means of placing him beyond the reach of want. Poor Ravellon! with his refinement of mind and fastidiousness of taste, to be compelled to dwell in a garret and subsist on bread and cheese!"

Mrs. St. Croix uttered these words with an enthusiastic earnestness that evinced her perfect sincerity. Ravellon felt flattered and pleased at the high opinion which she had expressed of his talents and other good qualities. When she signified her generous determination to place him beyond the reach of want, he was almost tempted to fall up-

on his knees, and after confessing the false part which he had been playing, implore her pardon. But his contact with her divine person, and the fragrance of her breath, as it mingled with his, were temptations too great to be resisted, and he felt that he could not sacrifice the happiness which he now confidently anticipated enjoying. So he continued to personate Mr. Harry Smallfry.

"You speak very highly of this Ravellon, Lydia," said he—"Since you view him in so favorable a light, and like him so well, I wonder that you have not selected him as a *lover*, in preference to me;—for he, you say, is a man of brilliant parts, while I, you know, am but an ignorant, verdant and unsophisticated youth, with no powers of conversation whatever."

"I will tell you, Harry," replied the lady, "Ravellon is too highly *intellectual* for me, and I cannot receive him in the capacity of a lover, because, in the presence of a man so mentally superior and so thoroughly acquainted with the world, I should feel ashamed to manifest the tender susceptibilities of my nature, and the extreme warmth of my temperament. I feel that I could love Ravellon, were I so disposed; but I must struggle against the admission of such a sentiment to my heart. On the other hand, dear Harry, I am willing to sacrifice myself to you, because I can afterwards meet you unabashed, for I am your equal in intellect, and, besides, there is to me something particularly *recherché* in initiating you in the divine mysteries of love, you dear unsophisticated youth; for you have so solemnly assured me that I am the first woman with whom you ever associated on terms of tender intimacy; and, although I myself am practically a stranger to the joys of love, the theory is not unknown to me, and I feel confident of my ability to act towards you the part of an able instructress."

These words, so characteristic of Mrs. St. Croix's peculiar disposition, were uttered with a candor and an emphasis that

charmed and excited Ravellon inexpressibly. He now perfectly understood her reasons for rejecting him as a lover, and accepting such a specimen of unmitigated verdancy as Smallfry. Her praises of his talents, and her acknowledgment that she *could* love him, were she so disposed, delighted the enamored writer beyond measure, and he thought—

"She *shall* love me, in spite of herself. As soon as I have accomplished this night's triumph I'll acquaint her with the deception which I have practised, and implore her forgiveness, which her natural generosity will not permit her to refuse me, especially when I assure her that 'twas her ravishing beauty, and my boundless love for her, that drove me to the imposition. A woman will, in nine cases out of ten, readily pardon a man who commits folly, or perpetrates wrong, in consequence of his love for her—for her vanity is flattered, and vanity is the great weakness of the sex. Yes, Lydia will be sure to forgive me, and I shall be happy in her love!"

While these thoughts were passing through the mind of Ravellon—and even while he pressed the lady to his throbbing breast and literally banquetted on kisses—Mrs. St. Croix was listening attentively to a strange and suspicious noise which her quick ears had detected, and which, she fancied, proceeded from the lower portion of the house. Soon she imagined that she heard the sound of footsteps stealthily ascending the stairs. Becoming frightened, she pushed Ravellon away from her with an abruptness that rather astonished and disconcerted him.

"Be silent, Harry," whispered the lady, who was now deeply agitated—"some one is coming up stairs towards this chamber. Good Heavens! if it should be the General! But the door is locked, and of course I will not admit him on any account. What if he should suspect the presence of a lover in my apartment, and break open the door!"

"Calm yourself, Lydia," said Ravel-

lon, who was a man of the most undaunted courage—"I will, at all risks, and under all circumstances, protect you with my life. I am unarmed, but desperation will give me the strength of a giant."

"Dear Harry, I did not suppose you to be so brave," murmured the lady.

"Hark," said the writer—"I hear the sound of a whispered conversation outside the chamber door. It *must* be the General and one of the servants, preparing to burst in the door. Can your maid Dorothy have betrayed us?"

"By no means; she would not be guilty of such treachery," replied the trembling Mrs. St. Croix.

"There's not a moment to be lost," said the writer, as he hastily arose and approached one of the chamber windows, which looked down upon the street—"can I not escape this way, and so preserve your reputation from dishonor?"

"No, Harry, if you attempt to leap from the window you will be surely killed, for it is a considerable height from the ground, and, besides, you will fall upon the sharp points of the iron railings below. Do not attempt it, if you love me."

This appeal was not to be resisted—and, besides, Ravellon had no desire to be impaled, or have his bones—perhaps his neck, broken in consequence of his taking a flying leap from a fourth-story window. Accordingly he resumed his seat on the sofa, saying—

"There's no help for it, and we must abide the result with all the philosophy that we can muster to our aid. But rest assured, dear Lydia, that whatever happens, *you* shall be protected and receive no harm."

"A thought strikes me, Harry," said Mrs. St. Croix, eagerly—"conceal yourself beneath the bed, and possibly your presence here may be undiscovered. At all events, it is worth the trial."

"I would much rather meet the General face to face like a man, instead of

skulking beneath your bed like a thief," said Ravellon—"but as your reputation is at stake, and as it is your request, I shall obey."

With these words the writer, very reluctantly, crawled beneath the bed, and found himself in company with a miscellaneous assortment of articles, consisting of Mrs. St. Croix's cast-off slippers—which were as diminutive in size as the glass slipper of Cinderella—a number of costly bonnets, nearly new, but out of fashion, silk and satin dresses ditto, piles of letters from female acquaintances, heaps of withered bouquets, stacks of spicily French novels, a broken guitar, a cracked opera glass, any quantity of ruined fans and soiled gloves, and—various other things, too numerous to mention.

Mrs. St. Croix, who firmly believed that her venerable husband, aided by his confidential *valet*, was about to force an entrance into her chamber, now hastened to get into bed, and pretended to be fast asleep. The whispering outside the door had now ceased; and then was heard the sound of the key turning in the lock. A pair of *forceps* had been used to effect an entrance into the room. [This is an instrument used by robbers in plundering houses; it enables them, when a door is locked with the key on the inside, to *turn* that key, and enter the apartment.]

Mrs. St. Croix, trembling in every limb, kept her eyes closed, as if she were in a profound sleep. Expecting every moment to hear the voice of her husband, her astonishment and affright may be imagined, when these words were uttered in a gruff voice—

"Show a glim, Dick, and let's see what there is in here."

The tone in which these words were spoken sounded strangely familiar to Mrs. St. Croix, and made her blood run cold with horror, for it recalled to her remembrance a fearful man whom she never could think of without a shudder.

## CHAPTER VIII.

WHEREIN OUR HEROINE ENCOUNTERS AN OLD AND AFFECTIONATE FRIEND.

BOTH Mrs. St. Croix and Ravellon now comprehended that the intruders, instead of being the General and his *valet*, were two burglars who had broken into the house for the purpose of plundering it; and, disagreeable as was this state of affairs, they both felt that it was far preferable to a visit from the jealous husband. A midnight robber is sometimes less dangerous than an infuriated husband who discovers a lover in the bed-chamber of his wife. A maddening thirst for vengeance is a much more powerful inducement to commit bloody deeds than the mere desire for plunder.

The robber who had been requested to "show a glim," (display a light) drew back the slide of the dark-lantern which he carried, and which now revealed the forms of two ruffians of the most repulsive appearance, whose countenances indicated the depravity of their characters, and announced them to be fully capable of committing the most atrocious crimes. In these two horrid faces were branded, as if with a red-hot iron, the words *desperation*, *cruelty* and *murder*.

"Well, Dick," said the robber who had before spoken, and whose voice Mrs. St. Croix fancied she recognized—"we've plenty of time before us, so sit down upon this here sofa while we take a pull or two at the brandy-flask."

"Agreed," replied the other; and seating himself beside his companion, he drew from his pocket a flask. This he applied to his lips, and, having taken a long 'pull,' he passed it to his comrade, who, when he had sufficiently refreshed himself, remarked—

"This may turn out to be a good job, Dick, although we haven't as yet come across much booty. I wonder where the devil they keep their silver plate—for a stylish crib like this must of

course have such finery. Before we leave we'll ransack the house from top to bottom—and, should any one happen to pounce upon us, we've got our knives and pistols, and know how to use them."

"That 'ere's a fact," observed Dick, who being a gentleman of limited powers of conversation, usually confined himself to the mere making of brief responses to the remarks of his more fluent friend.

"Ah, Dick," said the first speaker, as he planted his muddy feet upon a damask-cushioned chair—"that was a lucky day for me when I gave up picking rags in the streets, and turned robber—wasn't it?"

"True enough, Mr. Braxley," replied the taciturn Dick.

The mention of the name *Braxley* sent a thrill of ineffable horror through the frame of Mrs. St. Croix, for, as the reader may remember, it was the name of the ruffianly rag-picker who pretended to be her father, and from whom she had escaped six years before, when she was twelve years of age. Partially opening her eyes, her worst fears were confirmed, for she saw that the robber was indeed the same rag-picking scoundrel who had been the terror of her childhood, and whose presence now inspired her with as much fear as though he had been the most ferocious of wild beasts. Having but little confidence in the personal prowess of Mr. Smallfry, whom she supposed to be hidden under the bed, she felt that she was completely in the power of Braxley, whom she knew to be capable of murdering her in revenge for her having deserted him so unceremoniously. Resigning herself to her fate, she closed her eyes and awaited her doom with all the fortitude of which she was mistress.

Dick, whose eyes had been wandering about the room in search of such portable articles as might be easily carried off, now fixed his eyes upon the bed, and for the first time noticed that it was occupied. Touching his companion's

elbow, he silently pointed towards Mrs. St. Croix. Braxley instantly arose, and taking up the lantern, approached the bed. The lady lay motionless, with her eyes closed, and presented every appearance of being fast asleep. Braxley turned the glare of the lantern full upon her countenance, which he had no sooner beheld than he started back in astonishment, at the same time uttering a frightful oath—for he instantly recognized, in the occupant of the bed, the once miserable rag-picking girl of whom he claimed to be the father, and whom he had been industriously searching for during the six years which had elapsed since her escape from him.

The phlegmatic Dick was astonished at the agitation displayed by his associate in crime, and demanded the cause thereof.

"This girl, Dick," said Braxley, in explanation of his conduct—"is the same that I have so often told you about, and that I have been searching for so long. She ran away six years ago. I've found her at last, and now I've got her, d—n me if I don't hold on to her!"

Dick executed a prolonged whistle, by way of expressing, without words, but yet in a forcible manner, his wonder; and Braxley continued—

"Yes, Dick, this is the girl, and I'm bound to make money out of her yet. You see that she is as handsome as a picture. Quite the lady, too, I swear—sleeping in a chamber like this, and living in grand style. Look at the lace upon her night-dress and the sparkling rings upon her fingers; that one's a diamond, or I'm no judge. But how, in the devil's name, came she to strike such a streak of luck as to become the inhabitant of a stylish crib like this—that's what puzzles me. But no matter; she's mine now, and I may as well awaken her at once, and give her to understand that she must accompany me—her father, ha, ha!—to a place where she won't enjoy quite so many luxuries as she does here."

"Look here, Mr. Braxley," said Dick, who always treated his associate with respect, as his superior in rank, and who was urged by the importance of the occasion to utter a speech of unusual length for him—"look here, sir. It's my advice not to carry off this 'ere gal, no how. Cause vy? She would scream and holler out, upon vich the hinmates of the 'ouse and the officers would be after us, and ve be took to the stone-jug without making no swag. Ve don't vant vimmen; they're plenty enough anyveres; ve vant money and booty, don't ve?"

"But," remarked Braxley—"we can gag the girl, and so prevent her from screaming or making the least noise."

"Vell," said Dick—"Vot then? You carry her to our crib, and perhaps hide her away in the cellar all snug and safe, Vot use is she to you then? None at all—only a trouble. These here rich nobbs that she lives with ain't going to have her spirited away without making every effort to find out her whereabouts. They vill offer big revards for her, and the consekence vill be, every s'picious house in the city vill be searched, she vill be found, and 'ell vill be played with us both. There's my sentiments!"

Braxley, upon whom the objections of his trusty follower had evidently made some impression, said, after a few moments' reflection—

"There is reason in what you say, Dick. It *would* be dangerous, and very difficult, too, to carry the girl off. But how shall I punish her for daring to run away from me?"

"Vy," replied Dick, coolly—"if it was my case, I'd put my knife through her heart vile she sleeps, and send her to 'eaven in a easy and comfortable way."

"Good!" exclaimed Braxley, who was well pleased with this atrocious suggestion. Drawing from its sheath a long and sharp-pointed knife, the ruffian prepared to murder Mrs. St. Croix, who, with that extraordinary courage and presence of mind which are sometimes produced, even in timid persons,

by circumstances of great peril, continued to feign sleep, and awaited the deadly stab with the fortitude of one who had relinquished all hope.

Ravellon, beneath the bed, watched every movement of the ruffians with eagle eyes, and prepared himself to spring upon Braxley, in case that desperate villain should really attempt to execute his murderous design.

Braxley raised his weapon high above the breast of Mrs. St. Croix; but, just as Ravellon was about to spring upon him with the fury of an enraged tiger, he returned the knife to its sheath, and said, in a tone of decision—

"I shall not kill the girl—at all events not here. I'll risk everything, and carry her off. You say, Dick, that a large reward will be offered for her recovery. That's the very thing I want. As soon as the reward is offered—and it's sure to be two or three thousand dollars—I'll enter into arrangements with these nobbs to restore the girl upon payment of the reward, and upon receiving good assurance that no harm shall happen to me for having carried her off. Why, Dick, I can claim the girl, any how, and the law can't take her away from me unless I feel disposed to part with her for a consideration, for I can get plenty of witnesses to swear that she is my daughter. Whether she is or not makes no difference, so long as I can purchase the services of good swearers. Yes, Dick, my mind is made up; we will carry the girl to our crib, and, for lending me your assistance, you shall share in the profits of the enterprise!"

Dick grumbled out his thanks, and declared himself in readiness to obey the orders of his superior. Laying his coarse hand upon the alabaster shoulder of Mrs. St. Croix, Braxley rudely shook her, at the same time holding his disengaged hand in readiness to place upon her mouth, in case she should attempt to scream.

The young lady pretended to awaken, and affected the utmost astonishment at sight of the robbers in her chamber.

Starting up in the bed, she exclaimed—"Who are you, and what do you here?"

"You shall know presently," replied Braxley—"but, in the first place, I must warn you not to make the least noise, for if you do, I shall be compelled to give you a taste of *this*."

Here the villain drew forth and displayed his knife, at sight of which, Mrs. St. Croix shuddered and turned pale.

"Do you know me, girl?" demanded Braxley.

"Alas, yes—too well!" replied the unhappy lady, bursting into tears; for the presence of that horrible man recalled to her mind the remembrance of the miseries which she had suffered in her childhood.

"Come, no snivelling!" cried Braxley, brutally—"that sort of stuff won't do with me, and you know it. Get up and prepare to accompany me to your old home!"

Not daring to disobey, yet shrinking from the exposure of her half-dressed person to the gaze of those two ruffians, Mrs. St. Croix arose and began to dress herself, while Braxley and his companion amused themselves by making the most obscene allusions to the voluptuous form and symmetrical limbs of the poor young lady, whose ears were shocked by such indecent language, and whose face, recently pale with fear, now glowed with mortification and shame.

"Harry is a braggart and a coward," thought she—"or he would rush forth from his place of concealment and endeavor to protect me from the miscreants."

"You're a nice one," said Braxley, scornfully—"what d'ye mean by being guilty of such ingratitude as to run away from me, your father, after I had fed and clothed you for so long a time, and learned you a good, respectable trade? How came you to live in such a grand establishment as this—eh?"

Mrs. St. Croix made no answer, but continued to dress herself with as much rapidity as possible.

"So you're obstinate, and won't speak,

ch! Well, when I get you home, I'll soon cure you of *that*. A taste of the rope's end will bring you to your senses, I'll swear. You shall learn to respect my authority as your father. D—n you, in spite of all your lady-like acts, you shall be stripped of your finery and made to wear the coarse garments suitable to your lowly birth and humble condition. Yes, I'll have you in the streets picking rags again; and I'll take devilish good care that you don't give me the slip the second time. So, you're dressed, are you, and all ready to go along with me quietly? Well, now give me all your jewels, for of course you must have plenty of such trash."

Mrs. St. Croix submissively handed the scoundrel a small key, and pointed to her dressing-case, which Braxley immediately opened. To his great satisfaction he found, in addition to a large assortment of valuable jewelry, a considerable sum of money. These treasures he of course transferred to his pockets.

Dick now whispered a few words in the ear of Braxley, who nodded as if in approval of a suggestion, and said to the young lady—

"Lydia, before we go, you must show us where those rich nobbs that you are living with, keep their money and plate. Come, be a good girl for once, and render me this little piece of service, for the sake of old acquaintance."

These words were uttered in a coaxing, wheedling tone, which was so sickening, so hypocritical, and so absurdly unlike Braxley's usual brutal and imperious manner of addressing her, that Mrs. St. Croix was filled with disgust, and she could not restrain her indignation.

"Do you think, wretch," she demanded, with a degree of spirit that both astonished and enraged Braxley—"do you think that I will become your accomplice in plundering the house? Never! When you were a rag-picker, I detested you—but now that you are a thief, you are alone worthy of my contempt. Take me, and do with me as

you will—starve me, beat me, *kill* me if you please. But all the tortures that you can inflict upon me, will not force me to become your associate in crime. Now you understand me, and further talk is useless."

"Brave, heroic creature!" thought Ravellon, who was filled with admiration at the courage of the woman whom he adored, and whom he resolved to protect at the hazard of his life.

Braxley, enraged almost to madness by the cutting words and haughty tone of the object of his persecutions, walked savagely up to her and with his open hand struck her a severe blow in the face. Scarcely had he committed this cowardly and brutal act, when Ravellon rushed forth from his hiding place; and seizing the scoundrel by the throat, the writer hurled him to the floor with a violence that nearly stunned him.

Mrs. St. Croix, who for the first time became aware that her amorous companion in the dark had been Ravellon, instead of Mr. Harry Smallfry, was so overwhelmed with astonishment, that she uttered a loud scream and fainted.

Dick, on seeing his comrade 'floored,' drew his knife and made a desperate attack upon Ravellon, who with marvellous coolness, seized the robber by the wrist and endeavored to gain possession of the weapon. A desperate struggle ensued between the two men. Dick was the most powerful, but he was a great lumbering lout of a fellow, having but a very limited stock of courage; while Ravellon, on the contrary, was brave, active, and an excellent pugilist. It was like a combat between a tiger and an elephant. The writer's consciousness that he was fighting in defence of the woman whom he loved, gave him superhuman strength. At length he succeeded in wresting the knife from the grasp of the robber; and, the next moment, the respectable Mr. Dick was laying upon the floor and weltering in his blood, his own weapon having been plunged into his breast by the hand of Ravellon, inflicting a mortal wound.

The brave writer now determined to

'finish' the other ruffian; but, on turning around in order to accomplish that laudable purpose, he discovered that Mr. Braxley had vanished without going through with the ceremony of bidding him good bye. Rather shocked at this evidence of a want of politeness on the part of so amiable a gentleman as Mr. Braxley, Ravellon approached the sofa upon which Mrs. St. Croix had fallen, when she swooned. But his consternation may be imagined when he discovered that the lady was gone!

Having searched the chamber and an adjoining closet without success, Ravellon was forced to arrive at the painful conclusion that Braxley had taken advantage of Mrs. St. Croix's insensible condition, to carry her off.

"Yes, exclaimed the writer, as he ground his teeth together with impotent fury—"poor Lydia being senseless, and I being busily engaged with this fellow whom I have slain, it was an easy matter for the scoundrel, Braxley, to escape from the house with his victim in his arms. But, by heavens! I swear that I will know neither rest or peace until I have discovered the den of that villain and rescue the object of my love from his power. Then will I terribly avenge the wrongs which he has inflicted upon my Lydia!"

Here a slight movement made by the dying Dick, arrested Ravellon's attention; he approached the poor wretch and bending over him with a feeling of pity, heard him gasp forth these disconnected words—

Braxley—Commercial street—trap-door—dungeon—search—I'm off!"

During the utterance of these words, change came over Dick's countenance; and, in a few moments, he expired.

"The poor devil is dead," thought the writer—"and, by killing him—which I was of course perfectly justified in doing—I have cheated the hangman of a job at some future time. Well, in his last moments he made all the atonement in his power by trying to tell me where Braxley might be found. The little that he was able to say will

assist me in my search. He probably meant to intimate that Braxley's den is in Commercial street—that beneath a trap-door in his place is a dungeon, and that in the dungeon will be confined the object of my search. I'll make a note of these things, although there is little danger of my forgetting them."

While Ravellon was engaged in writing a few words in his pocket-book, the door was thrown open and General St. Croix made his appearance, holding in one hand a lighted candle, and in the other a pistol. The old gentleman had been awakened from his voluptuous repose in the arms of the maid Dorothy, by the tumultuous noises in the chamber of his wife; and, rightly judging that robbers had broken into the house, he reluctantly tore himself away from the affectionate and ardent embraces of his plump and pretty companion, who was frightened almost out of her wits. The General, who was a brave old fellow, notwithstanding his many ridiculous traits of character, did not pause to dress himself, but seizing the candle, he hurried to his own apartment, loaded a pistol, and made his appearance before Ravellon in the manner described. Peeping over the General's shoulder was the fair Dorothy, who, being apprehensive with regard to her personal safety, had closely followed her ancient admirer. She was very scantily attired in a single garment, which displayed rather more than it concealed; and, even at that critical time, Ravellon, who now saw Dorothy for the first time—for it will be remembered that his interview with her had taken place in the dark—Ravellon, we say, could not help admiring her *piquant* countenance and her plump beauties which were so charmingly exhibited. The General, who naturally supposed Ravellon to be one of the robbers, took a deliberate aim at him with the pistol; and the poor writer was then in rather a dangerous predicament, for the old gentleman was a 'dead shot,' and could snuff a candle at thirty paces.

"My dear sir," cried Ravellon, with hurried politeness—"you will greatly



oblige me by not pulling that trigger, for such an act might result in my personal damage. I am not what you take me for—allow me to explain.”

“Explain!” roared the old General, with an oath—“scoundrel, you break into a man’s house, and even enter the chamber of his wife, and then when you are about to receive the reward of your villany, you have the cool effrontery to talk of *explanation*! Wretch, you have not one minute to live!”

Ravellon, seeing the necessity of making a desperate effort to save his life, suddenly sprang forward with such force and vigor, that the General, taken completely by surprise, was precipitated to the floor, as was also poor Dorothy, who uttered a piercing scream. In the rum-pus the pistol was accidentally discharged, fortunately without injuring any one. Ravellon bounded down the stairs with the agility of an antelope, and, opening the front door, gained the street in safety. Congratulating himself upon his lucky escape, and overcome by the fatigue and excitement which he had experienced, he repaired to a hotel, procured a chamber, and sought the repose which he so much needed.

## CHAPTER IX.

DESCRIBETH THE HOSPITABLE ABODE AND THE PLEASANT FRIENDS OF MR. SIMON BRAXLEY.

LEAVING General St. Croix to discover that his wife had disappeared, and to find in her chamber the dead body of Dick—both of which mysterious circumstances filled the old chieftain with the utmost consternation and astonishment—we will for the present follow Mrs. St. Croix and her abductor.

