A Perilous Secret eBook

A Perilous Secret by Charles Reade

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A PERILOUS SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

The poor man's child.

Two worn travellers, a young man and a fair girl about four years old, sat on the towing-path by the side of the Trent.

The young man had his coat off, by which you might infer it was very hot; but no, it was a keen October day, and an east wind sweeping down the river. The coat was wrapped

tightly round the little girl, so that only her fair face with blue eyes and golden hair peeped out; and the young father sat in his shirt sleeves, looking down on her with a loving but anxious look. Her mother, his wife, had died of consumption, and he was in mortal terror lest biting winds and scanty food should wither this sweet flower too, his one remaining joy.

William Hope was a man full of talent; self-educated, and wonderfully quick at learning anything: he was a linguist, a mechanic, a mineralogist, a draughtsman, an inventor. Item, a bit of a farrier, and half a surgeon; could play the fiddle and the guitar; could draw and paint and drive a four-in-hand. Almost the only thing he could not do was to make money and keep it.

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Versatility seldom pays. But, to tell the truth, luck was against him; and although in a long life every deserving man seems to get a chance, yet Fortune does baffle some meritorious men for a limited time. Generally, we think, good fortune and ill fortune succeed each other rapidly, like red cards and black; but to some ill luck comes in great long slices; and if they don't drink or despair, by-and-by good luck comes continuously, and everything turns to gold with him who has waited and deserved.

Well, for years Fortune was hard on William Hope. It never let him get his head above-water. If he got a good place, the employer died or sold his business. If he patented an invention, and exhausted his savings to pay the fees, no capitalist would work it, or some other inventor proved he had invented something so like it that there was no basis for a monopoly.

At last there fell on him the heaviest blow of all. He had accumulated L50 as a merchant's clerk, and was in negotiation for a small independent business, when his wife, whom he loved tenderly, sickened.

For eight months he was distracted with hopes and fears. These gave way to dismal certainty. She died, and left him broken-hearted and poor, impoverished by the doctors, and pauperized by the undertaker. Then his crushed heart had but one desire—to fly from the home that had lost its sunshine, and the very country which had been calamitous to him.

He had one stanch friend, who had lately returned rich from New Zealand, and had offered to send him out as his agent, and to lend him money in the colony. Hope had declined, and his friend had taken the huff, and had not written to him since. But Hope knew he was settled in Hull, and too good-hearted at bottom to go from his word in his friend's present sad condition. So William Hope paid every debt he owed in Liverpool, took his child to her mother's tombstone, and prayed by it, and started to cross the island, and then leave it for many a long day.

He had a bundle with one brush, one comb, a piece of yellow soap, and two changes of linen, one for himself, and one for his little Grace—item, his fiddle, and a reaping hook; for it was a late harvest in the north, and he foresaw he should have to work his way and play his way, or else beg, and he was too much of a man for that. His child's face won her many a ride in a wagon, and many a cup of milk from humble women standing at their cottage doors.

Now and then he got a day's work in the fields, and the farmer's wife took care of little Grace, and washed her linen, and gave them both clean straw in the barn to lie on, and a blanket to cover them. Once he fell in with a harvest-home, and his fiddle earned him ten shillings, all in sixpences. But on unlucky days he had to take his fiddle under his arm, and carry his girl on his back: these unlucky days came so often that still as he travelled his small pittance dwindled. Yet half-way on this

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journey fortune smiled on him suddenly. It was in Derbyshire. He went a little out of his way to visit his native place—he had left it at ten years old. Here an old maid, his first cousin, received Grace with rapture, and Hope pottered about all day, reviving his boyish recollections of people and places. He had left the village ignorant; he returned full of various knowledge; and so it was that in a certain despised field, all thistles and docks and every known weed, which field the tenant had condemned as a sour clay unfit for cultivation, William Hope found certain strata and other signs which, thanks to his mineralogical studies and practical knowledge, sent a sudden thrill all through his frame. "Here's luck at last!" said he. "My child! my child! our fortune is made."