On reaching the street with his insensible burden, Braxley hastened with all speed towards his den in Commercial

street—a portion of the city which was then, as it is now, mainly occupied by stores and other places of business, with here and there an inferior looking dwelling-house, tenanted by persons of the lowest class, whose subsistence was principally derived from the neighboring wharves, on which they gained a precarious living, either by labor or by plunder—the latter employment, we fear, being the most prevalent.

Fortunately for Braxley the night was dark and stormy, and he therefore ran but little risk of being intercepted in his progress with his burden by the watchmen, who, with a commendable regard for their precious healths, had retired to various comfortable places of shelter from the drenching rain. Braxley was a powerful man, and carried the lady as easily as if she had been an infant. In about a quarter of an hour he arrived at the place of his abode, which was situated in that part of Commercial street that fronts on the river near Ann street. Descending a long, steep flight of steps, the villain knocked in a peculiar manner upon a door, which being opened, he entered a cellar of considerable extent, which was dimly lighted by a tallow candle that burned upon a shelf over the fire-place. Having carefully re-fastened the door, Braxley rudely threw the form of the still insensible Mrs. St. Croix upon a wretched bed in one corner, and exclaimed—

“There she is, safe at last, and never shall she go out of this crib *alive*, until she is redeemed by my receiving her weight in silver, at least. D—n her, lugging her such a distance has completely fagged me out. Wonder what the devil has become of Dick, and how he made out with that fellow who appeared so mysteriously from under the bed, and who, I’ll be sworn, had thus hidden himself so as to have a pleasant little interview with my lady here. No matter; Dick must take care of himself. Here, Peg!—where the devil are you, Peg? Show me the light of your beautiful countenance!”

“What do you want, Simon Braxley?” demanded some invisible person, in a hoarse voice, which proceeded from a

dark and remote corner of the cellar, and then, with shuffling footsteps, the speaker emerged from the darkness, and exhibited the form and face of a woman who might have been in her forty-fifth year. She was a creature whose appearance was calculated to inspire disgust and horror in the minds of all who looked upon her. With her bloated form, clothed in rags that were filthy in the extreme, she seemed an appropriate inhabitant of that squalid, subterranean den, which swarmed with rats and other foul vermin that were engendered by the damp and pestilential atmosphere. But it was the woman’s face that particularly horrified every one who gazed upon her. A profusion of fiery red hair fell in coarse and tangled masses over her eyes, which expressed as much cruelty and ferocity as those of the hyena, that robs the grave and makes its loathsome meal upon the bodies of the dead. From her mouth projected her black and rotten teeth, between which was now stuck an equally black and dilapidated pipe, the rank smoke of which, mingling with her foul and diseased breath, created an odor sufficiently abominable to nauseate any hog possessing the slightest claims to respectability. This lady’s personal attractions were not increased by the circumstance of her being destitute of that convenient and useful feature, a nose—she having been deprived of hers by the ravages of disease. This loss was the cause of her speaking in a hoarse and snuffling tone of voice, which completed the extensive catalogue of her charms and graces. She rejoiced in the elegant cognomen of ‘*Peg Pickles*,’ which may have been bestowed upon her in playful allusion to the sourness of her disposition; and she occupied the honorable, but not very lucrative, position of house-keeper (and occasional *mistress*!) to Mr. Simon Braxley and such gentlemen as he saw fit to receive into his confidence, and associate with in matters of business.

“What do you want?” again demanded this amiable lady, as she gazed first at her partner in crime and then at poor Mrs. St. Croix, who lay upon the miser-

able bed, her garments saturated with the rain, and her wet hair flowing in disorder all over her pallid face and snow-white shoulders.

“First get me some brandy, Peg,” replied Braxley, shaking himself like a Newfoundland dog that has just come out of the water—“and then try and bring that girl to her senses. Don’t stop to ask me who she is; you shall know all about her soon. Come, bustle about and do as I bid you.”

Peg grumbled out some unintelligible words, and having produced the brandy bottle—to which Mr. Braxley applied himself with praiseworthy zeal—she busied herself with endeavors to restore Mrs. St. Croix to a state of consciousness. Some brandy was poured down the throat of the unfortunate young lady, who soon began to manifest symptoms of returning sensibility. At last she opened her eyes, and gazed with terror upon the hideous countenance of Peg Pickles, who bent over her, and whose foul breath sickened her almost to death.

“Where am I?” demanded the poor, bewildered lady, faintly.

Braxley advanced to the bed-side, and Mrs. St. Croix felt that his presence was a sufficient answer to her question. Shuddering, she reclosed her eyes so as to shut out his hated image from her sight. She knew too well that she was now completely in the power of that dreadful man, although she was of course unconscious of everything that had occurred since the moment when the unexpected and startling appearance of Ravellon in the chamber, had caused her to swoon.

“I’ll tell you where you are,” growled Braxley, as he seated himself upon the side of the bed, and laid his heavy hand upon the breast of Mrs. St. Croix, probably by way of enforcing his remarks and giving them additional emphasis—“you are in the humble but snug crib of your affectionate father, whose tender heart you nearly broke by cruelly deserting him, six years ago, yet who is now willing to give you a home. The circumstances that restored you to me, Lydia, were strange and most fortunate. Now, it de-



pend altogether upon your rich friends whether you remain with me, or return to them. If they think it worth their while to *come down* handsomely—say, with two or three thousand—they can have you; otherwise, you stay here and keep company with Peg Pickles, who, although she is immoderately fond of brandy and tobacco, takes no *snuff*, having lost the *receptacle* for the same—ha! ha! ha!—and who is a very nice, agreeable lady, as her looks indicate. She will be a sort of step-mother to you, Lydia.”

Oh!” cried Mrs. St. Croix, eagerly—“I entreat you to go or send immediately to my husband—that is to my friends, and I am sure that they will instantly pay you whatever ransom you may demand. They are immensely rich, and money is of no consequence to them compared with my safety, for they have become greatly attached to me, and will go to any expense in order to recover me.”

“Don’t be in such a hurry to leave your doting father,” said Braxley, with the most provoking coolness—“I must wait until a big reward is offered for your recovery;—then will be the time for me to go forward and offer to restore you. Until then, you must make up your mind to stay here, and be as contented as possible. And now tell me how you happened to *ring in* among these rich nobles; and also explain the reason of that fellow’s being hidden under your bed. Come, begin!”

Mrs. St. Croix, ashamed to confess that she was the wife of a man old enough to be her grandfather, did not inform Braxley of the fact of her being married, although she knew that in all probability he would eventually become acquainted with that circumstance. She merely related to him, that having found a valuable ring in the street, she had restored it to its owner, an old gentleman, who, interested by her appearance, had kindly taken her under his protection, educated her, and provided her with a comfortable and luxurious home. In relation to the man who had been concealed under the bed, she protested that she knew nothing

about him whatever, and suggested that he must have been some villain who had thus secreted himself for the purpose of committing robbery or outrage. This suggestion was received by Braxley with a smile of incredulity, for he firmly believed that the man who had attacked him and his comrade was a lover of Lydia’s. However, he did not care to dispute the point; but, having made the young lady give him the General’s diamond ring from her finger, he told her to sleep, if she could, adding, that she should not be disturbed. Mr. Braxley then retired to a distant corner of the room with Miss Peg Pickles; and the amiable and well-matched couple proceeded to eat, drink, and smoke with a relish that was inspired by their affectionate regard for each other, and by the agreeable prospect of making a good speculation out of poor Lydia, who, notwithstanding the horrors of her situation, soon fell into an uneasy slumber, which was visited by the most frightful dreams.

After sleeping for the space of about half an hour she was awakened by the sounds of boisterous merriment and roars of laughter. Opening her eyes, she saw, in a remote part of the cellar, a large company of men and women surrounding a great round table, and engaged in drinking and smoking. The men were all ruffians of the lowest and most desperate class; while the women were filthy and repulsive looking creatures, evidently of the most abandoned character. These wretches were the associates of Braxley and Peg Pickles; and, having finished their night’s work of robbery, dock-thieving and low prostitution, they had, as was their custom, come to make merry in the den of Braxley, who kept a sort of tavern for their accommodation, and who took good care to make them pay for the vile liquors and other ‘refreshments’ with which he supplied them.

As the corner in which Mrs. St. Croix lay was enveloped in darkness, none of the company could see her; and none, with the exception of Braxley and Peg Pickles, knew of her presence. She, however, could distinctly see all that

transpired; and, if her soul sickened within her at the obscene language that was used, how must she have been horrified when she beheld those hideous women and those frightful men indulging in the most loathsome actions that could be prompted by unbridled lust, when stimulated by copious and fiery draughts of brain-maddening brandy? Yes, unrestrained by each other’s presence, those wretches perpetrated atrocities which we dare not describe. The elegant education which Mrs. St. Croix had received, and the refinement which had been imparted to her mind and tastes, by associating with the most elevated circles of society during the preceding six years, poorly qualified her to contemplate such a peculiarly horrible scene as was presented to her gaze in the cellar of Simon Braxley. Closing her eyes, she shut out the awful spectacle from her vision; but she could not close her ears to the blasphemy, the villanous flash songs, and the shockingly obscene language that seemed to render the atmosphere even of that vile place more foul and pestilential than it otherwise would have been. These monsters of iniquity, whose trades were robbery and murder, scrupled not to boast openly of their exploits in both departments of their ‘business.’ One scoundrel told of a poor, half-intoxicated sailor whom he met one dark night upon a wharf, and who had that day been paid his hard-earned wages.

“He was going to his vessel,” said the ruffian, whose piratical, blood-thirsty looks would have appalled the stoutest heart—“he was more than half-seas over, and I knew that he had plenty of *blunt* about him, for I had been drinking with him all day. Well, I gave him a rap on the head with my slung-shot, which laid him out; then I rifled his pockets and tumbled his carcass into the river! When the body was discovered, a coroner’s inquest was held over it, and the verdict was, ‘found drowned.’ Ha, ha, ha!”

Another villain related the circumstance of his once having stealthily entered the cabin of a vessel in which the captain and

several of the crew lay asleep in their berths.

“Having secured all the booty that I could lay my hands on,” said the scoundrel—“I set fire to the cabin and decamped. The whole party was either burned or suffocated to death, and the newspapers came out and said that the fire must have been the result of their own gross carelessness. D—d good joke, wasn’t it?”

These interesting reminiscences, and others of a similar character, were warmly applauded by the company, every member of which was fully capable of appreciating any narrative involving crime. The ladies, too, contributed their mite towards the general entertainment; but as their anecdotes and personal recollections partook largely of the objectionable ingredient of obscenity, we shall be obliged to omit them.

Mr. Simon Braxley being loudly called upon to relate some of his personal adventures, told the following story, to which Mrs. St. Croix listened with the most breathless interest.

## CHAPTER X.

### MRS. ST. CROIX MAKES AN APPALLING DISCOVERY.

“SIXTEEN years ago,” began the respectable Mr. Braxley, who, being somewhat elevated with liquor, was disposed to be communicative—“I stole an article which the owners would not have sold for a hundred thousand dollars—and yet many poor people, who possess articles of precisely the same description, would gladly give them away if they could find anybody to take them. Now, ladies and gentlemen, what think you that article was?”

Not one of the company could guess; and Mr. Braxley, with a smile of pity at their stupidity, proceeded to explain:—

“It was a *child* that I stole—a girl just about two years old, a beautiful little

creature belonging to one of the richest and most aristocratic families in Boston. I was then nothing but a miserable rag-picker, although you all know that I have had a good education. How I became reduced to the rag-picking profession has nothing to do with my story. Thank heaven! I am no longer a degraded gatherer of street rubbish, but a respectable thief. Well, I'll tell you how I came to steal the child. I was one day pursuing my rag-collecting occupation in a street where none but wealthy people dwell. Seeing the door of a handsome house standing invitingly open, with no person in sight, I slipped in, for even at that time I occasionally did a little in the pilfering line, and never missed a good chance to make a haul. Noiselessly entering a splendid parlor, I looked hastily around, but saw nothing that I could conveniently carry off, with the exception of the miniature of a child, set in gold, which lay upon the table. Thrusting this miniature into my pocket, I turned to leave, as I was fearful of being detected; when for the first time I saw, lying fast asleep upon a sofa, a little girl whom I instantly knew to be the *original* of the portrait which I had taken. The child was surpassingly beautiful, and it occurred to me that by taking possession of her I might contrive to extort a handsome sum of money from her parents or friends, upon condition of restoring her to them. No sooner thought, than done. Taking the child gently up in my arms, so as not to awaken her, I wrapped my old canvass bag around her tiny form, for the purpose of screening her from observation. This done, I stepped out with all possible haste, and hurried to my crib with my prize, who was still asleep when I reached home. Well, ladies and gentlemen, to make a long story short, I reared the girl, and tried to make her think that I was her father;—but, devil take her, I don't think she ever believed me, for she doubtless felt the aristocratic blood that flowed in her veins, and perhaps that mysterious thing called *instinct* told her that no relationship existed between us. However, I made a

rag-picker of her, and kept her with me until she reached the age of twelve, when she contrived to give me the slip, just as I was beginning to think about dressing her up and selling her to any rich and amorous old codger who would have given a high price for so beautiful a young girl as she was."

"I remember the gal well," remarked an ancient dock-thief with gray hair and a wooden leg—"and I recollect, Simon, how you raved and swore when you found that she had run away. But tell us why you didn't sell her back to her parents and pocket a good round sum by the operation, as you intended to do when you stole the child."

"I'll tell you," replied Braxley, after indulging in a copious draught of brandy. "Having the child securely in my possession, I immediately began to make inquiries concerning her relatives; and, as these inquiries were made through another person, whom I employed as a kind of agent to act for me, no suspicion was directed towards me. I contrived to learn this much: that the child's name was Lydia—but this I knew before, as that name was engraved upon the back of the miniature which I had stolen, and which I have carefully preserved, for it may be of use to me some day. I also ascertained that the child's father was dead, and that her mother was lying at the point of death; her health had always been rather feeble, and the mysterious abduction of her little daughter so completely prostrated her that the physicians pronounced her recovery hopeless. A large reward was offered in the newspapers for the lost child; but my trusty agent, in whom I could place the most implicit confidence, warned me not to go forward to restore the child and claim the reward—'for,' said he, 'I am satisfied that if you were to do so, you would be immediately taken into custody, and your only reward would be a residence of several years within the walls of the State Prison at Charlestown.' I took the hint, and kept shady. Soon I learned that the child's mother had died; she was then an orphan, and I came to

the conclusion that there was no one left who cared sufficiently for her to pay any considerable sum for her restoration, even had it been safe to step forward in the matter, which it certainly was not. Finally I determined to bring up the child as my own, calculating to sell her, as I have said, to some wealthy libertine. But she upset that calculation by running away at the age of twelve."

"Hasn't she got any relations living?" asked the gentleman with a wooden leg.

"Yes," replied Braxley—"she has a grandfather, a rich old General named St. Croix, who lives somewhere here in the city, but I do not know what street he resides in. I don't believe that he cares a straw for the girl. You see, the General many years ago was presented with a son by a young lady whom he had seduced, and who died in giving the infant birth. Well, the General brought up the boy carefully, as if he had been the legitimate offspring of an honorable marriage, bestowing upon him his own name of Arthur, and sparing neither pains nor expense to educate and make a finished gentleman of him. When young Arthur reached the age of manhood, he fell in love with and married a beautiful but poor girl, who had nothing to recommend her but her loveliness and her virtue. There's a fine moral sentiment for you, ladies and gentlemen! The General was strongly opposed to this marriage, and, when he heard of it, he grew desperately angry, as all rich fathers do when their sons marry young ladies without fortunes. The General sent for his son, and gave him a large sum of money to keep him, he said, from becoming a beggar; he then drove the young man from his presence, saying—'Let me never see you again, nor your pauper wife, nor any of the brats that may spring from your disgraceful union.' From that day the father and son were strangers to each other. All these particulars were derived from a servant who had long been in the St. Croix's family, and who had at last been discharged on account of having committed a theft.

Out of revenge he revealed all these family secrets. You now understand why the old General would not be likely to care a curse for his grand-daughter, she being the fruit of his son's marriage, which he had so bitterly opposed."

"Haven't you been able to find any traces of the whereabouts of this girl—this Lydia, since she ran away from you?" asked one of the company.

"No," replied Braxley, who did not choose to state the fact that Lydia was in his possession—"I have never heard from the girl, and never expect to. Well, let her go to the devil—I shall not bother myself any more about her. Come, lads and lasses, take a drink all round at my expense, and then let's have a song."

This proposition was received with the most tumultuous applause; and then the gentleman with the wooden leg proceeded to enliven the company by making a vocal effort which contained about as much melody as would be produced by the filing of a saw, combined with the howling of an insane mastiff.

Vain would it be for us to attempt to describe the emotions created within the breast of Mrs. St. Croix, while listening to Braxley's narrative, which filled her with consternation, astonishment and horror; and no wonder—for the unhappy young lady had become aware of the appalling fact that she had married her grandfather! The contemplation of such a monstrous and unnatural connection bewildered and stupefied her, and her reason threatened to give way beneath the crushing blow. No longer did she hear the obscene songs, the ribald jests, the horrid oaths, the boisterous laughter of the abandoned wretches who were assembled in the cellar—for her mind and soul were entirely taken up with the dreadful reflection that her husband was her grandfather.

But one ray of comfort partially dispelled the darkness that prevailed within her breast, when she remembered that her marriage with General St. Croix had been a mere matter of form, and that her connection with the old

gentleman had always been *strictly Platonic*. This reflection, we say, somewhat cheered her even in that place and under those circumstances; and most fervently and sincerely did she thank Heaven for having been preserved from the perpetration of a crime the most shocking and unnatural that can possibly be conceived.

The drunken and obscene orgies of Braxley and his guests were protracted until day-light, which, feebly struggling down into the cellar through a small hole and dirty window, revealed a most disgusting scene. Stupefied by drink, and worn out by the mad excitement in which they had all participated, the filthy revellers, both male and female, lay scattered about the floor like so many swine, their red bloated and villanous countenances, and their unclean, ragged and foul-smelling garments, forming a spectacle which few people could have gazed at without experiencing a nauseating feeling of sickness, something similar to that which would be produced by the contemplation of a charnel house filled with decaying corpses.

Mr. Simon Braxley was the first one to awaken from his unhallowed slumbers. The proceedings of this gentleman were peculiar, and somewhat suspicious. Having shaken himself and removed the cobwebs from his throat by a prolonged application to the brandy bottle, he began a playful and yet a thoroughly business-like investigation of the contents of his guests' pockets. Having seized upon and confiscated all the money and valuables which he could find—and which didn't quite amount to the fortunes of the Rothschilds—Mr. Braxley procured a bucket of rather dubious water and soused it over the sleeping ladies and gentlemen, who, as they started up rubbing their eyes, grumbled and swearing, were greeted by the worthy landlord with the following salutary advice:—

"Come, gentlemen of the wharves and ladies of the pave, don't snooze there all day, but go out and look for your honest

living. Come, tramp—right about face—march!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE DUNGEON BENEATH THE CELLAR.

THE guests of Mr. Braxley having reluctantly taken their departure, that worthy gentleman and the amiable Peg Pickles sat down to their morning repast, which chiefly consisted of red herrings and raw brandy. During the progress of the feast, Simon and Peg deliberated as to what was best to be done with Lydia St. Croix; and it was soon concluded to place her for safe keeping in the dungeon beneath the cellar.

"She will there be snug and out of sight," remarked Mr. Braxley—"and should the officers of justice, or any other persons, come here to search after her, they will be unable to find the place of her concealment. Besides, 'tis not by any means desirable that our customers who come here every night should see the girl or know of her presence, for, in case of a reward being offered for her, some of them might go forward and betray me, securing the reward for themselves, while I would be ruined. Yes, the girl must become the occupant of the dungeon, there to remain until I can dispose of her to good advantage."

"That's right," snuffled out Peg Pickles, approvingly—"but what in the world can have become of Dick, your pal? Very likely the poor devil has been taken and gagged. I hope he won't betray you."

"He has got into some kind of trouble, that's certain," said Braxley—"or else he would have been here, long before this. I was obliged to leave him in rather a dangerous predicament, and the probability is that he has either been killed or taken prisoner. At all events, I don't think that he would dare

to betray me, for he knows very well that in case he did so, I would cut his throat at the very first opportunity."

Mrs. St. Croix overheard this conversation, and shuddered at the mention of the dungeon; but, knowing the impossibility of turning the villain Braxley from his purpose by entreaties or prayers, she determined to meet her fate with firmness, trusting that death would soon terminate her sufferings and release her from a world, of which she had recently grown very weary.

Having sufficiently refreshed himself, Mr. Braxley gave some directions to Peg in a low tone of voice, and then went out for a morning walk, leaving Lydia alone with that frightful woman, who naturally inspired her with the utmost horror and aversion. Peg lighted her pipe, and seating herself close to the bed-side of Lydia, abandoned herself to the soothing influence of the weed, fixing, meanwhile, her reptile-like eyes upon the beautiful but sorrowful orbs of the young lady, who soon felt like the charmed bird when it is under the deadly fascination of the serpent's gaze. In vain did poor Lydia try to avert her looks or close her eyes; the steady glare of that loathsome woman's optics seemed to render her perfectly powerless. Peg, inwardly chuckled at the effect which her continued stare was evidently producing upon the sensitive creature who lay helpless before her, smoked away with such surprising vigor that her hideous head was enveloped in a thick cloud, through which, however, gleamed her malignant eyes like two balls of fire shining through an almost impenetrable fog. Peg, at last, grew musical; and, in her *snuffling* tones—we cannot really find or invent any other word to apply to her voice—she began to warble, with all the grace and expression of a vocal bull-frog, a song commencing thus:—

"I know that I am beautiful,  
I know that I am fair—  
That Grecian is my well-formed nose,  
And raven is my hair."

These words became so particularly

and irresistibly ludicrous when sung by a lady with red hair and no nose, that Mrs. St. Croix, despite her situation, could scarcely refrain from laughing.—Peg noticed that the young lady had considerable difficulty in suppressing her merriment—and the horrible woman frowned frightfully, as she muttered something about making some folks laugh on the wrong side of their mouths, before long.

Having smoked her fill, Peg now manifested a desire to engage in conversation.

"Young woman," said she—"I s'pose you think that you are very handsome."

Lydia, anxious to propitiate the woman if possible, meekly replied—

"I have not the vanity to consider myself any better looking than the average of females."

"Have you had many lovers?" demanded Peg.

"Not one, I assure you," replied Lydia, with an assumed air of candor.

"That is strange," quoth the noseless interrogator—"for, after all, you are far from being bad-looking. Nay, some amorously inclined men might even be tempted to call you decidedly pretty. I used to be very handsome myself, once; my hair was auburn, instead of red, my complexion was fresh and fair, my cheeks were rosy, and my teeth were white and even; my nose, too, which has since been injured by an accident, was then straight and well-formed. I had lovers in abundance—sweet fellows, too, with delectable persons and pockets lined with yellow gold—bright, glittering gold, that clinked so merrily as it fell into my outstretched hand. Oh, those were the times, when I dressed in silks, and satins, and fine linen, and slept on a soft bed, and lived on dainties, and drank rich wines out of a silver cup! Every night I went to a ball, or the theatre, with some one of my lovers, who were all jealous of each other on my account, and could have torn each other's hearts out! Well, well; those bright days have passed and gone for ever, and I am now the companion of a

thief and the inhabitant of a dirty cellar, I know that I have grown very ugly, but my passions remain as strong as ever, and brandy is the idol of my worship, for, while I am under its dreamy influence, I can fancy that I am once more handsome, and gay, and surrounded by fawning lovers, who would kiss my feet to obtain from me a favor, or even a smile. But my heart has become as hard as a rock, and such silly sentiments as pity and mercy, can find no place within it, so fiercely do I hate the whole human race!"

If it was detestable to hear that old hag boast of her former beauty and her many lovers, it was perfectly frightful to witness the fierce energy with which she declared her hatred towards all mankind, and proclaimed the stony hardness of her heart.

Miss Pickles now became inquisitive, and asked Lydia how she came to be so fortunate as to secure the affectionate regard of the wealthy people among whom she had been living—who those people were, and what were their names—how much money they were worth, and what amount they generally kept in the house—and a hundred other questions which female curiosity could alone have suggested; for Peg was a woman, after all, although we admit that she was rather a hard specimen of her sex. Mrs. St. Croix, however, purposely answered all these inquiries in a very vague and unsatisfactory manner, so that Miss Pickles was very little the wiser on account of what information she received. This somewhat enraged the good lady; and, with an oath, she commanded Lydia to get up and prepare to be accommodated with quarters which were less comfortable than those she then occupied.

"I'll soon cure you of your obstinacy," said the hag—"your fine, stuck-up airs won't do here, I promise you. A few weeks passed in darkness, on a bed of straw, and a diet of bread and water, will bring you to your senses, and teach you to return proper answers to such reasonable questions as may be addressed to

you. Besides, I have my man's orders to place you in the dungeon. So get up, and do not oblige me to use violence, for I warn you that I am more savage than a wild-cat when my blood is up!"

Poor Lydia, seeing the folly of attempting to resist that abominable woman, who was as physically powerful as she was personally hideous, submissively obeyed, and arose from the wretched bed with difficulty, for she felt both weak and ill. Still, however, she retained within her breast a feeling of pride, which kept her from humbling herself before the hag by vainly imploring for mercy. Peg Pickles now compelled her to take off the elegant garments in which she was attired, and then made her clothe herself in a mean, coarse garb. The wretch next took possession of the young lady's ear-rings, which were of great value, and which had escaped the notice of Mr. Simon Braxley.

"Now, your ladyship," said Peg, with mock politeness, as she lighted a candle—"if you will do me the honor to follow me, I will conduct you to your future abode. You can inspect its convenient arrangements, and take immediate possession, if it suits you; but not for the world would I compel you to hire the place against your will.—Oh, no! Your rent will be very reasonable, and your unpretending but wholesome meals will be regularly furnished you at a moderate rate. Do not fear that you will be lonesome in your new home; for I assure you that you will have plenty of company, as the apartment swarms with certain playful little animals which you vulgar people call rats. Ah! you shudder—you turn pale!—and well you may, obstinate hussey that you are, for you are about to become the inmate of a dungeon a thousand times more gloomy and terrible than was ever depicted in a romance. Come, follow me, or I will drag you along by the hair of your head!"

In the centre of the cellar was a trap-door, so artfully constructed in the floor that, unless a very successful search were made, it would have escaped the notice of any person unacquainted with its ex-

istence. Peg raised this trap-door with some difficulty; and the unhappy Lydia shuddered as she looked down into a dark pit which reminded her of the fancied entrance to the infernal regions, and which suggested thoughts of horror, starvation, and a lingering, miserable death. The bottom of this vault, or dungeon, was reached by means of a ladder, which Peg compelled the shrinking and trembling Lydia to descend, while she followed, bearing the light. Having with great difficulty arrived at the bottom of the ladder, Lydia stepped upon the damp ground, which yielded beneath her feet like the mud of the streets. This excessive dampness was caused by the close vicinity of the river. The vault corresponded in extent with the cellar above; its rough stone walls were green and slimy, and the air was foul and pestiferous in the extreme—so much so, indeed, that the flame of the candle which Peg held flickered, and seemed about to become extinguished.

"Follow me, your ladyship," said the hag, in the same jeering tone which she had before spoken—"and I will conduct you to your voluptuous couch, on which you may repose in luxurious indolence as often as you choose. Oh, you will have grand times here, my lady, surrounded by darkness, solitude and a legion of rats!"

With these words, the heartless monster, and foul libel upon the sacred name of woman, conducted her sobbing victim to a corner of the dungeon where was piled up a heap of old boards and other rubbish, forming a rude sort of platform, on which had been placed a quantity of not particularly clean straw.

"There's your bed, and you'd better scramble into it while the light is here, for you won't be able to reach it in the darkness," said Peg, dismissing all her mock civility, and speaking in a hasty, impatient tone, for she felt anxious to get out of that horrible place, the rank, putrid atmosphere of which oppressed and nauseated even her, accustomed as she was to the combination of abominable odors that prevailed in the cellar above.

"I will lie me down there to die," murmured Lydia; and having mounted the platform with difficulty, she threw herself upon the straw and covered her weeping eyes with her hands.

"You can die or live, just as you see fit; it makes no difference to me;" and with these words Peg Pickles ascended the ladder, which she drew up after her, in order to render Lydia's escape impossible. The trap-door was then closed, and the ill-fated young lady was left alone with the darkness, the solitude, and her own despairing thoughts.

She could not help contrasting the overwhelming miseries of her situation with the comforts and luxuries which she had so recently enjoyed, and from which she had so cruelly been torn. Then she thought of Philip Ravellon, who had, in the darkness, so successfully personated the simpleton, Smallfry, and who came so very near accomplishing a triumph over her. What would Ravellon think of her, after thus becoming acquainted with her frailty? And how had he obtained a knowledge of her appointment with Smallfry, which had enabled him (Ravellon) to visit her in place of the unsophisticated youth? What had become of Philip? Perhaps his daring adventure had involved him in trouble, from which he might find it difficult to extricate himself. But, if he had escaped in safety from the General's house, would he not make every effort to discover the place of his friend Lydia's concealment, and rescue her from the power of Braxley, and from the dreadful place in which she was imprisoned?

These thoughts passed through the mind of Lydia, and served in some degree to draw her attention away from the horrors that surrounded her. A faint but genial ray of hope began to dawn upon her dark and despairing soul; for she felt within her a mysterious presentiment that Ravellon was destined to become her deliverer. Not only did she forgive him for the imposition which he had practised upon her on the preceding night—and which had come so very near being crowned with complete success—but she



admired the daring and romantic nature of the adventure, which was in such exact accordance with her own wild and erratic disposition.

"Philip must love me very dearly," thought Lydia—"to dare so much in order to achieve over me an amorous conquest! Ah! why did those odious robbers come to interrupt our bliss! The line was passed—the climax once attained! I feel that I could have abandoned myself with Philip to all the delirious joys of love. I now despise and detest that Smallfry, and wonder at my folly in conceiving even a temporary passion for him. How superior to him is Philip! How deeply and thoughtfully expressive are his eyes! What a strange, irresistible fascination there is in his half-melancholy, yet tender smile! How brilliant is his conversation, and how graceful are all his movements. True, his countenance is not what the world would call handsome, but in my eyes it is beautiful, for it indicates the nobility of his soul and the sterling quality of his intellect. Dear Ravellon, my acquaintance with him has been very short, and yet I feel that he has already become very dear to me. Yes—it is useless to conceal or deny the revelations of my own heart, which tell me that I love Philip—dearly, devotedly love him! Ah! I could dwell contentedly, happily in this dreadful place, during the remainder of my life, if Philip were only here to support me with his encircling arm and to breathe into my ear words of tenderness and love! Something tells me that he will ere long release me, and that his eloquent lips will be the first to welcome me back to the bright sun-shine, the free air, and happiness. Yes, I shall be happy again—happy with Philip; for my unnatural union with General St. Croix—my grandfather—can easily be dissolved, and then there will be no obstacle in the way of my bestowing my hand upon Ravellon. Courage, Lydia! thy woes will soon be terminated, and then, united to the man of thy choice, thou shalt enter upon a career of unal-

loyed bliss which the recollection of these dark hours will immeasurably enhance!"

These cheering thoughts fell upon Lydia's bruised and wounded heart like healing balm; and she continued to indulge in them until she fell into a sweet sleep and dreamed of happiness and—Ravellon.

When she awoke, her tender limbs, which for six years had been accustomed to repose every night upon a couch of down, ached painfully on account of the hardness of her bed of straw. The dampness of the vault, too, caused her to shiver with the cold, while the unwholesome air sickened her dreadfully. In vain did she now strive to forget her sufferings by summoning up such pleasant thoughts as had cheered her, prior to her slumbers; those thoughts refused to come at her bidding, and she could not escape from the awful realities of her situation. A new horror, of the most appalling description, soon presented itself, causing the blood of Lydia to run cold with fright. It was not without good reason that Peg Pickles had spoken of her victim's being obliged to keep company with a legion of rats. Vast numbers of those loathsome animals, driven up from the neighboring docks by the rising of the tide, now entered the vault through the crevices in the walls, making their presence known by their pattering noise and their horrible squeaking. These creatures were of enormous size, and hunger made them as ferocious and almost as formidable and dangerous as a pack of famished wolves. Lydia screamed with horror and affright, when a number of them leaped upon her person, and she felt their damp and loathsome bodies passing over her face. Endowed with the courage of desperation, she seized a stick which fortunately lay near her, and with it drove away the vermin. For hours was she compelled to battle with the hideous intruders, which renewed their attack as often as they were driven off, seeming determined to devour her alive. At length, however,

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE GRAVE IN THE GARDEN.

AFTER Ravellon had so narrowly escaped being killed by the pistol of General St. Croix, in the manner related by us in a former chapter, the venerable old chieftain approached the bed of his wife, expecting to find her there in a state of great alarm, for he firmly believed Ravellon to be a robber—probably the same one who had, on a former occasion, been hidden in the chimney. The old gentleman had not the faintest suspicion that our hero was a *lover*, instead of a midnight marauder. He would have regarded the lover as a far more dangerous enemy than the burglar.

The General, on finding the bed empty, imagined that Lydia must have hidden herself, and accordingly, aided by Dorothy, (who, it will be remembered, had followed her ancient admirer to the chamber,) he began a careful search for the missing lady. This search was of course unsuccessful.

"I understand it all," said the General, in accents of grief—"one of the robbers, for there must have been several of them, has carried off my poor Lydia, and I shall probably never behold her again. Good God! what have we here?"

This exclamation was caused by the General's nearly stumbling over the dead body of Dick, the comrade of Braxley.—Dorothy set up a scream, and throwing herself into a chair, proceeded with great deliberation and industry to work herself up into a fit of hysterics, after the manner of more fashionable ladies than herself, when they wish to make themselves objects of extraordinary interest and attention.

"Silence, woman!" cried the General, sternly—"this is neither the time nor the place for any such scene as you are trying to enact. Calm yourself; this man here cannot harm you, for he is as dead as a herring. He is a most diabolical looking fellow!"

when she was completely exhausted and about to abandon herself to the sharp teeth of her voracious antagonists as the easiest means of escaping from her miseries, the falling off of the tide caused the rats to withdraw from the vault, in order to banquet upon such offal as was left by the receding waters. Thus was she relieved, for a time at least, from a danger that would have appalled the stoutest heart.

In that abode of eternal darkness, Lydia was of course unconscious of the progress made by time in its unceasing flight. She had no means of ascertaining whether day or night reigned in the world beyond the confines of her gloomy prison; but, when she heard the sounds of singing and laughter made by Mr. Braxley's patrons overhead, she naturally supposed that the hour of midnight had passed.

After a while, Peg Pickles descended into the dungeon, bearing a light and a small quantity of bread and water. Having placed the provisions upon the platform, the infamous hag was about to retire without uttering a single word, when poor Lydia, in a feeble tone, begged that the light might be left with her, as it might protect her from the horrible vermin with which the vault was infested. Miss Pickles thereupon endeavored to throw into her battered visage an expression of lofty and ineffable scorn; but the attempt was a decided failure, it being difficult if not impossible for an individual whose countenance is not ornamented with a nose, to express the emotion of contempt with any degree of melo-dramatic effect. Peg was therefore obliged to content herself with bestowing upon her hapless victim a shower of foul curses and vile epithets, in view of what she termed, Lydia's "*cheek*;" and, having exhausted her vocabulary of choice phrases, she withdrew, and the unfortunate young lady was again alone.



"He must have been one of the robbers, sir; but how came he to be killed?" asked Dorothy, who, as if by a miracle, had already recovered from her hysterical symptoms.

"Judging from the nature of the wound in the man's breast," said the General, as he bent over the corpse and examined it carefully—"I am led to believe that he was slain by the hand of Lydia herself, for she always kept a dagger near her, and was as savage as the very devil when once aroused. Yes, it must have been my heroic little wife who slew this scoundrel, one of whose comrades afterwards carried her off, while the other remained here to complete the work of plunder; that was the villain who just now made his escape in time to avoid being shot. The brief view I had of him enabled me to see that he was a well-dressed, gentlemanly looking man, far superior in appearance to this fellow here; he was probably the leader of the desperate gang. Poor Lydia! what will become of her? The desperado who carried her off will shamefully abuse and perhaps murder her, in revenge for her having killed his partner in crime. I must make every possible effort to find her; and, meanwhile, I shall offer a large reward to any person who will furnish such information as may lead to her recovery."

"But, sir," suggested Dorothy—"what is best to be done with this dead body?"

"That's a very sensible question, my good girl," said the General—"and it does credit to your prudence. Now, as I wish to keep this whole affair as quiet as possible, I will not go before the authorities, for then a devil of a row would be kicked up, the gaping rabble would surround this house out of idle curiosity, the greedy and excited public would form unjust opinions and make injurious comments, the newspapers, many of which live and fatten upon slander, that commodity being as necessary to their existence as the air is essential to the continuance of a man's life—the newspapers, I say, would dish up the matter with all sorts of ridiculous exaggerations, and, in short, I should attain an unpleasant noto-

riety which I am most anxious to avoid, and which would not by any means assist us in regaining possession of Lydia, for the scoundrel who abducted her, frightened at the tremendous excitement that would be sure to prevail, would convey the poor girl to some place of concealment where she could never be found, or else kill her at once, so as to avoid the consequences of his villany. Besides, I do not wish to have it publicly known that my wife killed a man, even though the circumstances of the case justified the deed. My mind is made up, Dorothy.—I shall dig a grave in the garden, and bury this body."

"But wouldn't that look suspicious, sir?" demanded the thoughtful maid.

"Nobody will know anything about it excepting you and I, and Simpson my valet, whom I shall call to my assistance, and in whose silence and fidelity I have every confidence," was the reply of the General—"and I think, my dear girl, that I can trust you."

Dorothy, who felt exceedingly delighted and flattered on account of being called a 'dear girl' by so rich and great a man as General St. Croix, protested in the most solemn manner that she should ever preserve a profound silence with reference to the affair which her antiquated lover was so very anxious to keep secret.

"Very well," rejoined the General, approvingly—"be discreet, and you shall be well rewarded. Now go and knock at the door of Simpson's chamber, and tell him to get up and dress himself immediately, as I want him very particularly.—Meanwhile, I will go to my own apartment and make some necessary addition to my toilet."

Dorothy departed upon her errand, and the old gentleman repaired to his own room. Having completed his preparations for the strange task which he was about to perform, by imbibing nearly half a pint of cogniac, he sat down to await the arrival of his valet, reflecting meanwhile as follows:

"This is a bad business—~~amned~~ bad! My wife carried off, God only knows where, and a dead man left on my hands!

If Lydia were an old, or even a middle-aged woman, whose embrace had grown stale to me, I shouldn't care a curse on account of being deprived of her. Most married men would be devilish glad to get rid of their wives so easily. But then Lydia is so young—so fresh, and full of girlish vivacity, and grace—so strangely beautiful—that to lose her in this manner, without ever having enjoyed the surpassing charms which she so abundantly possesses—charms, too, which I had an undoubted religious, legal and moral right to enjoy—why, the very thought almost drives me to madness!—Well, I must at all events dispose of the corpse of the robber, and the world will know nothing concerning the bloody deed, for I have confidence in the discretion and faithfulness of the two servants, Dorothy and Simpson, and there is no fear of the dead man's comrades coming forward to make known the matter, for they would only thereby get themselves into trouble. The reward which I shall offer for Lydia, must be very large; and I will so word the advertisement as to make it appear that she simply wandered from her home in a fit of mental aberration. Thus will the capacious maw of the voracious public be deprived of a rich and savory budget of wonders, which it would have devoured so greedily. But here comes Simpson; another bumper of cogniac, and then I shall be in readiness to attend the funeral of the dead robber!"

Simpson now made his appearance in the chamber of his master, followed by Dorothy, who had improved the opportunity by dressing herself, and therefore her snowy and voluptuous charms, which Ravellon had so much admired, and to which neither the general nor his valet were strangers—those charms, we say, were now veiled beneath the neat and coquettish attire appropriate to her station, and at the same time worthy of her beauty.—Both she and the valet looked very innocent and melancholy, as they appeared before the General; and they exhibited no indications of the amorous toyings, and other naughty actions, in which they had indulged in the apartment of Mr. Simp-

son, when the fair but frail Dorothy went to summon that gentleman to appear in his master's presence.

Mr. Apollo Simpson, the confidential valet and body servant of General St. Croix, was a little, crooked, dried-up specimen of humanity, in age somewhere about forty years. He was an English cockney, and had been long in the General's service. A freckled face, pug nose and goggle eyes, together with a mouth of immoderate width, did not tend to make him a particularly handsome individual, and it is to us a matter of astonishment that Dorothy should have condescended to bestow her favors upon such a deformed pigmy. But it is very possible that Mr. Simpson may have possessed qualities, not visible to a superficial observer, which especially recommended him to the favorable consideration of the ardent and not over fastidious lady's maid, who, adopting the maxim, 'like master, like man,' always treated the valet as well as she did the General himself. Mr. Simpson, as the personal attendant of a wealthy aristocrat, was always dressed with the most scrupulous care; and, from the frequency with which he consulted his looking-glass, it is fair to presume that he labored under the harmless but outrageously absurd delusion that he was handsome. He perfumed his hair, and occasionally had it curled by a tonsorial friend and countryman of his, with whom he often, of an evening when his master was absent from home, indulged in a pot or two of 'alf and 'alf at the 'Bell in Hand' tavern, which was not far distant. When we add that Mr. Apollo Simpson extracted nasal refreshment from a real gold snuff-box, without any humbug at all about it, and that in the street he always wore real kid gloves, some idea may be formed of his vast importance, his exquisite elegance, and the very elevated opinion which he entertained of the deity whom he idolized—meaning himself.

The valet saluted his master with a most obsequious bow; and the General hastily explained to him the circumstances of the case. Simpson listened without betraying any emotion; and, when

the old gentleman had ceased speaking, he said, with another low bow—

"I hunderstand heverything, yer 'onor. We Henglishmen are hup to hall these sort o' dodges; but this here hadventure of to-night is a perfect stunner, and no mistake. Yes, yer 'onor, I will bury the stiff un in the garden, and you may depend that I'll always be as mute habout the business as Barnum's Fejee mermaid."

"You're a good fellow, Simpson," said the General, who was much pleased at the readiness with which his *valet* agreed to perform a rather delicate task, which was not exactly among the legitimate duties of his station—"you're a good fellow, and I shall not forget to reward you liberally. We had better go to work without any delay. Follow me, both of you, and make as little noise as possible."

Having reached the chamber in which the luckless Dick lay, 'alone in his glory,' the General and Simpson raised the corpse between them; and, preceded by Dorothy bearing a light, they carried the cold and ghastly remains of the robber down the stairs and out into the garden at the rear of the house.

The General now directed Dorothy to extinguish the light, fearing that it might enable the occupants of the adjoining houses to watch the interment. Besides, rain was falling quite rapidly, and it would have been rather a difficult matter to have kept the light burning.

Having placed the body upon the cold, wet sod, the General and Simpson provided themselves with spades from the gardiner's tool-house, and then began to dig the grave in a remote corner of the garden. The labor was comparatively easy, the soil being soft; and the two amateur grave-diggers, who were fortunately enabled to see by the aid of a light which streamed from one of the upper windows of the next house, had soon made an excavation of sufficient depth to answer their purpose. Into this grave they unceremoniously threw the body of Dick, after which they replaced the earth, and the work was completed.

The General and the two servants now re-entered the house, quite fatigued and drenched with the rain. The old gentleman, however, was so well pleased with the idea of having got rid of the corpse of the robber, that he invited his assistants to refresh themselves with brandy, which invitation they were not slow to accept, and Miss Dorothy, as well as Mr. Simpson, disposed of a bumper of the exhilarating fluid, with a facility which betokened that she rather liked it than otherwise. The old chieftain himself took a hearty dram, and then, having again cautioned the servants against making the slightest allusion to the burial in the garden under any circumstances, he dismissed them, telling them to retire to their respective rooms. Simpson and Dorothy thereupon withdrew from their master's presence; but, instead of parting and repairing to their *separate* chambers, they both instinctively proceeded to the snug and neatly-furnished quarters of the lady's maid herself, where they were soon buried in blissful unconsciousness of everything, excepting the high degree of satisfaction which they experienced in each other's society.

Dorothy and Simpson, having exhausted themselves by a protracted conversation, of which we cannot give the details, were about to fall into voluptuous slumbers, when they were aroused by a knocking upon the door of the chamber. The lady's maid, somewhat agitated, leaped out of bed, telling the trembling *valet* to remain perfectly still, while she ascertained who the person was that had disturbed them. In answer to her inquiry as to who was there, the voice of General St. Croix was heard, saying—

"You know very well who is here—let me in. You might have known that I intended to finish the night with you."

"I don't understand you, Simpson, what in the world do you want?" demanded the artful Dorothy, who was determined not to admit the General, as she did not by any means desire that he should become acquainted with her intimacy with Simpson; for she well knew that the high-tempered old warrior would

not endure the indignity of having a rival in his *valet*.

"I'm not Simpson," growled the General—"and you know damned well what I want. Come, none of your nonsense, girl—don't presume upon my familiarity with you to trifle with me. You know me, and that's enough. Open the door."

"Oh, but you *are* Simpson!" cried the imperturbable Dorothy, in a tone of virtuous severity—"you try to imitate the General's voice and way of speaking; but I *know* that you are Simpson. Now, Mr. Simpson, why do you try to practise such a cruel deception, so as to get into my chamber and ruin me—boo—oo—oo—oo!"

Here Dorothy, pretending to be horrified at the supposed attempt which was being made upon her virtue, wept, sobbed and bellowed in a style that would have reflected credit upon the vocal powers of a cow.

"Damn it!" roared the General, in a perfect phrenzy of rage, as he danced up and down outside the door and tore his hair, after the manner of the baffled tyrant in some heavy melo-drama—"I tell you that I am *not* Simpson; I swear to you that I am your lady's husband, General St. Croix. What in the devil's name do you mean by this masquerading? Heretofore, you have always been very eager to have me visit you; and now you suddenly affect to think that I am Simpson. I am inclined to suspect, Dorothy, that you are playing some deep game with me."

"Oh, go away, Simpson!" cried Dorothy—"you are a good mimic, but you can't impose on me. The General don't use such wicked language as you just now spoke. I will inform him to-morrow of your conduct, and he will discharge you from his service. He is a nice man, and handsome, too, if he is rather elderly; while you are a monster of ugliness, Simpson, and I would not let you touch me on any account—ugh!"

"Egad!" thought the General, who was greatly mollified by this artful speech—"she is a girl of sense, after all."