The proprietor of this land, and indeed of the whole parish, was a retired warrior, Colonel Clifford. Hope knew that very well, and hurried to Clifford Hall, all on fire with his discovery.

He obtained an interview without any difficulty. Colonel Clifford, though proud as Lucifer, was accessible and stiffly civil to humble folk. He was gracious enough to Hope; but, when the poor fellow let him know he had found signs of coal on his land, he froze directly; told him that two gentlemen in that neighborhood had wasted their money groping the bowels of the earth for coal, because of delusive indications on the surface of the soil; and that for his part, even if he was sure of success, he would not dirty his fingers with coal. "I believe," said he, "the northern nobility descend to this sort of thing; but then they have not smelled powder, and seen glory, and served her Majesty. *I have*."

Hope tried to reason with him, tried to get round him. But he was unassailable as Gibraltar, and soon cut the whole thing short by saying: "There, that's enough. I am much obliged to you, sir, for bringing me information you think valuable. You are travelling—on foot—short of funds perhaps. Please accept this trifle, and—and—good-morning." He retreated at marching pace, and the hot blood burned his visitor's face. An alms!

But on second thoughts he said: "Well, I have offered him a fortune, and he gives me ten shillings. One good turn deserves another." So he pocketed the half-sovereign, and bought his little Grace a neck-handkerchief, blue with white spots; and so this unlucky man and his child fought their way from west to east, till they reached that place where we introduced them to the reader.

That was an era in their painful journey, because until then Hope's only anxiety was to find food and some little comfort for his child. But this morning little Grace had begun to cough, a little dry cough that struck on the father's heart like a knell. Her mother had died of consumption: were the seeds of that fatal malady in her child? If so, hardship, fatigue, cold, and privation would develop them rapidly, and she would wither away into the grave before his eyes. So he looked down on her in an agony of foreboding, and

shivered in his shirt sleeves, not at the cold, but at the future. She, poor girl, was, like the animals, blessed with ignorance of everything beyond the hour; and soon she woke her father from his dire reverie with a cry of delight.

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“Oh, what’s they?” said she, and beamed with pleasure. Hope followed the direction of her blue eyes, open to their full extent; and lo! there was a little fleet of swans coming round a bend of the river. Hope told her all about the royal birds, and that they belonged to sovereigns in one district, to cities in another. Meantime the fair birds sailed on, and passed stately, arching their snowy necks. Grace gloated on them, and for a day or two her discourse was of swans.

At last, when very near the goal, misfortunes multiplied. They came into a town on a tidal river, whence they could hope to drift down to their destination for a shilling or two; but here Hope spent his last farthing on Grace’s supper at an eating-house, and had not wherewithal to pay for bed or breakfast at the humble inn. Here, too, he took up the local paper, praying Heaven there might be some employment advertised, however mean, that so he might feed his girl, and not let the fiend Consumption take her at a gift.

No, there was nothing in the advertising column, but in the body of the paper he found a paragraph to the effect that Mr. Samuelson, of Hull, had built a gigantic steam vessel in that port, and was going out to New Zealand in her on her trial trip, to sail that morning at high tide, 6.45 A.M., and it was now nine.

How a sentence in a newspaper can blast a man! Bereavement, Despair, Lost Love—-they come like lightning in a single line. Hope turned sick at these few words, and down went his head and his hands, and he sat all of a heap, cold at heart. Then he began to disbelieve in everything, especially in honesty. For why? If he had only left Liverpool in debt and taken the rail, he would have reached Hull in ample time, and would have gone out to New Zealand in the new ship with money in both pockets.

But it was no use fretting. Starvation and disease impended over his child. He must work, or steal, or something. In truth he was getting desperate. He picked himself up and went about, offering his many accomplishments to humble shop-keepers. They all declined him, some civilly. At last he came to a superior place of business. There were large offices and a handsome house connected with it in the rear. At the side of the offices were pulleys, cranes, and all the appliances for loading vessels, and a yard with horses and vans, so that the whole frontage of the premises was very considerable. A brass plate said, “R. Bartley, ship-broker and commission agent”; but the man was evidently a ship-owner and a carrier besides; so this miscellaneous shop roused hopes in our versatile hero. He rapidly surveyed the outside, and then cast hungry glances through the window of the man’s office. It was a bow-window of unusual size, through which the proprietor or his employees could see a long way up and down the river. Through this window Hope peered. Repulses had made him timid. He wanted to see the face he had to apply to before he ventured.