She honestly believes me to be Simpson, and her firm refusal to admit the supposed *Valet* is a gratified evidence of her fidelity to me. I am now fully convinced that I alone am the recipient of her favors. But how comes she to fall into such a singular error as to mistake me for my servant? Ah, the strange events of this night have frightened and confused her. That's quite natural. But I must make another effort to obtain admission, for the brandy has warmed me up, and I feel cursedly inclined to enjoy a little playful dalliance with the fair, plump and dark-eyed Dorothy. My dear girl," said the General, aloud—"you are laboring under a great mistake, but I forgive you; I am not in the slightest degree angry. Now just open the door a very little, and convince yourself that it is General St. Croix talking to you."

"I shan't do any such thing, Simpson," said Dorothy, who being anxious to rejoin her bosom friend, the *Valet*, was very impatient to get rid of the old gentleman—"you only want a chance to force your way into the room. You pretend to be the General, but I can tell you that *he* wouldn't be guilty of trying to seduce and ruin a poor young girl whose only wealth is her character. I now tell you solemnly, and for the last time, Simpson, that you *shall not* enter this room; and, if you stand there all night, I shan't speak another word to you, for I am now going to bed. Good night, Simpson."

The disappointed General now heard the obstinate damsel leap into bed with a vigor inspired by her youth, high health, elasticity of limbs and eager desire to enfold once more the form of Simpson in her warm and ardent embrace. But the General did *not* hear the sound of the kissing that immediately took place between his *valet* and the lady's maid. If he had, he might have 'smelt a rat' and done something desperate.

The gallant military commander groaned in anguish of spirit on account of being cheated of the enjoyment which

he had so confidently anticipated; and, as he crawled towards his own apartment, he muttered—

"Just like the first night of my Platonic marriage! Well, the pretty Dorothy is true to me, and 'that same is some comfort, any how,' as the condemned criminal philosophically remarked when the hangman greased the rope. Well, I must be content to pass the rest of the night in virtuous solitude. To-morrow, I will convince Dorothy of her error, and adopt some private signal that will prevent the occurrence of such disagreeable mistakes in future."

Thus communing with himself, General St. Croix retired to his couch and dreamed that he was leading an army of troops against a fortress, guarded only by two Amazons. Those female warriors were Lydia and her maid Dorothy, and the General, dreamed that they put his whole army to flight, took him prisoner, and, by the aid of a powerful magician, enclosed him in a vast iceberg and condemned him to float throughout all eternity on the immense Polar seas of the extreme North.

While thus the General dreamed, and shivered in unconscious sympathy with his frigid dream—and while the amorous lady's maid and the equally susceptible *valet*, lay upon the couch of guilty pleasure enfolded in each other's arms—the rain outside continued to descend in torrents, beating down the flowers and shrubbery in the garden, and saturating the sod that covered the ghastly remains of the robber, Dick.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE INVALID.

WHEN General St. Croix awoke from his dream-haunted slumbers, the morning was far advanced. On opening his eyes, he saw Simpson standing at his bed-side, wearing upon his grotesque countenance a look of deep concern.

"You seem to be werry unvell, sir," said the cockney *valet*—"your face is as vite as a sheet, and yer 'onor shivers as with the cold, although the veather has cleared haff and it is werry warm, and although I have just put two hextra thick comforters on yer 'onor's bed."

"I am indeed dreadfully ill, Simpson," said the General, faintly, as his teeth chattered like those of a man who is exposed to the keenest blasts of mid-winter—"my last night's exposure to the rain, in the garden, has played the very devil with me. I fear that I am going to have a serious and perhaps dangerous spell of sickness. How terribly cold it is! I shall positively freeze to death!"

And the General shivered and shook more violently than ever, although the warm rays of the summer's noon-day sun were streaming in upon him through the closed windows of his chamber.

"See that a fire is lighted in my room, Simpson," said the old gentleman—"and when it is ready, come and assist me to dress. I shall feel more comfortable sitting up than lying here."

Half an hour afterwards the General was seated in his spacious and well-stocked library, before a roaring fire, and enveloped in his thick winter dressing gown. His illness seemed to increase, and it was deemed advisable to send for a physician. The man of medicine came, secretly delighted with the idea of having a rich patient. Having felt the General's pulse, and inquired into the state of his feelings, Doctor Smuggins sighed, shook his head, looked profound, took snuff contemplatively, wrote a prescription elaborately, bowed obsequiously, and then took his departure loftily, remarking that he would look in again that evening. The General now dismissed his *valet*, saying that he desired to be alone for an hour or two; but, scarcely had he entered upon a train of reflections that were naturally suggested by his situation and the circumstances which surrounded him, when Dorothy softly entered the library and stood before the suffering chieftain,

who said, in a voice so feeble as to be hardly audible—

"Ah! my good girl, is it you? Well, what do you want? You must not expect me to talk much, for I am too weak. State your business in as few words as possible."

"I have come, sir, to make a serious complaint against Mr. Simpson," said the artful Dorothy, who was desirous of 'fixing everything right' concerning her refusal to admit the General into her chamber on the preceding night. She of course wished to make the old gentleman firmly believe that she really mistook him for the *valet* when he tried to induce her to open the door.

"Well, what has Simpson been doing?" demanded the General, who well knew what was coming, and who, sick as he was, felt inclined to smile at the supposed error of the girl in accusing the poor *valet* wrongfully.

"He came to the door of my chamber last night," replied Dorothy, with well-assumed indignation—"and, imitating your voice and manner as well as he could, he commanded me to let him in, declaring himself to be my lady's husband, General St. Croix. But, although his imitations were very cleverly done, I detected the imposition which he was trying to play off upon me; and I of course refused to open the door, for you, dear General, are the only man who has, or ever shall be received by me as a lover. Besides, I actually hate the sight of Simpson, and the bare idea of having him approach me in a certain way, fairly makes my flesh creep. So I told him to go away, and threatened to inform you of his conduct. He swore and went on terribly, but, as that did no good, he tried coaxing. Finally, he went off grumbling; and now, sir, don't you think that he deserves to be punished for having taken your name so as to ruin me, if he could?"

"Has Simpson ever before made improper proposals to you?" asked the General.

"No, sir—never!" was the prompt and emphatic reply of Dorothy.

A look of satisfaction passed over the sick man's face on hearing this answer; and he said—

"Listen to me attentively, my dear girl. You do poor Simpson great injustice, for he is innocent. You made a strange mistake last night, for it was I whom you refused to admit into your chamber, as you supposed me to be Simpson."

Dorothy affected the utmost astonishment, and declared that the General must be jesting; but when he assured her upon his honor, that the fact was as he had stated, the shrewd girl pretended to be sorely grieved at the enormous offence which she had committed in repulsing the only man she had ever loved, and with whom she had ever gone astray from the path of virtue—meaning, of course, General St. Croix.

"To think," sobbed Dorothy, holding a corner of her apron to her eyes—"to think of my mistaking a gentleman like you for such an ape as Simpson—to think of my refusing to open my door to you, when at the same time I was dying to receive a visit from you—dear General, can you ever forgive my stupid blunder?"

"Say no more about it; all is forgiven and forgotten, my dear girl," said the old man, as a faint flush suffused his pallid face and his icy blood became a little warmer, for Dorothy looked particularly charming that day, dressed as she was, somewhat in the fashion of a Parisian *grisette*, a style of costume that admirably harmonized with her arch, captivating face and plump, yet graceful form.

"In order to avoid such mistakes in future," continued the General, as his eyes wandered admiringly over the enticing properties of the pretty damsel who stood before him in all the splendor of her youthful and distracting charms—"whenever I wish to enter your apartment, I will rap three times upon the door, and cough twice. You may then open the door with perfect confidence; you understand."

Dorothy protested that she not only

perfectly understood the arrangement, but was delighted with it.

"You're a good girl," said the old man, approvingly—"unlock yonder desk, and bring me the purse which you will find in it."

"Dorothy obeyed this order with alacrity. The General, among whose prominent traits *meanness* certainly had no place, for he was generous almost to a fault, took from the purse several gold pieces, and presented them to the delighted damsel, saying—

"Accept this trifle as a token of my regard for you and appreciation of your fidelity, as well as a reward for your aid last night in disposing of the body of the robber. You may tell Simpson that it is my intention to reward him, also. By the way, none of the servants, excepting you and my *valet*, know aught concerning the occurrence of last night, do they?"

"Not one, sir," was the emphatic reply.

"That is well. Ah, Dorothy, had it not been for your awkward mistake last night—had you received me in your warm embrace, instead of compelling me to sleep alone—it is very probable that I should not now be afflicted with these horrible chills. But let that pass. Come closer to me, my dear, and give me a kiss.

Dorothy approached the old libertine, who, although he was upon the verge of the grave, still retained in a great degree that passionate ardor of temperament which had eminently characterized him since his earliest youth. When he felt the young girl's ripe and luscious lips come in delicious contact with his cold cheek, that cheek, until then so pale, suddenly became flushed and warm; and winding his arms around Dorothy's yielding form, he strained her to his breast and with his withered hands explored the snow-white regions of her luxuriant and abundantly-developed bust, to which the fair damsel's low-necked dress gave him easy access. But we cannot dwell longer upon a scene so disgusting as was afforded by this spectacle of a dying man, aged and worn out, amorously trifling with a

wanton young girl of seventeen, whose raging and insatiable passions not only made her willing to submit to such fooleries, but also compelled her to manifest an eager desire to have them continued, and eventually brought to a nameless consummation.

Becoming wearied, at last, and absolutely incapable of responding to the licentious promptings of his soul, General St. Croix gently pushed the disappointed Dorothy away from him, saying—

"Ah, my child, I fear that I am unable to play the part of a lover to-day. But to-morrow I shall be well—quite well, and then we can enjoy ourselves as usual.—Poor Lydia! what can have become of her? By the way, my dear, draw that table towards me, and then retire: this evening you may pay me another visit."

Dorothy obeyed, and then left the room. Taking up a pen, the General with great difficulty managed to scrawl the following advertisement, which he caused to be inserted in the evening papers:—

"TWO THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD."

"Whereas, my wife, Mrs. Lydia St. Croix, has, in a fit of temporary derangement, left my house in P— Square, and it is feared that some evil may befall her unless she be speedily returned to her anxious friends, this is to give notice that I will pay the above reward to any person who shall furnish me with such information as may lead to the recovery of the missing lady, who is about eighteen years of age, and of great personal beauty. *No questions will be asked the person who brings the information;* and the money will be faithfully paid over the very moment that the lady is restored to her family and friends. It is earnestly hoped, that whoever knows anything concerning Mrs. St. Croix, will instantly come forward and relieve her afflicted husband from a terrible weight of suspense. Every daily newspaper in the city is requested to copy this advertisement, and send in to the undersigned for payment.

"ARTHUR ST. CROIX."

Within the space of one hour after this

## CHAPTER XIV.

A REVEREND GENTLEMAN.

This General was too ill to arise from his bed, having grown much worse. His sickness was now of the most alarming character, and the learned Dr. Smuggins shook his head more solemnly than ever, and came to the private conclusion that his friend Mr. Dismal, the funeral undertaker, would soon have a profitable job.

A clergyman, well known in religious circles as the Reverend Helphire Howler, hearing of the old General's dangerous illness, paid him a friendly visit for the purpose of instructing him how to flee from the wrath to come. Seating himself at the side of the bed, the reverend gentleman blew his rather red and brandy-suggesting nose with pious fervor, and then proceeded to perform his holy labors of love.

"You have been a great sinner, my brother," said Mr. Howler, with a strong nasal twang, as he raised his eyes ceiling and seemed to be looking at it into that world beyond the skies. he, Howler, supposed that he had his treasures beyond the reach of thieves.

The General groaned, and shifted his position in a manner indicating that he was ill at ease.

"My brother," resumed Mr. Howler, as he complacently crossed his hands upon his beef-fed stomach and indolently stretched out the pillars of his tabernacle—that is to say, his legs—"my brother, it is said that you have been a luster after the flesh, and have conversed carnally with many women. *Sinner!* the bottomless pit is yawning for you, even as the jaws of a hungry man yawn for that worldly vanity known as an apple dumpling;—transgressor! the devil is waiting for your soul, even as a jackass waiteth for his allowance of corn;—worker of iniquity! the fire is kindled which shall roast thee through all eternity, even as the ordinary potato is roasted in an oven. Repent! arouse! awake! Be born again,

advertisement was written, it had been read and commented upon by thousands of people in all quarters of the city, and created considerable sensation, for General Arthur St. Croix, of P— Square, was well known as a military man, a prominent politician, a high official functionary, a *millionaire* and an aristocrat. The generality of people, however, had been in ignorance of his having been married to a young girl, until they saw in this advertisement the allusion to his wife, aged about eighteen years; for the General had always kept the fact of his ill-assorted marriage as private as possible, and very few people beyond the circle of his own personal friends, were aware of it.

The next day all the morning papers appeared with the advertisement conspicuously displayed in their columns. The important notice finally fell under the eyes of Mr. Simon Braxley, as he was regulating himself with a glass and a pipe at a low public-house known as the "*Dock Rangers' Retreat*," in Ann street. Mr. Braxley read the advertisement through with trembling eagerness, thrust the paper into his pocket, finished his grog, threw away his pipe—for he respected the *admirable* law which prohibits smoking in the streets of Boston—and, having paid his reckoning at the bar, he sallied forth and hurried with all possible haste towards P— Square, muttering as he went—

"Two thousand dollars reward, and no questions asked! Thunder and lightning! my fortune's made, *sure!* But then it seems that Lydia is *married*—and the man who calls her his wife signs himself Arthur St. Croix. Why, the old General, her grandfather, is the only person of that name I know of. The affair is mysterious, and I don't understand it at all. No matter—two thousand dollars—that's enough—Simon Braxley, thou art a made man!"



and have your name booked for Heaven. Let us pray."

Here Mr. Howler began to struggle through a long and heavy prayer, in which he thanked Providence for having made him a 'vessel of holiness,' while he deplored the wickedness of his 'brother St. Croix.' The good man then went on to request that a comfortable place might be reserved for him in the 'new Jerusalem,' so that he should find everything ready for his reception above, when he should 'slip his wind' here below. He concluded the prayer by calling the General a great many hard names, and by promising to 'wrestle' with him until he should consent to be 'landed on the other side of Jordan.' Finally, Mr. Howler observed 'amen,' got up, brushed the dust from his knees, blew his nose thrice, and resumed both his seat and his remarks.

"My hell-bound friend," said he, as he rolled up his eyes until the whites alone were visible, an optical performance which caused him to resemble a domestic barnyard fowl in the act of contemplating imaginary thunder—"my poor, lost and fire-doomed brother, let us mingle our tears together. It is both comfortable and refreshing to know that you won't live twenty-four hours, and that you are sure to be cast into eternal torment, where there shall be *whipping*, and *whaling*, and *smashing of teeth*—for all these things show the existence of divine justice. On yonder table there standeth a decanter; what doth it contain, my brother?"

"Brandy," gasped the poor General, who was trying to invent some means of getting rid of his pious but troublesome visitor.

"Brandy!" cried Mr. Howler, starting with holy horror, as he arose and approached the table—"brandy is one of the devices of Satan. It exciteth the brain, warmeth the blood, provoketh lust, and maketh men drunk. Yea, verily, it is the devil's beverage, and allureth mankind to destruction. My brother, for drinking this, art thou accursed. Yet it hath a pleasant smell, and I marvel not that men should occasionally be tempted to take what

the ungodly call a 'snifter'. How tasteth it, my brother? Is it like milk and honey to the palate, and goeth it down the gullet with an agreeable sensation?"

"Try it," said the General, gruffly—"I'm damned certain that you are no stranger to the taste of good brandy, or else that Bardolphian nose of yours lies most infernally. Go in, old Mawworm!"

Mr. Howler sighed mournfully, and forgave the uncharitable insinuations of the unhardened invalid. The reverend gentleman sorrowfully poured a liberal quantity of the potent liquor into a tumbler, which he thoughtfully raised to his lips. Having tasted the brandy with an air of absent-mindedness, he suddenly smacked his lips with great gusto, for he discovered that the 'budge' was prime old stuff, which was not to be wondered at, for it had reposed amid the dust and cobwebs of the General's well-stocked cellar during many years. Mr. Howler, being now fully satisfied of the excellent quality of the 'temptation,' disposed of the remainder of the liquor which he had poured out, without much difficulty. Filled with a holy exhilaration, the reverend gentleman now began to assail the invalid with every description of pious abuse, calling him a "hardened reprobate," a "moral leper," a "corrupt worm of the dust," a "damnation-deserving wretch," and various other uncomplimentary names, which at last raised the ire of the choleric old General to the highest pitch; but, concealing his wrath, he quietly desired Mr. Howler to hand him a pitcher which stood upon the table. The holy man obeyed, whereupon the invalid raised himself up in the bed, and brandishing the pitcher in a threatening manner, thus addressed the astonished and terror-stricken expounder of the gospel:—

"You damned, white-cravated, black-coated, long-visaged, red-nosed, frog-mouthed, brush-haired, knock-kneed, spindle-shanked, club-footed, onion-smelling, brandy-sucking, psalm-singing, sanctimonious old hypocrite! You abominable disgrace to a sacred profession,

which notwithstanding my many acknowledged faults, I have always respected! Now listen to me. If you are not out of this room in less than twenty-seconds, I swear that I'll hurl this pitcher at your head, and knock you so far that if your clothes were made of sole-leather, you'd be ragged before you could run back again!"

The reverend Helphire Howler made a dive for the door, but, before he could make his escape, the pitcher had come in contact with his head, breaking it (the pitcher, not the head) into a thousand pieces. Uttering a wild yell of agony, Mr. Howler burst madly out of the door and rushed down stairs, upsetting Dr. Smuggins and Dorothy, who were standing in rather questionable proximity with each other, and breaking his shins and 'barking' his nose, by an unsuccessful attempt to accomplish a flying leap over a table and two chairs that stood in the hall. Finally, the luckless parson managed to get into the street; and, being without a hat and covered with blood, he presented rather a sorry appearance.

"If ever I again try to convert one of the ungodly who boasteth of the title of General, may I be damned!" quoth Mr. Howler to himself, as he wended his way homewards.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE INTERVIEW.

Mr. Simon Braxley soon arrived at the residence of General St. Croix, and rang the door-bell with a vigor, inspired by the consciousness that his business was of the very highest importance. A servant opened the door and surveyed him with a look of suspicion—for Mr. Braxley's appearance was not in his favor, neither were his garments exactly of that description which would have secured his admission into fashionable

circles. Besides, having that morning been involved in a fight, he had received a black eye which did not enhance his personal beauty, nor add to the natural amiability of his temper.

"What do you want, fellow!" demanded the insolent and pampered lackey, who was arrayed in costly livery.—"If you are a beggar, you must go to the kitchen door, and they will give you some cold victuals."

"You d—d impertinent flunkey!" exclaimed Braxley, as he stepped into the hall and gazed at the servant with a horrible frown, that caused the poor devil to tremble and turn white with fear—"is it thus you address a gentleman who comes to pay a visit to your master upon a matter of the very greatest moment? You miserable cur, that licks the feet of aristocracy and raises its puny bark against every man who has not a broadcloth coat upon his back, I've more than half a mind to tear out your saucy tongue!"

"I beg your pardon, sir—I—I—really!" stammered the terrified servant, whose attempted apology was speedily interrupted by Braxley's exclaiming, in a tone of thunder—

"Conduct me into the presence of your master, you milk-faced monkey! I bring intelligence of Lydia St. Croix."

The last sentence produced an almost magical change in the appearance and manner of the servant, who was an honest fellow at heart, and who had been sorely grieved at the mysterious disappearance of his young mistress. His countenance brightened, he rubbed his hands together in the excess of his joy, and bowed almost to the floor as he said—

"Forgive me, sir, for my rudeness. You are as welcome as if you had come in a coach and four. Thank God! we shall now know something about the poor young lady. Is she safe and well? Will she be brought back at once? But I won't detain you, sir. My master is very ill, but I am sure that the news which you have to impart, will cure him. Have the



goodness, sir, to follow me to his chamber. This way, sir—this way."

And continuing to bow and scrape with as much ceremony as if Mr. Braxley had been a newly-imported foreign prince, the servant led the way to the apartment of the General, who had scarcely recovered from the fit of rage into which he had been thrown by the Rev. Mr. Howler.

"Here, sir," said the servant, as he ushered Braxley into the room—"is a gentleman who brings news of my young mistress."

On hearing these words, the countenance of the invalid assumed a look of the greatest joy, and, having directed the servant to retire, but to remain outside, within call, he requested Braxley to be seated, an intimation which that gentleman accepted without ceremony.

"In the first place, my friend," said the General, who seemed to have been suddenly endowed with new life—"help yourself to a glass of brandy, and then speak without fear. Whatever may be the nature of your disclosures, you shall not be harmed, provided that my wife is restored to me."

"Your wife," cried Braxley, in unaffected astonishment, as he nearly filled a tumbler with brandy and gulped it down at a single draught—"your wife! Thunder and lightning! Do you mean what you say, old man? Is the missing lady, eighteen years of age, who is alluded to in the advertisement which appeared this morning in all the newspapers—is she your wife?"

"Certainly she is," said the General, who was somewhat surprised in his turn—"I have been married to her about two years. I admit that the union is rather an ill-assorted one; but then such unequal matches are not unfrequent among the aristocracy. I was old and rather infirm, and needed a young wife to take care of, and comfort me."

"Pray, sir," said Braxley, who had recovered his usual calmness—"excuse the seeming impertinence of the question which I am about to ask; for it is desir-

able that we should understand each other at once. *Who are you?*"

"I am General Arthur St. Croix!"

"You once had a son?"

"I had—he was an illegitimate child. When he became of age, he married contrary to my wishes, and I cast him off, having first written him a check upon my banker for a large sum of money. But why these questions?"

"Have patience, and you shall know soon. Your son died, leaving a wife and one infant child—a girl. Am I right?"

"Yes," replied the General—"and I heard that the child was stolen. Its mother died shortly afterwards. But what the devil has all this to do with my little wife, and her being restored to me?"

"Softly, my dear General," said Braxley—"this is an intricate web, and we must disentangle it by slow degrees. Here, sir, is a portrait of your granddaughter, who was stolen."

With these words Braxley drew from a secret pocket in his clothes, the miniature which he had stolen with the child. The General examined the picture for some time with the closest attention, turning it over and over in his hand, and wondering how his uncouth but smooth-spoken visitor became possessed of it.

"Yes," said the invalid, at last—"this is indeed the likeness of my son's child, for in it I can trace a faint but certain resemblance to him, particularly in the expression of the eyes. Besides, the name '*Lydia*' is engraved upon this portrait, and I understand that Lydia was the name of this grand-daughter of mine. 'Tis a curious coincidence that Lydia is also the name of my wife. How came you by this?"

"I stole it at the same time that I stole the original of it," replied the ruffian, coolly—"for, old man, 'twas I who carried off your son's child—your grand-daughter."

"Indeed,!" said the General—"then you must be a villain, and your looks do not belie you. Whatever became of the girl."

"In the first place, great General," remarked Braxley, with a sneer—"don't call me hard names; for villain, as I honestly confess myself to be, I have that to tell you which will cause you to envy me, and make you wish that you were in my place instead of your own. You ask me what ever became of the girl—your grand-daughter. I will tell you. I reared her until she was twelve years of age, and made her follow my own humble but honest profession; I was a rag-picker. Well, at the age of twelve, she found a valuable diamond ring in the street, ran away from me, and restored the ring to its owner, who was, I believe, a certain General St. Croix; and the grateful old gentleman, it seems, afterwards made her his wife. If I am not mistaken, that same diamond ring is now in my possession.—Here it is, General."

As he spoke, Braxley displayed the ring which he had compelled Lydia to give him after he had carried her to his den in Commercial street.

"Enough—enough!" cried the General, whose countenance plainly indicated the intensity of his mental agony—"Great God! when I induced that young girl to marry me, I little thought that she was —"

"Your own grand-daughter!" exclaimed Braxley, laying a cruel emphasis upon the words—"yes, old man, you are right; you are the husband of your own grand-daughter. Mighty queer union, isn't it? Had you been blessed with offspring, they would have been your own children, and your great-grand-children, at one and the same time. Ha, ha, ha!"

Here Mr. Braxley, in the innocent pleasantries of his honest heart, laughed long and loudly.

"Scoundrel!" cried the afflicted old man, who found it difficult to realize the horrible fact with which Braxley had made him acquainted—"do not torture me with your ill-timed mirth. My load of sorrows is sufficiently heavy without your adding to the burden. Ah! I am rightly punished for my folly in marry-

ing, at my advanced age, a young girl—a mere child. I am also justly rewarded for my heartlessness in casting off and disowning my son; for, had I forgiven him, and received his wife and child with kindness and affection, this horrible and unnatural marriage of mine would never have taken place. But I have one thing to be thankful for—one circumstance to comfort me in this dark hour. *Thank Heaven! the relations which have existed between her whom I have considered as my wife, and myself, have always been rigidly Platonic!*"

"Ah!" exclaimed Braxley, with an air of disappointed surprise—"this was a *Platonic marriage*, then? Well, in that case, the affair isn't so bad after all. I suppose that you were just like old King David, who, being well stricken in years, wanted a virgin for no other purpose than merely to keep him warm.—But come, let us talk about business. I presume that you are just as anxious as ever to have Lydia restored to you. After you get her back, you can consider her as your wife, or as your grand-child, just as you may feel inclined. For my part, if I were in your place, I should prefer to regard her as my wife. Well, she is now safe in my possession; pay me the two thousand dollars which you have offered for her recovery, and this very day—yes, within this very hour—she shall be given up to you."

"Answer me one or two questions first," said the General. "Your name is —"

"Simon Braxley, at your service."

"And it was you who, night before last, carried off Lydia from this house?"

"Just so. I and a comrade broke into the house, for the purpose of plundering it. We neither of us knew who lived here."

"State all the particulars of the burglary," said the General.

"Well, sir, listen. Night before last, I and a comrade named Dick—both of us being rather short of funds—determined to *crack some crib*, and thus replenish our exhausted finances. So we started out and wandered up this way.

This house attracted our attention, for its appearance indicated that its occupants were persons of wealth, and besides, no lights could be seen in any of the windows, which showed pretty clearly that all the inmates had retired to rest. We of course had all our *tools* with us; and, there being no inquisitive watchmen around, we soon effected an entrance into the house through a window in the rear, having obtained access to the garden by picking the lock of the gate that leads to it. We explored and ransacked all the lower apartments without finding any booty of consequence, although we took devilish good care to help ourselves liberally to the choice wines and liquors which we found in the cellar, and the delicacies that abounded in the kitchen. Somewhat disappointed in not having found any money or plate, we pursued our investigations, and finally came to a room, the door of which was locked, the key being on the inside. We resolved to enter that room, judging it to be a sleeping apartment, and thinking that it must contain either money, jewels, or something of value worth carrying off. After a while, we succeeded in turning the key in the lock by means of *forceps*, with which we were provided. We entered the room, which seemed to be the chamber of a lady, for female garments were scattered around, and all the arrangements exhibited a delicate and tasteful elegance which is seldom seen in the apartment of a man. Congratulating ourselves upon the fortunate circumstance that we should only have to contend with a *woman*, who, in case she awoke and made any resistance, could be easily silenced, we made ourselves perfectly at home, and sat down to converse and rest ourselves after our arduous labors. The bed was in a distant part of the room, and was nearly shrouded in darkness; and so profound was the silence which reigned, that I began to imagine the room to be unoccupied, although the fact of the key being on the inside of the door, would seem to discourage that belief. My comrade Dick and I sat for some time,

conversing together on various matters and things, and solacing ourselves with the contents of a brandy-flask. All of a sudden, Dick pointed towards the bed, and then, straining my eyes through the gloom, I indistinctly saw the form of a sleeping lady. Taking up my dark-lantern, I approached the bed, and examined the occupant of it. You may judge of my surprise when I almost instantly recognized my former *protege*—the girl who, six years before, had deserted me and her honest rag-picking trade. At first, I was inclined to kill her upon the spot; but I altered my mind, and determined to carry her to my *cub*, there to keep her in close custody until a suitable reward should be offered for her recovery. Well, to make a long story short, I awakened her; she knew me at once, and did not, as you may suppose, evince any great amount of joy at sight of me. I made her dress herself, and, as a punishment for some saucy remark which she made, I found it necessary to bestow upon her a slight chastisement, merely to remind her that I was still her guardian and protector—in fact, her father *pro tem*. Scarcely had my hand touched her, when out from beneath the bed there rushed a man who, taking me completely by surprise, dashed me to the floor with a violence that stunned me for the space of a minute or two. When I recovered, I found Dick and the stranger engaged in a desperate conflict: my comrade being provided with a knife, while his antagonist seemed to be unarmed. Lydia, overcome with fright, had swooned, and was lying insensible. 'Now is my time,' thought I—'Dick must take care of himself.' I arose, took the unconscious form of Lydia in my arms, left the chamber, descended the stairs, passed out into the street, and, with my interesting burden, arrived in safety at my humble but secure place of abode, where Lydia now is, subject to your orders, and impatiently waiting to be released, which she shall be, as soon as you have forked over a cool two thousand, according to the stipulations of your advertisement."

"Where do you live?" asked the invalid.

"Ah! that won't do, General; I am an old bird, and not to be caught with chaff. No information do you get out of me until I have fingered the dimes."

"You are a shrewd rascal," remarked the General—"and your style of language shows that you have been well educated. I don't know about paying you this large sum of money, for I shall be awarding a premium to crime. I have a great mind to detain you and deliver you up to the officers of justice, unless you tell me where you have concealed poor Lydia."

"Pooh!" cried Braxley, snapping his fingers in a manner implying unqualified contempt—"try to detain me against my will, old man, and you will soon have a sample of the strength and desperation of Simon Braxley. Detain me, indeed!"

"But," said the General—"my servant is outside, within call; I have but to order him to summon all my male servants, who number about a dozen stout, able-bodied men, and who could soon overpower you and make you a prisoner."

"Let them come!" cried the desperado, recklessly—"they will find that they have no child to deal with; for, although I have no weapons with me but my two hands, I am not afraid of a dozen of your flunkies. They should not capture me alive; and, were I to be killed, how would you ever be able to find out the whereabouts of Lydia?"

"You are unarmed, then?" said the General, with a penetrating look.

"Yes," was the reply—"I generally carry a knife, but I lost it this morning during the fight in which I was engaged. No matter; I am as strong and as fierce as a lion when once aroused, and, even without weapons, I have no fear of your being able to detain me, most valiant General—neither you, nor your whole tribe of fawning flunkies!"

These words were spoken with an air of cool and swaggering insolence that brought the hot blood of anger to the pale face of the General, who, however restrained himself, and said, mildly—

"Ah, I see that you are a man of true courage, and that you are not to be trifled with. You shall receive your reward at once. Be kind enough to reach me that box of polished ebony that stands upon yonder shelf."

"Now you talk reason," remarked the delighted Braxley, as he took down and handed the General the box, which was about one foot in length, and profusely ornamented with plates of gold.

The General touched a secret spring, and the lid of the box flew up, revealing—not the piles of bank-notes and gold coins that Braxley expected to see—but a pair of double-barrelled pistols, ready cocked, and fully prepared to respond, in tones of thunder, to the slightest touch upon their triggers.

Taking up these weapons, and pointing them towards Braxley with a deadly aim, the General exclaimed—

"Stir but an inch, villain, and you are a dead man, for I swear that I will shoot you as readily as if you were a dog. I cannot detain you, eh? You perceive that I do not need the aid of my flunkies, as you call them. Now is it not strange that I, a poor, weak, old man, and an invalid to boot, can make you, a strong, robust fellow, but little past the prime of life, tremble before me? You have declared yourself to be unarmed; what, then, is there to prevent me from terminating your career of crime by shooting you through the head? Besides, you have used insolent language towards me, and I am inclined to punish you for it.—You are evidently a villain of the blackest dye, and are unfit to live. The law will justify me in taking your life. Yes, I will rid the world of a pest by killing you; and your carcass shall be buried along with that of your comrade, in my garden."

"So Dick is dead, then?" remarked the terrified and trembling Braxley, in a subdued tone—"then he must have been slain by his antagonist who appeared so mysteriously from beneath the bed. By the way, who could that stranger have been, and how came he secreted under the lady's couch?"

"He was a lover of Lydia's, I suppose," said the General, musingly, as if he was communing with himself instead of addressing Braxley, towards whom the four barrels of the two pistols were still pointed with a steady aim. "Poor girl!" continued the old man, sadly—"I cannot sincerely blame her for encouraging the secret visits of a lover, considering the circumstances of the case. I am glad that I did not kill the young man, as I meant to do, for I supposed him to be one of the robbers. Yes, it must have been *his* hand that slew your comrade, who now lies, cold and stiff, in a grave in my garden, to which *you* will shortly follow him."

"But sir," implored Braxley—"if you kill me, you will never discover the place where your wife—I mean, your grand-daughter is concealed. She is confined in a vault, or dungeon, a horrible place, dark and damp; if she is not released in twenty-four hours, she must certainly perish, for no human being could long exist in that awful den."

"Eternal curses light upon you!" cried the infuriated old man—"how dared you place that fair, delicate creature in such a place as you have described? I am now, ten times more than ever, determined to send your polluted soul to the regions of eternal torment. I shall discover the place of Lydia's concealment without the aid of any information from you; for I will employ a thousand men, if necessary, to ransack every hole and corner of the city, until she is found. Scoundrel, you are my evil genius. Why did you enter this house and steal away my poor Lydia? and why have you now come to horrify me with the appalling intelligence that she is my son's daughter? Why did you not mercifully leave me in blissful ignorance of the fact? The knowledge of that unnatural and almost incestuous marriage is a thousand times more painful to me than an eternal separation from Lydia, and entire ignorance of her fate could have been. Without that hateful knowledge, I might have died in peace, for I feel that

my days on earth are numbered. But ere I die, I shall do an act of justice by punishing a most atrocious miscreant, who is far more dangerous to society than a tiger let loose from its cage."

"But, sir," remonstrated the very uncomfortable Mr. Braxley, who did not at all admire the rather critical position in which he found himself placed—"I came here in perfectly good faith, thinking, of course, that no harm would befall me. You offered a reward for certain information concerning a missing lady, and I came here for the purpose of furnishing you with that information. At the very beginning of our interview, you told me to speak without fear; and you assured me that, whatever might be the nature of my disclosures, I should not be harmed. I quote your own words, sir. And what says your advertisement? Suffer me to read an extract from it, for I have in my pocket a newspaper containing it:—*No questions will be asked the person who brings the information.*" These words, General, are printed in *italics*, to give them greater emphasis. The advertisement goes on to say—"The money will be faithfully paid over the very moment that the lady is restored to her family and friends. It is earnestly hoped that whoever knows anything concerning Mrs. St. Croix, will instantly come forward and relieve her afflicted husband from a terrible weight of suspense." Now, in regard to 'no questions being asked,' you have catechised me thoroughly, and I have answered you fairly and truly, although I might with perfect propriety have refused to reply to a single question. I came forward to 'relieve you from a terrible weight of suspense; but, instead of making arrangements to receive the lady and pay me the money, you produce a pair of pistols, and threaten me with instant death. Pardon me, General, but I must say, that you are not acting like a man of honor in this business. You are breaking your pledged word, which you should regard as sacred under any and every circumstance. Fulfil the terms of your advertisement,

receive back your Lydia, and let me depart in peace."

"I believe," said the General—"that a man is justified in forfeiting his word of honor, when he discovers that the party with whom he is dealing, is utterly unworthy of his consideration. You came here with the air of a bravo; you manifest no penitence for your crimes, but on the contrary, seem to glory in them; you coolly confess yourself to be a thief, a child stealer, a burglar, and a monster of cruelty, for you acknowledge that you have placed Lydia in a dungeon where she cannot exist twenty-four hours. What faith is to be kept with such a diabolical villain as yourself? What claim have you upon my mercy or forbearance? Had you come with the air of a man who regrets the crimes of his past life and earnestly desires to reform and enter upon a future career of honesty and respectability—had you come thus, you would have been entitled to some consideration, and I certainly would have paid you the reward. But you have conducted yourself in my presence with a swaggering insolence and a recklessness both of speech and manner, that show you to be incapable of reformation and fully determined to persist in your villanous courses. Therefore, not one cent of my money shall you receive; for I am not going to furnish you with the means of beginning a career of debauchery on a grand scale and enlarging the sphere of your criminal operations. No, scoundrel! you will find that this last *speculation* of yours is not likely to be quite as profitable as you had expected."

"Well, then," said Braxley, with an air of desperation, as he folded his arms and savagely surveyed the General, whose pistols were still pointed towards the miscreant—"well, then, as you are determined not to treat me with fairness and, as I am in your power, I submit, and you may do with me as you please. If you kill me, you will never have Lydia restored to you, for she is concealed in a place so secure, that the

devil himself could not find her, unless I conducted him to her. If you deliver me up to the officers of justice, this whole affair will of course be made public, and the world will know the not very red-tape fact that General Arthur St. Croix, at the age of seventy, did, in his extreme anxiety to get a young wife to comfort him in his old age, marry his own grand-daughter. Nobody will believe that the marriage was *Platonic*, for, General, you enjoy the enviable reputation of being an excessively amorous old gentleman; consequently, you will be universally execrated as having been guilty of a most atrocious and unnatural crime. All your family secrets will be blazoned to the world, which eagerly seizes upon and devours with the utmost avidity such matters. Will it be worth your while to undergo all this, merely for the sake of saving two thousand dollars, and gratifying your *pique* against me? You say that the money will enable me to 'enlarge the sphere of my criminal operations;' in reply to that remark, permit me to remind you, that *you* will not be held responsible for whatever sins *I* may commit. I am no hypocrite, General St. Croix, I did not present myself to you with a long visage and a sanctimonious aspect—I did not pretend to be deeply afflicted in view of my past offences, neither did I whine about a determination to reform, and such humbug. No, scorning the disguise of hypocrisy, which I might easily have assumed, I came in my own true character. I never sail under false colors, but always openly display the blood-red flag of the pirate. Do I not deserve some little credit for my candor?"

"You deserve hanging," said the General, sternly. "It is strange that a man of your superior education should have been first a rag-picker, and then a robber. You are ten times more culpable than an ignorant person, for your intelligence should have taught you better. Your logic is admirable, but it is lost upon me. What do I care for the opinions and com-

ments of society, into which I shall never again enter, for I am positive that I am now upon my death-bed! Let the world assail my reputation with its arrows of malignant slander after I am dead; I shall then be beyond the reach of those venom-pointed missiles. Braxley, you cannot change my resolution to bring you to condign punishment, for I believe you to be a stupendous villain, far beyond the possibility of reformation."

"And do *you* prate to me of reformation?" cried the ruffian, who, seeing that the General was determined to treat him with the most unrelenting severity, no longer attempted to conceal or restrain the intense rage that was consuming his heart—"you, a hoary-headed veteran in the service of Satan; you, who, although tottering upon the verge of the grave, still retain all the beastly propensities that distinguished you in the days of your youth and robust manhood! You, who have seduced and ruined more women than you have numbered years! Reformation, indeed! Pull the beam out of your own eye, old man, and never mind the mote that is in the eye of your neighbor. It is for *you* to reform, and that, too, in double quick time, for I agree with you in the opinion that your stay on earth will be very short. You know that you have always been a most heartless, unscrupulous and notorious libertine. Now, are you not as much in need of repentance as I am? And can you consistently lecture me upon the enormity of my crimes, when you yourself have been guilty of the most atrocious and criminal actions?"

"Your reproaches are just," said General St. Croix, sorrowfully—"I have been a great sinner; and I tremble as I approach the verge of an unknown and mysterious eternity. If there is a world beyond the grave, and if there is a hell to which the wicked are consigned, there to suffer eternal torments—then I am lost!"

"Upon my soul, General, you would have made a capital Methodist parson," remarked Braxley, with a sneer.

"Silence, scoundrel," exclaimed the old man, with newly-awakened fury—"let me

hear none of your coarse and ill-timed jests. It is time that this interview should terminate, for it has lasted too long already, and your presence annoys me and increases my illness. I have a proposal to make to you, and you can accept or reject it, just as you may think proper.—Two of my male servants shall accompany you to your place of abode, wherever it may be. When they arrive there, you shall instantly place Lydia in their possession.—You may then return with them to this house, and if I find that the poor girl has sustained no material injury either in mind or body, I shall probably bestow upon you a moderate reward—say two or three hundred dollars—and then suffer you to depart unmolested, giving you full liberty to travel towards the gallows as fast as you can."

"What if I do not choose to accept this proposal?" demanded Braxley.

"In that case," replied General St. Croix, with an air of decision that was not lost upon his hearer—"I shall place you in charge of the authorities, and you are too experienced a rascal not to know that a residence of several years within the walls of the State Prison, will be your certain doom."

"Will you solemnly promise to pay me three hundred dollars as soon as the girl is restored to you?" asked Braxley.

"I shall promise nothing," replied the old man—"come, choose between your liberty, and a long imprisonment. Which do you prefer? Will you conduct my servants to the place of Lydia's confinement, or shall I send for the officers?"

"Well," said Braxley, sulkily—"I suppose there's no help for it, and that I must show your flunkies the way to my crib, and place Lydia into their hands, without any certainty of being paid for my trouble. You have treated me very scurvily, General, and I tell you candidly that the weapons which you point towards me, are the only considerations that have kept me from strangling you in your bed!"

"I haven't the least doubt of it," observed the General, drily—"and yet you

yourself placed these pistols in my hands. Then you accept my proposal?"

"Yes," growled Braxley, as he ground his teeth together with disappointment and rage. It was especially galling to one of his obstinate and bullying spirit, to be dictated to by a feeble old man, whom, but for the pistols, he could have crushed as easily as a worm beneath his feet.

"Very well," said the General, and then, raising his voice, he called to the servant who remained outside, and who instantly made his appearance in obedience to the summons of his master.

"James," said the old man—"tell Simpson my *valet*, and Mike the coachman to come to me immediately."

James bowed and vanished, and in a few minutes the *valet* and the coachman entered the apartment. With the personal attributes of Mr. Simpson the reader has already been made acquainted. Mr. Michael O'Hara, the General's coachman, was a great, strapping Irishman, exactly six feet four inches in height, and stout in proportion. He rejoiced in the possession of a head that would have filled a bushel basket, a neck like that of a bull, and a pair of fists like sledge-hammers. He was, upon the whole, a rough and dangerous-looking customer, and as excellent a specimen of a 'fine Irish lad' as ever performed prodigies of valor at Donnybrook fair, armed with a blackthorn cudgel. His brogue was of the broadest and richest kind; and his face, while it indicated a brave and determined spirit, was expressive of much good-humor and genuine drollery. He was dressed in the respectable garments appropriate to his station as coachman to a gentleman of wealth and aristocratic tastes.

Braxley smiled contemptuously when he saw Simpson; but his countenance assumed a look of uneasiness as he surveyed the gigantic form and stalwart proportions of Mike, who was far his superior in strength and activity, and who, on entering the chamber, saluted his master by scraping the carpet with his right foot, at the same time pulling his head forward, vigorously grasping the tuft of red hair that overshadowed his mirthful eyes.—

This formality being finished, Mike 'stood at ease,' and regarded Braxley with a stare that seemed to ask—"And who the devil are *you*, ye black-muzzled thafe?"

"Simpson and Mike," said the General—"attend to me. This man here knows where your young mistress is concealed. I wish you to go with him wherever he may conduct you; and on *no account whatever must you lose sight of him, even for a single instant*, until the young lady is placed, alive and well, in your possession. Keep your eyes upon him, and upon every movement of his, *constantly*; and fail not to exercise the utmost vigilance, so as to prevent him from playing any trick. I warn you that he is a most artful, desperate and murderous villain; so look out for him. If he attempts to play you false, *shoot him down*, and I will take all the responsibility. Do you perfectly understand me, both of you?"

Mr. Simpson placed his finger upon his nose in a manner to intimate that he was awake, and 'up to snuff;' while Mike, disdaining mere pantomime, delivered himself as follows:—

"Be the howly mackerel, Gineral, and that's a good oath, I understhand ye like a book, and if this murthering spalpeen thries to come any of his thavish thricks over *me*, be the powers of mud! I'll sind him to a place below where cowl'd weather is unknown, and where the devil pays a high pramium for the sowls of such d—d dirty thaves of the worruld as me frind here, bad cess to him!"

The General declared himself perfectly satisfied with the pantomimic and verbal assurances of his two retainers, to whom he presented his pistols, saying—

"Do not hesitate to use those weapons, should this fellow exhibit the slightest sign of treachery. Go now, and see that you safely bring me back your young mistress. May success crown your enterprise!"

"Come along, Judas Iscariot!" exclaimed Mr. Simpson, pompously—"I will lead the van; let the prisoner follow next, and Mike, do you bring up the rear. Now, forward—march!"

The two servants, with the scowling



Mr. Braxley in their custody, left the General's chamber and marched out of the house with a military precision of step that would have reflected credit upon the well-disciplined army of Napoleon himself.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## A PUGILISTIC ENCOUNTER, AND AN OLD FRIEND IN DISGUISE.

Mr. Simon Braxley, who found himself placed in a most embarrassing and annoying position, walked on in silence, closely hemmed in by the two servants, who guarded him with a vigilance that could not have been surpassed by the members of the famous French police. Braxley, instead of proceeding towards Commercial street, where his den was located, conducted his 'friends' in an entirely different direction, hoping that they would get tired out and leave him; and trusting, at all events, that a chance might be afforded him to give them the slip in the crowded streets. On, on went the ruffian and his guards, far along the road to Roxbury. Soon they diverged into a cross road, and began to travel backwards and forwards in such an erratic manner, often traversing the same ground twice over, that Mike's suspicions were aroused, and ordering a 'halt,' he thus addressed the prisoner:—

"Misther Black-muzzle, I'm spakin' to ye for yer good; d'ye mind? It's humbuggin' us that ye are; ye want to blarney us around until night comes on, and then thry to lave us without cirimony.—Ye don't live up in this direction at all, at all. Such thaves as yerself always live in Ann sthreet, or some murtherin' hole like it. Now, be Jases, me frind, if ye don't lade us in the right coorse, and that mighty quick, I'm d—d but I'll bate ye within an inch of yer life—d'ye mind?"

"You Irish, bog-trotting hound!" exclaimed Braxley, foaming with rage—"there are two of you to one man, and besides, you are armed while I am not.

If we were equal, you d—d Paaddy, I'd soon teach you a lesson which you would not soon forget!"

"Whoop!" cried Mike, as he leaped into the air and then threw himself into a pugilistic attitude—"Ye talk like a raysonable man, now. Be the big book, I like ye for yer spunk. Will ye fight, kick shins, wrestle, or box? I'll make meself your *aqual*, me frind, and ye shall have fair play. Here, Simpson, take me pistol—now I'm unarmed. Now, Simpson, walk away to the distance of about quarter of a mile, and don't interfere wid us, any way. If I'm *kilt* or *bate*, let Black-muzzle go; but, be the powers, I think there's small danger of that same. Whoop! be Jases I was hungry afther a fight, and its mighty well playzed that I am to be so soon accommodated. Now, Black-muzzle, if ye conquer Mike O'Hara, I'll tell a d—d lie and call ye a gentleman!"