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But Mr. Bartley was not there. The large office was at present occupied by his clerks; one of these was Leonard Monckton, a pale young man with dark hair, a nose like a hawk, and thin lips. The other was quite a young fellow, with brown hair, hazel eyes, and an open countenance. “Many a hard rub puts a point on a man.” So Hope resolved at once to say nothing to that pale clerk so like a kite, but to interest the open countenance in him and his hungry child.

There were two approaches to the large office. One, to Hope’s right, through a door and a lobby. This was seldom used except by the habitues of the place. The other was to Hope’s left, through a very small office, generally occupied by an inferior clerk, who kept an eye upon the work outside. However, this office had also a small window looking inward; this opened like a door when the man had anything to say to Mr. Bartley or the clerks in the large office.

William Hope entered this outer office, and found it empty. The clerk happened to be in the yard. Then he opened the inner door and looked in on the two clerks, pale and haggard, and apprehensive of a repulse. He addressed himself to the one nearest him; it was the one whose face had attracted him.

“Sir, can I see Mr. Bartley?”

The young fellow glanced over the visitor’s worn garments and dusty shoes, and said, dryly, “Hum! if it is for charity, this is the wrong shop.”

“I want no charity,” said Hope, with a sigh; “I want employment. But I do want it very badly; my poor little girl and I are starving.”

“Then that is a shame,” said the young fellow, warmly. “Why, you are a gentleman, aren’t you?”

“I don’t know for that,” said Hope. “But I am an educated man, and I could do the whole business of this place. But you see I am down in the world.”

“You look like it,” said the clerk, bluntly. “But don’t you be so green as to tell old Bartley that, or you are done for. No, no; I’ll show you how to get in here. Wait till half past one. He lunches at one, and he isn’t quite such a brute after luncheon. Then you come in like Julius Caesar, and brag like blazes, and offer him twenty pounds’ worth of industry and ability, and above all arithmetic, and he will say he has no opening (and that is a lie), and offer you fifteen shillings, perhaps.”

“If he does, I’ll jump at it,” said Hope, eagerly. “But whether I succeed with him or not, take my child’s blessing and my own.”

His voice faltered, and Bolton, with a young man’s uneasiness under sentiment, stopped him. “Oh, come, old fellow, bother all that! Why, we are all stumped in turn.”

Then he began to chase a solitary coin into a corner of his waistcoat pocket. “Look here, I’ll lend you a shilling—pay me next week—it will buy the kid a breakfast. I wish I had more, but I want the other for luncheon. I haven’t drawn my screw yet. It is due at twelve.”

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“I’ll take it for my girl,” said Hope, blushing, “and because it is offered me by a gentleman and like a gentleman.”

“Granted, for the sake of argument,” said this sprightly youth; and so they parted for the time, little dreaming, either of them, what a chain they were weaving round their two hearts, and this little business the first link.

CHAPTER II.

The rich man’s child.

The world is very big, and contains hundreds of millions who are strangers to each other. Yet every now and then this big world seems to turn small; so many people whose acquaintance we make turn out to be acquaintances of our acquaintances. This concatenation of acquaintances is really one of the marvels of social life, if one considers the chances against it, owing to the size and population of the country. As an example of this phenomenon, which we have all observed, William Hope was born in Derbyshire, in a small parish which belonged, nearly all of it, to Colonel Clifford; yet in that battle for food which is, alas! the prosaic but true history of men and nations, he entered an office in Yorkshire, and there made friends with Colonel Clifford’s son, Walter, who was secretly dabbling in trade and matrimony under the name of Bolton; and this same Hope was to come back, and to apply for a place to Mr. Bartley; Mr. Bartley was brother-in-law to that same Colonel Clifford, though they were at daggers drawn, the pair.