Simpson, having full confidence in the prowess of his comrade, walked off to a considerable distance from the scene of the approaching conflict. It was a quiet, lonely spot, no houses being near, and the roads in the vicinity being entirely free from vehicles and pedestrians.

"You promise," said Braxley, "that, in case I get the best of you in this encounter, I shall be set free, and neither you nor your comrade will follow me any further. Is that so?"

"Yis, me frind—and I niver broke me word," replied Mike.

"And you also solemnly declare that you have no weapons of any kind about you?"

"None but me two fists, and they're not small ones."

The men now stripped off their coats and prepared for the fight. Braxley was an uncommonly powerful man, and his long familiarity with scenes of riot and violence, in which he was always a prominent actor, rendered him an experienced and formidable antagonist in such an affray as was now about to take place. But he was a mere cypher compared with Mike, whose long, muscular limbs and hardness of flesh gave him a decided

advantage, which would have been immediately apparent to the most careless observer. Besides, the Irish coachman had for many years lived a temperate and regular life, while Braxley had greatly injured himself, and diminished his natural vigor, by a free indulgence in the lowest and most pernicious vices. Mike, therefore, was as fresh and as strong as if he had undergone two months of regular 'training'; while his opponent was stale and fagged out, like a horse which had been over-driven.

"Now," thought Braxley, as he rolled up his shirt-sleeves and tightened the belt around his waist—"If I flog this fellow, I shall not only thereby gain my freedom—for I think he'll keep his word—but I shall also have the satisfaction of punishing him for his d—d insolence. Nothing but these considerations would ever induce me to fight such a giant of a fellow. But perhaps after all, he is only a mere braggart who wishes to frighten me by the display of his tremendous proportions. I'll soon find out whether he is a cowardly cur, or not. But what muscle the fellow has! He's like a Roman gladiator. Well, well, I'll try him at all events. Thunder and lightning, if I had but my knife with me, how soon I would make him bite the dust!"

"Come, Misther Black-muzzle, are ye ready?" demanded Mike, who was impatient to begin the fight.

"Yes, you d—d Irish, sheep-stealing potato-guzzling vagabond!" replied Braxley, who desired, if possible, to throw Mike off his guard by rendering him furious with anger. In this design, however, the ruffian was frustrated, for Mr. O'Hara merely grinned, and remained 'cool as a cucumber.'

The combatants now cautiously approached each other, and both of them, were evidently bent on mischief. They both possessed considerable pugilistic 'science,' and had any admirers of the 'manly art of self-defence' been present, they would have enjoyed the 'sport.' After some fancy sparring, Mike 'led off with his right,' and planted a tremendous

blow upon the 'snuff-mill' of Braxley, who spouted the claret. 'First blood' for Mike, who followed up the advantage which he had gained by bestowing upon his 'friend' a punch on his 'brain-pan' that laid him sprawling in the dust. As he slowly arose to his feet, Mr. O'Hara observed to him—

"Take it *asy* Black-muzzle; recover yer wind, me boy, and thin perhaps ye'll have betther luck nixt time. But strike out bowldly, man, and don't be affther lettin' me have all the fun to meself—do ye mind?"

Cursing his evil luck, and almost frantic with rage, Braxley rushed upon Mike with the utmost fury, and closing with him, endeavored to throw him. Mike, however, like many of his countrymen, was an excellent wrestler; and soon Mr. Braxley resumed his place in the dust, painfully bruised and almost crushed to death by the heavy form of his foe, who fell upon him with the force of a blacksmith's anvil.

Mike, scorning to strike an enemy while down, arose and good-naturedly assisted Braxley to his feet. The latter gentleman, groaning with pain, and deeply mortified in view of his inglorious defeat, declared with an oath that he could fight no more.

"Ye have enough, thin?" demanded the victorious Mike—"spake the word, or be jabers I'll knock ye so far, that if ye have any good money in yer pocket, it'll be uncurrent before ye can thravel back again!"

"Yes, I've had enough, and too much," groaned Braxley, as he put on his coat, a task of some difficulty with him, just then, for all his limbs were as stiff and as sore as if he had been hitched to a railroad train and dragged for many miles over a rough surface of ground.

Mike also put on his coat, and with his conquered foe, rejoined Simpson, who was overjoyed at the result of the conflict.

"I knew werry vell," said he—"that you could *vip* the rascal, Mike. Von't the General be tickled ven he 'ears of

this? Bloody my heyes if I don't think I could vip the fellow myself, little as I be."

With these words the valiant cockney resumed his military strut, and the party moved on towards Boston.

"Now, Black-muzzle," said Mike, impressively—"ye'd better take us to yer place at once, without any more humbuggin'. We'll niver lave ye from this moment till the day of judgment, until our young misthress is put safely in our hands; and if I catch ye in any more of yer desateful thricks, lading us the wrong way, be the great toe of the Pope, and that's no thrifle of an oath, I'll bate ye to a jelly and sell ye for soap fat! Dye mind?"

After walking on for some time in silence, Braxley, who had apparently been deeply reflecting, abruptly said—

"Come, friends, let us understand each other. There's no need of our quarrelling or fighting. I see that I am no match for you, and therefore I submit quietly to my fate. I confess that I wished to mislead you, at first; but 'sober second thought,' and the severe trouncing which I have just received, have convinced me that I had much better act honorably in this matter. I will conduct you directly to my place of abode in Commercial street, and place the young lady in your possession. Then I will go back with you to General St. Croix, and perhaps, in his satisfaction, he may bestow upon me a reward, which will pay me for my lost time and diminish the pain of my wounds. A plaster of bank-notes is a sovereign remedy for a bruised body."

"Now ye talk raysonable," said Mike, approvingly—"only do the dacent thing, Mither Black-muzzle, and it's ourselves that will trate ye decently in return."

Relapsing into silence, and walking as briskly as the infirm condition of Mr. Braxley would admit of, the party soon re-entered the city and wended their way towards Commercial street. As they were traversing that rather filthy and decidedly unsalubrious and tar-

smelling thoroughfare, they passed a wretched looking man who seemed to be carefully searching, from door to door, for some particular person or place. He was clothed in rags, and a profusion of coarse, tangled hair well nigh covered his dark-colored countenance, which wore a look of deep dejection and profound melancholy. This man on seeing Braxley, uttered a subdued exclamation of joy, and muttered—

"That is he! I cannot be mistaken. But who are those two respectable-looking men that accompany him? No matter. I have at last obtained a clue. I shall of course follow; but I must be cautious!"

Braxley and the two servants of General St. Croix passed on, followed at a short distance by the strange, squalid-looking man whom we have described, and who now moved with an activity which he had not before displayed.

"Here is my home, gentlemen," said Braxley, as he paused before the entrance of the cellar which he inhabited, and looked carefully around to see that no one was watching him. The ragged stranger had hidden himself behind a huge pile of chains, and was therefore invisible.

"Follow me, gentlemen," continued Braxley, as he descended the steps leading to the cellar, and rapped in a peculiar manner upon the door, which was instantly opened by that lovely and interesting lady, Peg Pickles, at sight of whom Mike started back, exclaiming—

"Howly Moses! is this a caravan of wild *bastes* that ye'r takin' us into? If so, what might be the name of this strange animal that bears a faint resemblance to a faymale woman widout a nose? Oeh, murther! but she's the devil's pup, intirely! Arrah, Mither Black-muzzle, ye'll make yer fortune on this quare cratur, any way."

Braxley laughed, but Miss Pickles frowned horribly, for she did not by any means relish the uncomplimentary remarks of Mike, who now boldly entered the cellar, followed by Mr. Simpson.

As soon as the door was securely fastened, the ragged stranger emerged from his place of concealment behind the pile of chains, and carefully scrutinized the exterior of Mr. Braxley's subterranean abode.

"Well, thank Heaven! I have found the place at last," muttered the stranger. "Shall I now go and demand the assistance of the authorities? No; for I wish to have all the credit of this business to myself. *She* will then be grateful to me alone, and her gratitude may soon change into love, by an easy, natural and irresistible transition. But how shall I gain admission to Braxley's den? I must try and devise some means of accomplishing that object, and, meanwhile, I shall loiter around this spot, taking care to watch narrowly the entrance of the cellar. Ah, Lydia! Did'st thou but know that Ravellon was near thee, determined to rescue thee or perish, perchance that knowledge might cheer and comfort thee, even amidst the horrors of thy dungeon!"

The disguised Ravellon stationed himself near the cellar, and was soon lost in thought.

## CHAPTER XVII.

MIKE O'HARA AND APOLLO SIMPSON GET INTO A BAD PREDICAMENT.

"Be seated, gentlemen, I beg of you," said Mr. Braxley, addressing Simpson and Mike with the most ceremonious politeness, and bringing forward a couple of chairs, which, being troubled with weakness in the legs, announced their sufferings by discordant screeches whenever they were sat upon.

"Thank ye, Mither Black-muzzle," said Mike, as he and his comrade seated themselves—"if it's all the same to you, we'll be afther transacting this little business widout any delay. Give us the young misthress, or show us where she is, and we'll depart in pace."

"Oh, don't be in a hurry," said Braxley, blandly—"I just want to have a little necessary conversation with my—my—*wife* here, and then I'll be entirely at your service. Perhaps, meanwhile, if you would like to taste a drop of brandy; I've got some real good old stuff, and—"

"We don't want any, wid many thanks to ye for yer kind offer; liquor might make us *slappy*, and we want to keep wide awake just now," interrupted Mike, who was induced to decline the hospitable invitation of Mr. Braxley on account of his fears that an attempt might be made to poison or *drug* Simpson and himself, by the private introduction into the brandy of some foreign ingredient not necessary to constitute it a desirable or wholesome beverage.

Braxley's face expressed disappointment, as he led Peg Pickles to a distant corner of the cellar, for the purpose of holding with her the 'necessary conversation' to which he had alluded.

"I say, owld Black-muzzle," cried Mike, "make yer discourse wid yer *wife* as bafe as possible, for meself and me frind here are mighty anxious to get out of this thrap, by rayson of the smell, which is sthrong enough to kill a hog. Oeh, the murtherin' villain, to bring me poor young misthress to such a skunk's howl as this! May the devil fly away wid him for the same!"

Let us listen to the conversation which took place between Braxley and Peg Pickles, and which was conducted in whispered tones that were entirely inaudible to Simpson and Mike.

In the first place, Braxley communicated to his amiable partner all the particulars of his interview with General St. Croix. These particulars we need not of course repeat, as the reader is already acquainted with them. The narration being finished, Peg asked—

"And now, how do you intend to dispose of these two *funkies*, as you call them?"

"I scarcely know," replied Braxley, with an air of perplexity—"I had strong hopes of being able to administer some of our *sleeping powders* to them, which

would have rendered them insensible, and then, you know, we could have cut their throats and buried their bodies in the cellar without any difficulty. But that d—d Irishman is too shrewd for me, and will not partake of any liquor."

"Let us attack and overpower them," said Peg savagely—"I can easily handle the smallest fellow, while you certainly ought to be a match for the Irishman."

"No, thank you," responded Braxley, as he rubbed his bruised limbs with a rueful visage—"I've had enough of that Irish gentleman, I assure you. He is the very devil to fight. Never before did I receive such tremendous punishment as he inflicted upon me to-day. No, Peg, we are no match for them, and besides, they are armed with pistols."

"Then," said Peg, reflectively—"you had perhaps better give up the girl to them, and risk the chance of receiving some reward from the old General, who, you say, is her husband as well as her grand-father."

"That won't do, either," said Braxley. "In the first place, the girl must by this time be in a terrible plight. When did you see her last?"

"I carried her down some food and drink two or three hours ago," replied Peg. "She has not eaten anything since her imprisonment; and has become reduced to mere skin and bone. Her cheeks, which were so fresh and blooming when she was first brought here, are now pale and sunken like those of a corpse. She seems to breathe with difficulty, which I don't wonder at, as the air of the place is so damp and thick that it almost stifles me. She can't live but a few hours longer, Simon; I wonder that the rats have not devoured her before this."

"Well," said Braxley—"suppose that I should restore the girl to the General in this miserable condition. Why, instead of rewarding me, I am positive that he would cause my instant arrest, and I should then be in a devil of a scrape. No, no, I am not going to place myself in the iron grasp of justice, which would crush me. Let the girl die in the dungeon; she has turned out to be a very

unprofitable speculation after all. The rats will soon consume her remains, and then all traces of her will be lost forever. Oh, that I had these two *flunkies* in the dungeon, particularly that Irishman, so that I might gratify my thirst for vengeance by killing him by inches! Peg those two men *must not* leave this place alive, for if they do, we are ruined. Besides, they *will not* leave until the girl is delivered up to them, which I am determined she shall not be. And yet I dread to announce that determination to them, for that infernal, hot-headed Irishman will either shoot us or call in the officers of justice. Damnation! what shall we do with the fellows?"

"I have it!" cried Peg, joyfully; and then she whispered a few sentences in the ear of her partner, whose face suddenly assumed a look of intense satisfaction, as he said—

"That's a capital plan, Peg, and it's so simple that I wonder I did not think of it. Ah, it takes a woman to scheme out a thing of this kind. You are a most invaluable partner in business, Peg, and your ingenuity more than atones for your lack of beauty. Come, let us do this little job at once, for the sooner it is over the better; and then I shall feel easy in my mind."

Braxley and Peg now broke up their conference, and the former approached Simpson and Mike, saying—

"Excuse me, gentlemen, for keeping you waiting so long, but I was obliged to coax my wife a good deal in order to obtain her consent to the young lady's being given up to you without any positive certainty of my receiving any reward. You know that women are generally apt to look sharply after the dollars and cents. Well, she has consented at last, and now nothing remains to be done, but to place the young lady in your possession. This way, gentlemen, if you please."

Mike and Simpson arose and followed Braxley to that part of the cellar where was situated the trap-door leading to the dungeon below. We will here remark that the ladder, by which access was gained to the dungeon, had always been

removed by the careful Peg Pickles after each of her visits to Poor Lydia. Consequently, it was almost, if not quite impossible for any person who might have the misfortune to be imprisoned in that horrible place (which was of great depth) to effect an escape, unless assisted by friends who should discover the trap-door and lower down the ladder.

Mr. Braxley, aided by the officious Peg Pickles, raised the trap-door, which creaked horribly upon its rusty hinges. Mike and Simpson shuddered as they looked down into the dark and awful chasm, and they sickened as they inhaled the foul air that ascended from the vault.

"Do ye mane to say," demanded Mike, indignantly, as he leaned over the black and yawning pit, and vainly tried to look through the thick darkness that prevailed—"do ye mane to say that ye had the heart to put the poor young lady in such a devil's den as this? Why, ye murderin' old thafe, she can't surely be alive afther livin' down there."

"Go to her, and see!" exclaimed Braxley, as he suddenly gave the unsuspecting Mike a vigorous push that sent him headlong down into the vault. Mr. Simpson instantly followed, he having been hurled down by Peg Pickles. Ere the coachman and the *valet* could regain their feet, the trap-door was closed above their heads, and they found themselves securely imprisoned, and surrounded by impenetrable darkness. Their abrupt descent into the vault had injured them considerably; and the comfort of their position was not materially increased by the loud peals of triumphant laughter in which they heard Braxley and Peg Pickles indulging, in the cellar over their heads.

"Arrah, Simpson, me honey," said Mike, after a long pause.

"Vot is it, Mike?" responded the poor *valet*, in a doleful voice.

"Its my opinion that we are *enthrapped*."

"Not the least doubt of it. Oh, my heyes! Vot vill become of us?"

"And its also my opinion, Misther Simpson, that we have been dacently

thricked, and that the pair of us are nather more nor less than d—d fools! Och, murther! what will the owld General think when we don't bring him home the young misthress? Well, be me sowl, Simpson, I'm thinking we'd better say our prayers and get ready for kicking the bucket fair and asy, for sorra the one of us will ever get out of this place alive. Be the big toe of Shaint Pathric! if I only had Misther Black-muzzle down here wid me, I'd be contint!"

"Oh, dear!" cried the cockney *valet*, as he sat down upon the damp ground and began to weep most piteously—"Oh, dear! Have I got to die in this 'ere 'orrid 'ole? Shall I never again see my dear Dorothy! Am I never to drink any more 'alf-and-'alf at the *Bell in Hand*? Must I starve, vither and die like a rose vich is nipped by a hearily frost? Apollo Simpson, who vould ever ha' thought of your coming to this! Vot a hend to hall my hambitious haspirations—Vot a—murder! what's this!"

"Arrah, man alive, what the dev' ye?" demanded Mike.

"Murder!" repeated the terrified Simpson—"there's a snake, or crawling up my leg, while anot' got me by the seat of my pantaloons. Oh, I shall be *devoured*, I know I shall. Mur—der!"

"Howld yer whist, and drive off the bastes like a man, and don't be 'bellowin' like a cow. Here, where the devil are ye? Is it sittin' down that ye are? Sthand up on yer feet, me frind, and let's see what's best to be done. If we only had a light, now, we could explore this place, and see if there's any chance at all to get out of it. I'm thinkin, afther all, that Black-muzzle lied when he gave us to understand that the young misthress was down here. Oh, if we only had a light!"

"How lucky!" exclaimed Mr. Simpson, who had succeeded in driving away the troublesome vermin which had attacked him—"how lucky! I 'appen to 'ave in my pocket a box of friction matches and 'alf a wax candle. I don't mind telling you now, Mike, that I put the matches and

the candle in my pocket with the intention of paying a private visit to the General's wine-cellar, for the purpose of treating Dorothy and myself to a bottle of wine after dinner. You won't *herpose* me, will you, Mike?"

"Divil a chance will I ever have to do that same, Simpson dear," said Mike—"I don't wonder now that the owld General swore that his wine walked off mighty fast, for he had a great dale of private assistance in the drinkin' of it. But strike a light, me friend, and let's be afther beholding our new place of abode—worse luck!"

Mr. Simpson ignited a match and lighted the candle, which burned feebly in the damp and unwholesome atmosphere, but which, however, partially revealed the horrors of the place.

Our two unlucky adventurers now began to explore the dungeon in which they had been so unceremoniously incarcerated. This examination only tended to destroy every hope which they had previously entertained, of being able to break out of their gloomy prison, which was originally constructed as a place of deposit for stolen goods. At one time the vault had been used as a work-shop by a gang of counterfeiters, who were soon, however, compelled to abandon it on account of its extreme unwholesomeness. It was situated far beneath the level of the street outside, and there was no probability of breaking through its walls; for beyond those walls, on every side, was a solid and impenetrable barrier of earth, while it was impossible to reach the floor of the cellar overhead.

The courageous Mike, and the trembling Simpson shuddered as they contemplated the gloomy features of the infernal den. Its green, damp walls—its poisonous air—its darkness, which the feeble light of their candle could only partly diminish—the multitude of loathsome reptiles that clustered in every corner—all these things, to say nothing of their firm belief that they were doomed to drag out a miserable existence, and finally expire in that place, filled their souls with ineffable horror.

"Whist!" suddenly exclaimed Mike, as he assumed a listening attitude—"may I niver again behold the blue sky or the blessed sun if I didn't hear a groan!"

"I heard it, too!" said Simpson, "perhaps it was huttered by our poor young mistress!"

In a few moments the groan was repeated, and the men hastened towards that part of the vault from which it had seemed to proceed. Soon they nearly stumbled over a pile of rubbish, upon the top of which they indistinctly discerned the form of a human being.

"Who has come to visit the dying Lydia?" asked a feeble voice, which the two servants instantly knew to be that of their young mistress—"is it the frightful woman who brings me the loathsome food which I cannot eat, and the foul water which I dare not drink? Go away, horrible creature, and let me die in peace."

"We are friends, and have come to share your imprisonment," said Mike, eagerly. "Look up, mistress dear, and ye'll know us both; I am Mike, the owld General's coachman—sure ye remember me very well, for 'tis often I have driven ye around the city when ye were so beautiful that be me sowl I was proud of ye! And here, too, is Mither Simpson, the General's own man. The spalpeen is crying like a *gossoon*, and be the powers of mud, I'm crying too!"

The poor fellows, forgetting their own troubles, wept bitterly as they contemplated the deplorable condition of their young mistress, who had frequently bestowed upon them both, presents and words of kindness, and whom they regarded with that respectful affection which is often cherished by the humble dependent towards the considerate master or the gentle, benevolent mistress.

Lydia, whose mind was evidently wandering, now said in the same feeble voice in which she had before spoken—

"Oh, if you are friends you are welcome. But do not speak of the General; I do not wish to have his name mentioned. I must never see him again. It would not be right for us to meet after the terrible mistake which has happened. The

General is my grand-father. 'Tis a strange story, and I'll tell it to you some time; but not now. I want to go to sleep now, and dream of sunny skies and green fields, and the fresh, pure air, laden with the breath of flowers. Hark! I hear the birds singing—far, far away—amid the leafy branches of the trees."

"She's lost her senses intirely," whispered Mike to his companion—"Oh, murder! but it's hard to stand here and witness her sufferin's, and not be able to relave her. Poor creature! she'll soon be in a better world, and 'tis meself that hopes, Simpson dear, that we'll soon be afther followin' her there."

"I'm glad that you have brought a light with you," murmured Lydia—"it may serve to keep away the rats, which have been gnawing my flesh with their sharp teeth. Pray, do not let them come near me again. I want to die in peace. When I am gone, tell Ravellon that I loved him dearly—that assurance may comfort him, for I know that he will feel sorry when he learns that I am dead. Now draw the curtains close around my bed; closer—closer——"

She ceased. Her pale yet exquisitely beautiful face shone out from the surrounding gloom like a lovely countenance sketched by the painter's glorious art upon a dark ground.

"She's gone; may the Heaven's be her bed, and may bright angels welcome her sowl wid music," whispered Mike; and then the two humble men knelt down by the side of that rough bed, and in their own simple way fervently prayed. \* \* \*

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A PLEASANT AND CONVIVIAL PARTY.

PHILLIP RAVELLON, disguised in the squalid rags which extreme poverty usually wears, remained patiently at his post

near the cellar of Braxley, until long after night had 'thrown her sable mantle o'er the earth.' Weary of watching, and anxious to be relieved of his suspense concerning the fate of Lydia, he was about to knock at the door of the cellar and to try to procure admission under some pretence or other, when ten or a dozen half-drunken, vagabond-looking men and women approached, and surrounded him with looks that were expressive of hostility.

"Who be you?" demanded one of the gang, a dirty ruffian of most ferocious aspect.

"And wot are you doin' here?" inquired another, whose appearance was equally repulsive.

"Are you on the *lay* for plunder?" asked a woman, whose personal attractions were almost equal to those of Miss Peg Pickles, of pleasant memory.

"I don't know what you mean," said Ravellon, who, remembering his disguise and assumed character, spoke in the gruff manner peculiar to very ignorant and barbarous people.

"Don't know what we mean, eh?" sneered the ruffian who had first spoken—"you pretend to be d—d green, but it's my opinion, that your trying to play 'possum. You don't belong around these wharves; you're not one of us. We don't want any new thieves around here, to lessen our business, which is bad enough already. Come, give an account of yourself, or we'll murder you and throw your body into the drink!"

"Search him, and see if he's got any money about him," suggested one of the women.

"Wot's the use o' that? He ain't got a cent—look at his ragged harness!" said another. "He's some foreign dock-thief that wants to graze on our pasture, and the best thing we can do is to throw him into the river!"

Ravellon, meanwhile stood prepared to defend himself in case any of the gang attacked him. Concealed beneath his rags were a pair of pistols and a Bowie-knife of excellent slaughtering capacity; and it is therefore highly



probable that had the ruffians attempted to treat him with violence, they would have been repulsed in a manner that might have astonished them and sent some of their number into eternity.

Ravellon, however, wished if possible, to conciliate the wretches, and avoid a personal encounter which might result unfavorably to the accomplishment of his object with reference to Lydia. Accordingly, he addressed them in a mild tone, saying—

"Friends, you are mistaken. It is true that I am a stranger to you, and it is also true that I am on a *thieving lay*. But I don't intend to make these wharves around here my places of business. I just come down here to night out of mere curiosity, to see how things look; I've been absent from this city a great while."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed one of the party—and the speaker was a gentleman whose journey through life was performed with the assistance of a wooden leg—"Oh, ho! I begin to smell a rat. I understand you, stranger; you have just come out of prison, and you are cruising around so as to take the fresh air after a long confinement."

"That's just it," said Ravellon, who willingly accepted the construction which the gentleman with the wooden leg had placed upon his words.

"Well, that being the case," said one of the men, who seemed to be the leader of the party, and who now took Ravellon's hand and shook it heartily—"you are welcome to join us, if you like, provided that you have the means to treat us to some grog."

"I have a small trifle of money with me," said our hero, cautiously—"it is but very little, yet 'tis enough to get us two or three horns a-piece; where shall we go, comrades?"

"Oh," was the reply—"we'll go down into Braxley's *crib*; there's where we spend the most of our money and leisure time. Here it is, down in this cellar. Come along, my hearties."

"How singularly fortunate!" said Ravellon to himself—"in the company

of these wretches, who imagine me to be as degraded and abandoned as themselves, I shall now be enabled to gain admission to this place, which, of all others in the world, I am most anxious to enter. The enterprise in which I am engaged is a most desperate and hazardous one—for were these scoundrels to discover that I am not what I profess to be, they would surely murder me. But I am well armed, and will sell my life dearly."

Mr. Braxley himself opened the door and admitted the party. He regarded Ravellon with a look of suspicion, and demanded—

"Who is this stranger? I don't know him—never saw him before. We want no strangers here, until we have satisfied ourselves beyond a doubt that they are of the right kind—bold, true, able to make money, and willing to spend it."

"I'll answer for this chap, Simon," said the leader of the party—"he's just come out of *quod*, and seems to be one of the right sort. He's going to treat the company, and join our honorable brotherhood."

"Oh, that alters the case," remarked Mr. Braxley, as the sullen look which his villanous face had worn, vanished, and gave place to an expression of satisfaction—"he is heartily welcome. His honest rags recommend him to my favorable consideration; and his form and countenance both bear the true mark of a genuine dock-thief."

Ravellon briefly returned his thanks for these flattering compliments, and said that he'd endeavor to deserve them. He remarked that he had frequently heard Mr. Braxley spoken of in terms of unqualified praise, by various gentlemen of the dock-thieving profession who had from time to time, taken up their abode in the stone-mansion from which he (Ravellon) had just graduated. He was, he said, proud and happy to make Mr. Braxley's acquaintance; and he hoped to prove himself worthy of Mr. Braxley's confidence, and deserving of the friendship of the ladies and gentlemen with whom he now, for the first time, sat down to

the social board. He would not *boast* of his abilities as a dock-thief; but he would soon, with pleasure, show his friends that he could enter and rob the cabin of a vessel, or take a boat-load of pork or flour from a wharf in a workman-like and creditable manner. He concluded by intimating that cutting throats and throwing drunken sailors overboard, were mere pastimes with him.

Ravellon's speech was received with the most deafening applause. The miscreants all crowded around the orator, in order to shake hands with and congratulate him; and one of the loathsome women, to his ineffable disgust, sat down in his lap and began to besmear him with her filthy kisses, swearing that he 'talked like a preacher,' that she had 'fallen in love with him,' and that he must from that moment consider himself her 'man.' Our hero, not daring to repulse the horrible creature, from whose person, which was literally reeking with filth, were exhaled the combined odors of bad gin, decayed onions and rank tobacco—was compelled to endure her hideous and sickening caresses, with all the philosophy of which he was possessed.

Meanwhile, Mr. Braxley and Peg Pickles had placed upon the table sundry bottles and decanters containing brandy, gin, and various other stimulating beverages. It is needless to say that all hands, with the exception of Ravellon, drank freely. Our hero managed to dispose of his liquor beneath the table without being noticed. Pretending, however, to be as drunk as any of the company—he arose—somewhat to the personal inconvenience of the lady who was seated in his lap—and in a few eloquent remarks proposed, as a toast, the 'health of their worthy host, Mr. Braxley.'

Mr. Braxley—who was quite drunk—steadied himself by leaning on the back of a chair, and responded to the elegant compliment of which he was the highly gratified recipient. "Ladies and gentlemen," said he, laying his hand pathetically upon that portion of his breast where he supposed his heart to be located

—"you do me proud. This is the happiest moment of my life. I am affected, even to tears. Our stranger friend has, in the kindest manner, and in language far superior to his wardrobe, proposed my health. I thank him. I thank you all. In my humble way, I trust I have been of some service to the dock-thieves in this vicinity. My house and heart are always open to them, and they are welcome to partake of my bounty, (cheers) provided that they pay for the same at a reasonable rate. (A faint groan from the gentleman with the wooden leg.) Comrades and friends! I am about to propose a sentiment of a peculiarly affecting character. Fill your glasses and attend. Here is to the memory of our old comrade *Dick*, who now sleeps beneath the sod, he having been gloriously slain the other night, while professionally engaged in *cracking a crib*. He was a faithful *pal*, although rather too fond of his rum. Ladies and gentlemen, for propriety's sake let us drink this toast standing, and in silence."

The 'ladies and gentlemen' obeyed with reverence, little suspecting that the individual to whose memory they were drinking, was slain by the hand of the stranger who was then in their midst.

Proper respect having been paid to the memory of a defunct comrade, the party became noisy and jovial in the extreme. In the midst of the uproar, the gentleman with the wooden leg—who rejoiced in the humorous cognomen of '*Timber Shank*'—arose and claimed the attention of the company for a few moments. *Timber Shank* was not a handsome man, by any means; his nose was of the pug order, and looked like an enlarged pimple—his eyes resembled two decayed oysters floating in a bucket of blood, while his mouth, which was irregularly ornamented with a few small and crumbling tomb-stones, habitually wore that expression which a person of strong imaginative faculties would be apt to ascribe to a vocal bull-frog when that interesting reptile is about to break forth into a sentimental ditty. Notwithstanding his personal defects, how-

ever, Mr. Timber Shank was a man of gallantry, and adored the ladies. Having obtained the attention of the company, he commenced by imparting to his friends then and there assembled, the startling intelligence that his mother was a woman. (Sensation, and cries of hear! hear.) "Yes," said Timber Shank, as he looked around him with an air of stern defiance, which seemed to indicate his readiness to 'smash' any lady or gentleman who might dare to contradict him—"my natural parent was of the female sex, and I'm not ashamed to own it. In fact, I'm rather proud of it. (Cheers.) She died one day. (Cries of 'Wot a pity!') mingled with an indecent atmospheric performance by an excessively intoxicated gentleman who had fallen under the table.) Yes, she *croaked*, and was carted off in a pine coffin to her last home. (Here the speaker became deeply affected, and assaulted himself on the breast with his fist, in a manner that evinced a perfect recklessness with regard to his own personal comfort; this was to show the intensity of his emotions. However, he soon recovered himself, and went on.) Yes, she faded from the earth like a delicate flower, and died of the lock-jaw, brought on by penetrating the calf of the left leg with a knitting-needle while under the influence of drink. (Another loud demonstration from the man under the table.) Now, my friends, why do I inform you that my mother was a woman? It is to show you my respect for the sex. Why do I respect and admire the sex? Because the sex is beautiful, and soft, and loving, and necessary to the comfort, pleasure and happiness of man. Gentlemen, we are men, but let us not forget that there are ladies among us. Gentlemen, we are, strong, and rough, and tough—but let us not lose sight of the fact that there are women—weak, tender, frail women—looking up to us for protection and support, and encouragement. Gentlemen, arise, and let every one of us drain a bumper to the health, wealth, long life and prosperity of *Lovely Woman!*"

Tremendous and enthusiastic was the

applause with which this brilliant effort was greeted; and the toast having been drunk with all the honors, Peg Pickles arose to respond. Having snuffled forth her thanks in behalf of herself and the other ladies who were present, she proceeded to expatiate largely upon the variety of useful purposes which Women had been expressly created to serve. She delicately but emphatically intimated that, without the aid of Woman, the human family would soon become extinct. She alluded, in glowing and impassioned terms, to the physical capacity of Women to afford Man the highest and most exstatic enjoyment which it was possible for the mind to conceive. Peg next grew professional in her remarks, and spoke of female thieves as being the most expert in the world. "Their blandishments," said she—"and the thousand fascinating little arts which they know so well how to practice, enable them to reduce a man to a condition of voluptuous insensibility, and then nothing is easier than to relieve him of his money and valuables. When he awakens from his delicious trances, he finds his watch, pocket-book, and paramour among the missing; and he often submits to his loss rather than expose himself by making a complaint before a magistrate." Peg finally became rather loose and licentious in her remarks, and therefore we cannot follow her further. She concluded by proposing the well-known sentiment—"A short life and a merry one."

Speeches and toasts were now abandoned by the company; and singing and hard drinking became the order of the night. Ravellon, who pretended to drink freely, contrived to throw away, unperceived, all the liquor which was poured into his glass. Affecting to be very drunk he sang two or three Bacchanalian songs, which elicited unbounded applause, all hands joining in the chorusses. Finally, overcome by excessive drink, the wretches fell from their seats and sprawled out upon the floor, Ravellon among the rest; and soon they all, with the single exception of our daring adventurer, were buried

in the deep and death-like sleep, which an immoderate indulgence in strong drink is so apt to produce.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE DAWN OF HOPE.

Ravellon, being satisfied that every inmate of the cellar, with the exception of himself, was fast asleep, arose with extreme caution and began to search the place in the hope of finding the trap-door to which the dying Dick had vaguely alluded. His search was, however, unsuccessful; for, as we have before remarked, the trap-door communicating with the dungeon was so artfully constructed, that no uninitiated person could discover it.

Greatly disappointed and somewhat discouraged, our hero resumed his place upon the floor, and endeavored to devise some method of gaining the necessary information relative to the locality of the entrance to Lydia's prison. He was busily engaged with his thoughts, when the captain of the "Wharf Rangers," who had drank with more moderation than his comrades, arose from his hard couch, shook himself, and muttered—

"It's time that the gang was on the move, if that vessel is to be robbed to-night. It must now be near day-light. D—n the rum when it interferes with business in this way! A thief should never be a drunkard, for he ought always to have his wits about him. But I don't suppose that I could ever get my party to sign the temperance pledge. Well, I must rouse these fellows from their comfortable snooze; but first, as I've got the start this morning, I may as well do a little private business on my own hook."

"Snakey Sam," for that was the name of the speaker—and a very appropriate name it was, too, for he was long and slender, just like a snake, and was about as hideous as that reptile—now began to

go through with a process precisely similar to that in which Mr. Simon Braxley, on a former occasion which we have described, had indulged: Sam emptied the pockets and bosoms of his male and female companions of all the loose change which they possessed; he then bestowed the same attention upon Mr. Braxley, and Peg Pickles, who, lying near each other, were executing a *snoring duet* with surprising vigor and pleasing effect. Peg's performances, however, were decidedly superior to those of her 'lord and master,' for, being destitute of a nose, she was enabled to belch forth a tremendous volume of sound which, had it issued from a nasal organ in the natural manner, would have been compressed and *thinned out* in a way to materially destroy its magnificent compass.

Snakey Sam, having deprived Braxley and Peg of all the filthy lucre which they happened to have about them, approached Ravellon with the evident intention of investigating and appropriating the contents of his pockets. But our hero, fearing that the weapons with which he was armed might be discovered and excite suspicion—for the pistols and Bowie-knife which he carried were of too elegant and costly a description to be suitable to a man professing the occupation of a dock-thief—opened his eyes and moved his person by way of announcing to Sam that he was wide awake. Sam was somewhat confused at first, for he became unpleasantly aware that the stranger had witnessed his thieving operations; but he soon recovered himself and whispered to Ravellon—

"Don't say anything about my *shaking down* these fellows. We all rob each other as often as we can get the chance. Keep dark, and I'll divide with you."

"No," said Ravellon—"keep it all yourself. It's none of my business, and I'll never mention a word about it."

"You're a trump," said Sam—"and I like you. Our party is going now to rob a richly-freighted vessel that lays out in the stream not far from here. We have a boat ready, and the thing is all

fixed. Come, as I have full confidence in your being a staunch chap, you may go with us and have a share of the booty."

This arrangement did not suit Ravellon's purpose at all; and he therefore said—

"I'm very sorry, but I really can't go with you this time. The fact is, I've got a little private business to attend to in about one hour from now. After I have got through with the affair, I shall be altogether at your service. Will you excuse me?"

"Certainly, old chap," replied Snakey Sam—"business is business, and must be attended to. I plainly see that you're going to make a first-rate member of my gang, for you have a pair of eyes that convince me that you're not afraid of the devil himself. Besides, you can sing a good song, you can talk like a gentleman, and you can drink more rum than any other live man I ever saw. Why, last night your glass was always emptied as soon as it was filled. Will you meet me and my comrades here to-night, between eleven and twelve o'clock?"

Ravellon promised to do so, of course;—and then Snakey Sam began to kick and otherwise maltreat the ladies and gentlemen of his interesting party, so as to awaken them from their peaceful slumbers. They arose, grumbling and growling, rubbing their aching heads and mentally cursing their respected leader for having disturbed them so soon. When they discovered that all their available funds had been feloniously abstracted from the various places in which those funds had been deposited, their ill-humor increased; and the incensed proprietor of the wooden leg, forgetting his accustomed gallantry towards the fair sex, ferociously accused a lady, in whose arms he had reposed, of having "shaken him down" to the tune of two shillings in silver, several coppers, and a brass quarter which needed but the addition of a little quick-silver to render it a very *passable* coin. The accused lady indignantly denied the odious

charge, of which she was indeed innocent, Snakey Sam being the true culprit; but Timber Shank insisted that she was the thief, whereupon the indignant fair one "squared herself" in a truly scientific style, and forthwith began to "pitch into" her wooden-legged accuser—who was also her *lover* or "fancy man"—with a vigor inspired by the consciousness of her wrongs, for she herself had been robbed of a shilling or two which she had hidden in her chaste bosom. Timber Shank fought manfully, and many an uncomfortable punch did the Amazon receive in the region of her "bread-basket" from the iron-pointed artificial limb of her "bosom friend," who, however, finally got the worst of the encounter, and cried, "hold, enough!" much to the delight of the other ladies, who considered that this signal victory reflected credit upon them.

"Well," gasped poor Timber Shank, as he chafed and foamed beneath the sarcastic remarks of his comrades, who ridiculed him unmercifully on account of his having been beaten by a woman—"well, *some* one has robbed me, that's certain. It's a d—d pity that a man can't lie down to take a snooze among his own partners in business, without having his pockets picked. I'm more than half inclined to suspect that this stranger here—"

"Shut up!" interrupted Snakey Sam, with an oath—"don't dare to say anything against that stranger, or I'll have to give you a licking. The stranger's a good fellow, and he shan't be injured. What's the use of making such a muss about a few shillings, when we've got a job in hand that will perhaps bring us in fifty dollars a piece? Come, it's time that we were moving, if we are going to do anything. Let Simon and Peg, snooze away—our departure need not disturb them, and as for the stranger, he's got some business of his own to attend to, and can't go with us this time. Perhaps he'll be good enough to fasten the door after us, when we've gone out. Come along, we've no time to lose!"

Having opened the cellar door, the

whole gang of miscreants, women included, passed out into the street. Ravellon carefully re-fastened the door, and then sat down to reflect. He was now alone with Braxley and Peg Pickles, both of whom continued to sleep and snore with undiminished industry.

Our hero was not long in determining how to act, for a long and stout rope upon which his eyes happened to fall, suggested a plan which he proceeded to execute without any delay. Having cut the rope into pieces of a suitable size, he bound the limbs of the "sleeping beauties" in the most secure and effectual manner, so that, when they should awaken, they would be perfectly helpless and unable to move a hair's breadth. This being done, he bestowed upon each of them a vigorous kick, which aroused them from their slumbers. Imagine their astonishment and terror when they discovered their total inability to stir! Soon comprehending the predicament in which they were placed, they muttered the most horrid oaths, and demanded of Ravellon, who stood over them the meaning of all this?

"It means," replied our hero—"that you are helpless and in my power, and that I shall torture you both in the most terrible manner, unless you tell me where you have concealed Lydia St. Croix, the young lady whom you, Braxley, carried off from her home."

"Who are you?" demanded Braxley. "It matters not. Suffice it for you to know that I am the young lady's friend, and that I am determined to rescue her."

"Ah! you are a disguised imposter. I thought that your language was very refined for a man calling himself a river-thief; but I did not suspect you of being otherwise than you seemed. Well, sir, whoever you are, let me assure you that I never carried off any young lady from her home—and that there is no one concealed about these premises, to my knowledge. You have been misinformed, and have made a great mistake."

"Liar! Where is the trap-door that leads to the dungeon? Ha! your coun-

tenance betrays your guilt. Scoundrel!—instantly give me the information which I require, or, by the eternal God, I will blow out your brains and send your crime-blackened soul shrinking to the flames of hell!"

As he uttered these terrific words, Ravellon drew forth his pistols and levelled them at the head of the pale and trembling Braxley, who faltered out—

"Release me from these bonds, and I will then show you the trap-door."

"No," said our hero, decisively—"I will not trust you. Tell me where the trap-door is situated, and instruct me how to open it, and that will suffice."

"If I do this, will you then set me free, and pledge yourself not to injure me any further?"

"I shall make no promises, villain. But if you do not comply with my request, I shall give you and your hideous partner here a foretaste of the torments of the damned!"

"Will you not tell me how you found out that the young lady was in my possession, and also how you knew about the secret trap-door?"

"No! I will not parley with you. Come, speak out, or your moments are numbered!"

"He must have followed you and the two *flunkies* from the General's house," said Peg Pickles to Braxley—"and his enquiries about the trap-door are the result of mere *guess-work*. You'd better tell him all he wants to know, Simon, or else he will surely kill the pair of us. I know by the looks of his eyes, which blaze like coals of fire, that he's not to be trifled with."

"Let him kill us if he likes!" said Braxley, desperately—"we may as well die now as to be hung at some future time. Stranger, blaze away with your pistols; Simon Braxley will show you that he can die game. But first, for your edification, let me acknowledge to you that the lady of whom you are in search is confined in a secret, and to you, *inaccessible* dungeon connected with this cellar. With her are two of General St.

Croix's servants, who were sent here to take possession of Lydia; but I caught them in a nice trap, and they will never see day-light again. I will add for your further satisfaction that Lydia was dying yesterday, and is probably dead by this time. Ha, ha! *that* seems to stir you up! I suspect that you are the girl's lover; if so, of what use will her dead body be to you, particularly when it has been half devoured by rats!"

"Villain—devil!" groaned Ravellon, as his entire frame quivered with tremendous agony—"how shall I make you speak the words which can guide me to that accursed trap-door? Even at this moment poor Lydia's life may be flickering and dying out like the expiring flame of a lamp whose oil is consumed. Could I but grasp her *now* in my arms and bear her to the pure air and to the abode of some good physician, her precious life might yet be saved. Five or ten minutes hence, it may be too late, and she who is dearer to me than the life-blood that gushes from my bursting heart, may be no more. Hushed forever will be the music of her voice, quenched forever the light of her once brilliant eyes, and never again shall my melancholy soul expand and grow joyous beneath the genial warmth of her sweet radiant smiles! Braxley, on my bended knees I implore you to speak the blessed words that can give her to my arms! You shall have gold—anything and everything—so that you but give me my Lydia!"

"Bravo!" cried Braxley, ironically—"if my hands were free, I would clap them together and applaud your theatrical rhapsody. Why don't you go on the stage and play the sickly, sentimental lovers? Seriously, stranger, you must unbind me, or I won't give you the information which you demand."

"I will not unbind you," said Ravellon—"for I fear that you may catch me in the same ingenious *trap* in which you caught the two servants of General St. Croix."

"Oh, you *fear* me, then—you are, notwithstanding your fine words, a miserable coward, after all," said Braxley with a

sneer—"you, although well armed, are afraid of a man without weapons. Bah! what a white-livered cur!"

Ravellon's face grew purple with tremendous fury on hearing these insulting words, for he was brave even to rashness, and the odious name of "coward," although applied to him by that despicable scoundrel, almost maddened him. However, he restrained himself by a powerful effort, and said, hoarsely—

"Miscreant! 'tis true that you are as far beneath the notice of any man as is the dirt under his feet—yet, were it not for the distracting anxiety which I feel concerning my Lydia, I swear that I would cut the cords which bind you, and prove myself no coward by throwing away my weapons and meeting you on equal grounds—will you, or will you not, point out the means of penetrating to Lydia's place of confinement?"

"No!" thundered Braxley, who, finding himself in danger of falling into the hands of the authorities, preferred instant death to the horrors of a long imprisonment—"no! You may tear up the floor of the cellar, but immense masses of stone will stay your further progress. Come, you have my answer; kill me if you like. I will die like a man!"

"And I will die like a woman!" cried Peg Pickles, who, however, did not believe that Ravellon really intended to kill either her or her partner in crime.

"Miserable wretches!" said our hero, calmly—"you shall both of you experience tortures ten times more terrible than the pangs of death. Braxley, I will begin with *you*. You shall be tormented with fire, and when I have become weary of listening to your groans of anguish, I will tear out by the roots the accursed tongue which you refuse to employ in directing me to the prison of my Lydia."

Ravellon approached the fire-place, in which had been heaped up a large quantity of shavings, kindling stuff and logs of wood. This fuel had been stolen from a neighboring ship-yard by the industrious Miss Pickles herself; for that estimable lady was ever on the alert to procure, without money and without

price, all the necessities and not a few of the comforts of life, and fuel was essential to the preparation of the dainty food on which she and Mr. Braxley were accustomed to feast. Ravellon ignited a match and applied it to the shavings. Soon a great blaze was roaring up the chimney and sending forth a most intense heat. Mr. Braxley surveyed these operations with a troubled look; but his uneasiness was changed to terror when Ravellon seized him by the heels and dragged him towards the roaring and crackling flames, which illuminated every corner of that squalid den, and distinctly revealed all its loathsome features.

"What in the devil's name are you going to do with me?" demanded Braxley—"am I to be roasted alive?"

"Yes," was the cool reply of Ravellon, as he placed the rascal upon the hearth a short distance from the fire.

Mr. Braxley soon began to feel uncomfortably warm; he began to edge away from the fire—but in vain; so securely was he bound that he could not move in the slightest degree. In a few minutes his sufferings became most intense, and he writhed in agony. The tremendous heat scorched and blistered his face, and singed his hair from his head. For some time, in the desperate obstinacy of his nature, he refrained from uttering a cry, or even a groan; but at length the horrible torments which he suffered became too excruciating for human endurance, and the most terrific yells burst from his parched and cracking lips. His tongue, which was black, blistered and swollen, projected from his mouth, his inflamed eyes almost started from their sockets, while every vein, nerve and sinew in his body seemed about to snap asunder.

"Mercy—mercy!" he gasped—"I can't bear it. Spare me, for God's sake!"

"No mercy shall you receive," said Ravellon, coldly—"until you consent to direct me to the prison of Lydia."

"Kill me at once, I implore you," groaned the wretched man.

"No; you must die by slow degrees," was the stern reply.

"Drag me away from the fire; I will do whatever you ask," said Braxley.

Ravellon immediately removed the suffering wretch from the fire. Braxley, overcome by the tortures which he had endured, and by the pain which he continued to feel, fainted. Ravellon dashed a quantity of cold water over him; but he did not revive.

"He is dead," said our hero—"and now, woman," (addressing Peg Pickles,) "will you show me the entrance to the dungeon, or do you prefer to undergo torments similar to those which I have just inflicted upon your precious partner here?"

"I will give you all the information you ask," replied Peg, who had been a horrified witness of Braxley's sufferings.

Ravellon unfastened the cord that confined the woman's feet, and assisted her to rise. He did not, however, release her arms.

"Now," said our hero—"show me the trap-door, and do not attempt to deceive me, if you wish to avoid a roasting. You have seen enough of me to know that I am not to be trifled with."

"That's a fact," said Peg with a hoarse laugh, as she spurned the form of Braxley with her foot—"but I hated this scoundrel, and I thank you for having put him out of the way. He was a petty tyrant, an unprincipled scamp, and a cruel brute, as many scars and bruises upon my person will testify, for he was in the frequent habit of beating and abusing me in the most savage manner. Well, thank the Lord and you, sir, his miserable career is ended, and I shall now have a chance to reform and become a better woman."

"Peace, hag!" cried Ravellon, sternly—"I am not to be imposed upon by your hypocritical prating. Think not to induce me to show you favor, by your empty professions of repentance! You are just as bad as was your infamous partner here, and worse; for, hideous as you are, you are still a woman, and should have had some feeling of pity and sympathy for one of your sex who had fallen into the power of a remorseless villain. In-



stead of that, you have aided and abetted Braxley in his infernally wicked operations. Come, no more words, but show me the trap-door."

Peg grumbled and walked to another part of the cellar, followed by Ravellon, who, fearing some treachery, watched her every movement with the closest attention.

"Here," said the woman, as she paused and pointed with her foot towards one of the boards which formed the floor of the cellar—"if you have a knife about you, insert the point of it into that crack, and pry up the board. So;—now do you see an iron ring? Well, take hold of that ring, and pull upwards with all your might. The trap-door is very heavy; loosen my arms, and I will help you to raise it."

Ravellon declined the obliging offer, for reasons of his own. Possibly he entertained a high opinion of Peg's ability to execute ingenious stratagems, and did not desire to afford her an opportunity of practising her skill upon him.

The trap-door was indeed very heavy, but Ravellon succeeded in raising it. While standing upon the verge of the dark abyss, a sudden and suspicious movement on the part of Peg Pickles attracted his notice, and he discovered that she had placed herself directly behind him.

"It is very dark and gloomy down there," remarked Peg, as she edged up closer to Ravellon.

The reader will rightly conjecture that it was her intention to precipitate our hero into the yawning pit, in a manner similar to that in which Simpson and Mike had been disposed of. She could easily have effected her object, for, although her hands were tied, the slightest push with one of her feet would have sufficed to pitch Ravellon headlong down into the dungeon, upon whose extreme edge he was standing.

Instantly comprehending the woman's design, Ravellon sprang back and ordered her to retire to a distant corner of the cellar, at the same time assuring her that in case she attempted to move without his permission, her instant death was

certain. Peg, not daring to disobey, and feeling excessively enraged and mortified in view of the defeat of her benevolent intention, shuffled off, growling like a she bear of an irritable temper, when that animal is supposed to be afflicted with a sore head.

Taking up the ladder which lay near, Ravellon lowered it down into the dungeon and carefully placed it in its proper position. Then he exclaimed, in a loud voice—

"If two of the servants of General St. Croix are down there, they will be glad to know that a friend has come to their rescue; they will instantly ascend this ladder, and be sure to bring with them the body of Lydia, whether she be living or dead. Haste, friends, for the love of God—haste!"

A few moments of profound silence ensued—a silence so painful, and so fraught with terrible suspense, that Ravellon could distinctly hear the throbbings of his own heart.

"There is no one here, after all," he muttered, as the cold perspiration streamed from his forehead—"or else the two servants have perished. If they were unable to endure the horrors of the place, how can I hope that Lydia still lives? I must secure that abominable hag, and then descend into the dungeon in search of the body of my beloved. It will afford me a melancholy satisfaction even to gaze upon her cold and inanimate remains; and I can in future unhappy years strew her grave with fresh flowers and water them with my tears."

Hark! he hears the sound of voices below, and the next moment he is certain that persons are ascending the ladder. Simpson first makes his appearance; he is followed by Mike, bearing in his arms the motionless form of poor Lydia.

To snatch that still and wasted form from the arms of the wondering Mike—to press it wildly to his breast—and to kiss, again and again, the cold, pallid lips of her whom he loved—all these movements on the part of Ravellon occupied but a second of time.

"She's mine!" he exclaimed, with

startling vehemence—"no human power shall wrest her from me! But, alas! she is dead. Oh, that I could but once again behold the light of her soul-speaking eyes! She is gone, but I swear that I will not survive her. Friends, let me be buried near her place of rest. It is the last prayer of a dying man. Lydia, I come to thee!"

Uttering these frantic words, Ravellon drew forth a pistol, applied it to his forehead, and was about to pull the trigger, when he fancied that his left hand, which rested upon the bosom of Lydia, directly over her heart, felt a slight pulsation. Almost crazy with joy he examined her closely, and discovered—with what overwhelming emotions we shall not attempt to say—that life still clung feebly in its frail tenement of clay.

"She lives—she lives!" cried Ravellon, and both Simpson and Mike leaped for joy on hearing the welcome announcement—"thank God there is now a hope that I may again behold my Lydia in the possession of life, health and beauty. But no time is to be lost. Friends, I will convey my precious burden to the house of a physician with whom I am acquainted. Do you take charge of that detestable hag in yonder corner, and deliver her up to justice. Her partner in crime has already received the reward of his atrocities. Farewell, until we meet again!"

Ravellon, bearing the light and delicate form of Lydia St. Croix in his arms, hastily unfastened the door of the cellar, rushed forth into the street, and flew, rather than ran, towards a respectable quarter of the city in which resided a friend of his, who was a well-known and skillful physician.

## CHAPTER XX.

THREE OF OUR CHARACTERS TAKE THEIR FINAL LEAVE OF THE READER.

Mr. Michael O'Hara, Hibernian coachman, and Mr. Apollo Simpson, British valet—after the abrupt departure of Ravellon with their young mistress in his arms—surveyed each other for some time with puzzled looks, which can scarcely be wondered at, in view of the strange events that had taken place within the previous five minutes. To be thus unexpectedly released from the dungeon—to discover that Lydia, whom they had given up as dead, still lived—and to behold her thus unceremoniously carried off by a ragged and decidedly hard-looking customer who was to them a total stranger who called the young lady *his* Lydia, and who, before he found out that she was still alive, was going to blow out his brains—all these wonderful circumstances completely staggered our two friends, and several minutes elapsed before either of them could speak. At length Mike found the use of his tongue and remarked—

"Arrah, Simpson, me boy."

"Vot?" responded the cockney valet.

"Would ye be plazed to give me your opinion on these sthrange evints, any way?"

"My heyes! I don't know vot to think."

"Bedad, nor more does meself. Well, we're free from the dungeon, and the young mistress is alive, thank God for both favors, amin. But 'it's troubled I am because we let the lady be carried off by that dirty-looking sthranger, for she may resave more bad treatment, and we shall nivir know where to find her. Och, wirra, wirra! we've just got out of one trouble to get into another—worse luck!"

"Depend upon it, Mike, it's hall right," said Simpson—"that stranger is

a friend, or he wouldn't have let us hout of the dungeon. Vasn't *that* a hact of friendship? Now, as to his being ragged and dirty, I think that he must have been in disguise, for vasn't his language that of a gentleman? And then his conduct vent to show that he vas in love with young mistress. Betwixt you and me Mike, I think he must be a particular friend of the lady's, perhaps her lover, vich wouldn't be much out of the vay, seeing as how the General is so precious hold. Vell, this lover having found out that the hobject of his hadoration had been carried to this place, takes and disguises himself, and makes his appearance in the manner vich we have seen. Vy, bless yer 'art, it's hail as plain as the nose on yer face!"

"That's all raysonable enough," said Mike—"and ye have relaved me mind of a cart-load of suspinse. The sstranger was a gintleman disguised as a black-guard, and the misthress will be safe in his care. He'll send or bring us word where we can find him. Let us now attend to business, and afterwards lave this devil's den to the rats, bad luck to them! 'Tis hard work we had, Simpson dear, to kape them from devourin' us and the misthress. Where is the faymale that the sstranger tould us to deliver up to justice? Och, there she is, in the corner beyant. Come out o'that, ye she imp of ould Satar, and give an account of yerself—d'ye mind?"

Peg Pickles reluctantly came forward, and regarded the two men with a sullen look.

"Where's yer frind—I mane Misther Black-muzzle?" demanded Mike.

"There he lies," was the reply—"he is dead. That stranger roasted him to death because he refused to point out the entrance to the dungeon. I showed him the trap-door, and therefore, gentlemen, you are indebted to me for your release. Now repay the obligation by treating me with moderation."

"Arrah, none of yer blarney, ye ould hell-cat," said Mike—"if ye showed the way to our dungeon, it was only to pre-

sarve yerself from being broiled like a herrin', and not from good-will, at all. Simpson, me boy, I'll tell ye what we'll do with this devil of a woman, who helped Black-muzzle to pitch us into the hole. Faith, we'll make her take our place below, and thin she can see how *she* likes livin' wid the rats. That'll be the best justice we can give her. Now, me beauty, plaze to walk down that laddher mighty quick, or be jabbers I'll throw ye down head-first as ye did me frind Simpson—d'ye mind?"

Peg implored for mercy, but in vain; she was compelled to descend the ladder, which was immediately removed by the men, who next turned their attention to the bound prostrate form of Braxley.

"He's dead, sure enough," said Mike—"let's throw his carcass into the vault, to kape company wid the woman. Be me sowl the rats will have a fine faste now!"

Braxley was accordingly thrown down into the vault; the trap-door was then closed, and the two men took their departure.

When they arrived home, they found everything in confusion; servants were hurrying to and fro with agitated faces, and the general excitement which prevailed seemed to announce that some important event had just transpired.

"What's the maning of all this row?" asked Mike of one of his fellow-servants

"Why," was the hasty reply—"the General has just expired. Good Lord! what are we all coming to!"

Peg Pickles, on finding herself an inmate of the dungeon, in company with what she supposed to be the dead body of Braxley, abandoned herself to despair, and made that gloomy vault resound with her cries and curses.

"If he were only alive," she exclaimed—"to share with me the horrors of this imprisonment, I should be content; but 'tis terrible to be here *alone*!"

Scarcely had she uttered these words, when she was startled by hearing a deep groan which seemed to have proceeded

from the lips of Braxley. In a few moments that gentleman—who had merely fallen into a swoon from which he had just recovered—asked in a feeble voice—

"Where am I?"

"So you are not dead after all, eh?" said Peg Pickles, as she groped her way to his side—"well, I'm glad of it, for I want company here. Simon, it's all over with us, for we are in the dungeon, and you know that our voices can never reach the ears of the gang overhead, when they come to night. Not one of them knows the secret of the trap-door; and, not finding us in the cellar as usual, they will imagine that we have been arrested by the police, a belief that will frighten them away. There's no hope for us, Simon."

"None," groaned Braxley—"but tell me all that happened during my swoon."

Peg obeyed; and when she had finished, her villainous partner cursed her bitterly for having pointed out to Ravellon the entrance to the dungeon. A fierce war of words ensued between the wretched pair, each of whom accused the other of being the cause of their misery. Finally, however, their anger cooled down, and they began to talk more rationally.

"If my limbs were unbound," said Braxley—"I should feel much easier, although I am almost crazy with thirst, and my burnt face pains me horribly."

Peg, making a desperate and powerful effort, succeeded in liberating her arms from the cord which had confined them; and she then easily relieved her companion of his bonds.

Several days passed, during which that wretched couple suffered all the pangs of hunger and thirst. Finally, a sort of strange madness came over them, and they grew afraid of each other, exchanging not a single word, and cowering down in different corners of the dungeon. At length, one night, when Braxley had lain himself down to die, he heard something creeping slowly towards him through the darkness; closer, closer

came that crawling object, and the blood of the dying man ran cold with horror when he felt a breath upon his blistered face and a clammy hand upon his throat. Suddenly, the fearful being who hovered over him uttered a shrill cry like that of a bird of prey; and then the hand tightened around the throat of Braxley until his black soul winged its flight to an unknown world. There, amid the gloom of that awful place, lay the corpse of the villain; while she, who had been his partner in crime, mangled and tore the flesh of the dead man with her teeth.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### AND LAST.

LYDIA was saved! The skillful physician to whose professional and fatherly care Ravellon had consigned her, soon restored her to consciousness; and, at the expiration of two days after her providential release from the horrible place of her imprisonment, she was able to sit up and converse with Ravellon, who had scarcely ever left her bed-side, and who had, of course, resumed his own proper habiliments in lieu of the squalid garments in which he had been disguised.

Ravellon had informed his fair friend of everything, including the death of General St. Croix—an event which, as might have been expected under the circumstances, did not fill her breast with any great amount of sorrow. As for Ravellon, he regarded the General's death as a most-fortunate occurrence for *him*, as he considered that there was now no obstacle in the way of his union with Lydia.

We need not pause to describe the astonishment which was felt and expressed by our hero, when he learned from the lips of Lydia, her *double* relationship to General St. Croix. Neither need we stop

to record the warm congratulations which passed between the lovers—for such we may call them—in view of that ill-assorted marriage having been strictly *Platonic*.

Upon examining the General's will, it was ascertained that he had left the whole of his vast property to Lydia. This will he had signed but a few hours before his death. The document provided that in case the young lady could not be found, the property should remain in the hands of certain responsible parties until her fate could be satisfactorily ascertained. In the event of her death being placed beyond a doubt, the property was to be divided among several of the General's distant relatives.

Again did the enamoured Ravellon enjoy the unspeakable happiness of beholding Lydia in the full possession of health and radiant beauty. Having liberally remunerated the good physician who had restored her, from a dying condition, to a world which, to one of her enthusiastic and poetic temperament, contained so many sources of felicity, she resumed her former splendid abode in P—Square. Ravellon visited her frequently, and she always received him with a transport of joy. But the melancholy writer was not happy.

"Ah!" he would say to himself—"she is only grateful to me for the services which I have rendered her. She does not love me. How can she, the mistress of an immense fortune, love a poor devil like me? Since the very first day I saw her, I have been making a fool of myself by aspiring to the love of that bright, beautiful being. I remember her words at our first interview—'I like thee, but I do not love thee.' It is very evident that I cannot secure her affections; she looks upon me as a mere friend—an agreeable companion—and that is all. No, she cannot love me, and that thought is killing me. Beware Ravellon! let not your heart break on account of a woman, who cares not one straw for you. 'Tis time that I should act like a man. I shall see Lydia once more; and, having told her that a regard for the preservation of

my own happiness compels me to discontinue my visits to her, I shall bid her farewell forever!"

It is strange that the intellectual and highly gifted Ravellon should have been such a fool as not to see that Lydia St. Croix was dying for him, for she manifested her passionate love in every way that a woman could, consistently with propriety. But Philip was a queer mortal, and the violence of his attachment to the idol of his soul made him act and think very absurdly. How could Lydia have helped loving him—for, although he was not what the world calls handsome, he was brilliant, talented, honorable, chivalrous and brave; and his fascinating traits of character charmed and enamoured the enthusiastic young lady ten thousand times more than mere personal comeliness could have done. Besides, had not Ravellon risked his own life to save hers, and was not that circumstance in itself sufficient to make him most dear to her?

Ravellon did see Lydia once more; and she noticed with deep concern that he looked pale and ill. He was also more than usually taciturn and gloomy; and he replied briefly, almost rudely, to her playful, good-humored sallies.

This strange conduct on the part of Ravellon suggested a very unhappy train of thoughts to the mind of Lydia St. Croix.

"This man," she reflected—"no longer loves me. It is perfectly natural that he should despise me; for he remembers the night when I received him into my chamber—that eventful night, when he so successfully personated the fop, small-fry, for whom I was so unaccountably foolish as to cherish an absurd transient passion. Yes—Ravellon, who on that night came so very near triumphing over my virtue, despises me for my frailty, and is afraid to put his trust in me. Alas! if Philip only knew how madly I love him, he would take pity on me, and treat me with less coldness. He would forgive and forget the temporary weakness which I displayed that night."

Thus we see that Philip and Lydia, between whom existed a warm mutual love, were distrustful of each other. Such misunderstandings between lovers are common enough, and the most unhappy results sometimes follow. Many a man and woman, although loving each other most truly and devotedly, have separated forever because they doubted each other's love, and had not the courage to insist upon a mutual understanding.

It was after a somewhat embarrassing pause that Lydia, who was seated upon the sofa with Ravellon, suddenly took courage to place herself close to the side of the melancholy and misanthropic writer; and, as she gently parted the black masses of hair that clustered about his intellectual forehead, with her delicate and richly-jeweled fingers, she said to him in a voice that was full of melting tenderness—

"Dear Philip, you do not seem well this evening, I have begun to fancy that you are declining in health."

"Lydia," said Ravellon, seriously—"you are the cause of my illness. Nay, hear me out. It is too true that 'hope deferred maketh the heart sick.' This is our last interview, Lydia, for you do not, cannot love me, and every occasion of our meeting, while it increases my affection for you, adds to my unhappiness and despair. We must part now and part forever, dear Lydia—for dear you are to me, and ever shall be. It will be better for us both to see each other no more. I have awakened from the bright dream of happiness which enthralled my senses. Forgive me, Lydia, for presuming to love you—you, the young, the beautiful, the wealthy, the centre of admiration; and what am I?—plain in person, twelve years your senior, unknown to the gay world, and poor!"

These last words were spoken bitterly. and Ravellon, as he uttered them, turned away his head. He could not bear longer to look upon Lydia, whom he regarded as a prize far above his reach. As if in mockery of his despair, the young

lady looked ravishingly beautiful that evening, and she was dressed with even more than her usual elegance, in a magnificent robe of black satin, the bright gloss of which contrasted superbly with her white polished shoulders, that were revealed in all their plumpness and faultless symmetry of proportion. The apartment, too, was well calculated to engender voluptuous thoughts, for it was the *boudoir* of Lydia, and was furnished with feminine and exquisite taste. Rare paintings, classic statues and fragrant flowers, met the eye on every side, while the soft, subdued light which was shed from a glass-shaded lamp, held by the hand of a sculptured Cupid, increased the dreamy luxurious aspect of the place. In short, Lydia's apartment was a bower of beauty, in which Love might have nestled in perfect contentment.

Ravellon, as we remarked, turned away his head in order to shut out the enchanting vision of loveliness which, he imagined, was soon to be removed forever from his gaze. But what is this that steals around his neck and causes every nerve in his body to thrill with ecstatic rapture? It is the soft, white, naked arm of Lydia. And what perfume is this, sweeter than the odor of flowers, that fans his cheek and intoxicates his senses? Ah! it is the breath of Lydia, who now presses her lips to his, and whispers—

"Then you love me, Ravellon? Oh, bless you, a thousand times bless you, for that welcome assurance. Do you doubt my feelings towards you, Phillip? Oh, look into my eyes, which you poets say are the mirrors of the soul—look there, dearest, and read the intensity of my love for you. Come, now we understand each other—let there be no more doubt, uncertainty, or assumed indifference between us; and do not, naughty one, again speak of parting. Dear Philip, you are pale and thin, but I will be your nurse, and you shall see how soon I'll restore you to perfect health. Away with every feeling of sorrow and despair my husband—for such you shall be this very night, in the

sight of heaven. I cannot delay our union a single hour. Oh, delicious night! This felicity more than repays me, a thousand times for all that I have suffered!" \* \* \* \*

Half an hour afterwards, Philip Ravellon and Lydia St. Croix were regularly united in marriage by a reverend gentleman who had been hastily sent for. The solemn ceremony was performed in Lydia's *boudoir*, and was witnessed by all the servants of the house, including our old friends, Simpson and Mike, who gazed with mingled admiration and awe at the deeply interesting scene.

The clergyman blessed the newly-married couple, pocketed his very liberal fee, (a bank-note for five hundred dollars,) and departed. The servants then offered their humble but honest congratulations, and withdrew, leaving Ravellon and his bride alone.

Lydia, almost fainting with excess of happiness, threw herself into her husband's arms and seemed determined to devour him with kisses. He, with a coolness and self-possession which, under the circumstances, were most astonishing, drew from his breast a little parcel; this he handed to his wondering bride with a serio-comic air.

"What is this, dear Philip?" demanded the fluttering and impatient little wife, whose finely developed bosom seemed ready to burst with the load of felicity which it contained.

"Examine it, and see," answered the husband, with the ascetic air of a religious recluse.

"How provoking you are, Philip!" pouted the glowing, panting little beauty, as her taper fingers removed the silken cord that was wound around the parcel.

The cord, and then the envelope, were thrown aside, and Lydia held in her hand—a *Lady's Garter*!

Lydia remembered it; it was the one which she had presented to Philip, at his urgent solicitation.

"Ever since it first came into my pos-

session," said our hero, as he received and returned the passionate caresses of his bride—"I have worn it next my heart. Never shall I part with it, for 'tis a sacred memento of our first acquaintance. 'Twas this pretty little trifle—this magical talisman—that laid the foundation of my present happiness. But, Lydia, the sight of this garter of thine suggests a question, which I have now a right to ask thee?"

"What is it, Philip?"

"Where is the mate to this garter?"

"Follow me, and I will show thee."

As she uttered these words, which were accompanied by a slight blush, the *virgin widow of her grand-father* opened a door which separated her *boudoir* from her bed-chamber. Ravellon's blood quickened and his heart palpitated as he crossed the threshold of that voluptuous sanctuary, wherein he dimly saw the luxurious outlines of a splendid couch which was laden with snowy clouds of gauze and satin drapery.

The door between the *boudoir* and the chamber was now re-closed and locked; and then—what subsequently transpired, we know not, although we presume that Ravellon was permitted to examine, to his entire satisfaction, the *other garter* which he had so earnestly desired to behold.

Mr. and Mrs. Ravellon lived very happily together, as all respectable married people ought to do. They were, in the course of time, blessed with numerous children, as all decent, affectionate and Bible-obeying married people certainly should be. If they are not, they must find out where the fault lies, and cause that fault to be remedied as soon as possible, taking care to pay no attention whatever to the quack advertisements in the newspapers, which are mere "*bosh, bosh*"—the Oriental expression for "*d—d humbug*."

Mr. Apollo Simpson took unto himself a wife in the fair person of Miss Dorothy, whose first-born strangely resembled Mr. Philip Ravellon. Mr. Michael O'Haar

remained a "roving bachelor," and, with Mr. and Mrs. Simpson, continued in the service of their young mistress;

Mr. Harry Smalfry, eluding the vigilance of his mamma, suffered himself to be deluded into matrimony, when he was twenty-two years of age, by an artful and vinegar-faced old maid, who chewed snuff, wore false hair and teeth, and kept five pet tom-cats, twelve rabbits, one poll-parrot which used profane language to an extent that

was positively frightful. Mr. Smalfry lived but a year or two after his marriage, being henpecked to death by his interesting wife, who, by the way, was a strong advocate of "woman's rights."

The author of these pages has now arrived at the end of his narrative; and as he throws aside his well-worn pen, he earnestly hopes that his readers may enjoy the largest possible amount of health and happiness.

THE END.



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