Miss Clifford, aged thirty-two, had married Bartley, aged thirty-seven. Each had got fixed habits, and they soon disagreed. In two years they parted, with plenty of bitterness, but no scandal. Bartley stood on his rights, and kept their one child, little Mary. He was very fond of her, and as the mother saw her whenever she liked, his love for his child rather tended to propitiate Mrs. Bartley, though nothing on earth would have induced her to live with him again.

Little Mary was two months younger than Grace Hope, and, like her, had blue eyes and golden hair. But what a difference in her condition! She had two nurses and every luxury. Dressed like a princess, and even when in bed smothered in lace; some woman’s eye always upon her, a hand always ready to keep her from the smallest accident.

Yet all this care could not keep out sickness. The very day that Grace Hope began to cough and alarm her father, Mary Bartley flushed and paled, and showed some signs of feverishness.

The older nurse, a vigilant person, told Mr. Bartley directly; and the doctor was sent for post-haste. He felt her pulse, and said there was some little fever, but no cause for anxiety. He administered syrup of poppies, and little Mary passed a tranquil night.

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Next day, about one in the afternoon, she became very restless, and was repeatedly sick. The doctor was sent for, and combated the symptoms; but did not inquire closely into the cause. Sickness proceeds immediately from the stomach; so he soothed the stomach with alkaline mucilages, and the sickness abated. But next day alarming symptoms accumulated, short breathing, inability to eat, flushed face, wild eyes. Bartley telegraphed to a first-rate London physician. He came, and immediately examined the girl's throat, and shook his head; then he uttered a fatal word—Diphtheria.

They had wasted four days squirting petty remedies at symptoms, instead of finding the cause and attacking it, and now he told them plainly he feared it was too late—the fatal membrane was forming, and, indeed, had half closed the air-passages.

Bartley in his rage and despair would have driven the local doctor out of the house, but this the London doctor would not allow. He even consulted him on the situation, now it was declared, and, as often happens, they went in for heroic remedies since it was too late.

But neither powerful stimulants nor biting draughts nor caustic applications could hinder the deadly parchment from growing and growing.

The breath reduced to a thread, no nourishment possible except by baths of beef tea, and similar enemas. Exhaustion inevitable. Death certain.

Such was the hopeless condition of the rich man's child, surrounded by nurses and physicians, when the father of the poor man's child applied to the clerk Bolton for that employment which meant bread for his child, and perhaps life for *her*.

William Hope returned to his little Grace with a loaf of bread he bought on the road with Bolton's shilling, and fresh milk in a soda-water bottle.

He found her crying. She had contrived, after the manner of children, to have an accident. The room was almost bare of furniture, but my lady had found a wooden stool that *could* be mounted upon and tumbled off, and she had done both, her parent being away. She had bruised and sprained her little wrist, and was in the depths of despair.

"Ah," said poor Hope, "I was afraid something or other would happen if I left you."

He took her to the window, and set her on his knee, and comforted her. He cut a narrow slip off his pocket handkerchief, wetted it, and bound it lightly and deftly round her wrist, and poured consolation into her ear. But soon she interrupted that, and flung sorrow to the winds; she uttered three screams of delight, and pointed eagerly through the window.

"Here they be again, the white swans!"

Hope looked, and there were two vessels, a brig and a bark, creeping down the river toward the sea, with white sails bellying to a gentle breeze astern.

It is experience that teaches proportion. The eye of childhood is wonderfully misled in that matter. Promise a little child the moon, and show him the ladder to be used, he sees nothing inadequate in the means; so Grace Hope was delighted with her swans.

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But Hope, who made it his business to instruct her, and not deceive her as some thoughtless parents do, out of fun, the wretches, told her, gently, they were not swans, but ships.

She was a little disappointed at that, but inquired what they were doing.

“Darling,” said he, “they are going to some other land, where honest, hard-working people can not starve, and, mark my words, darling,” said he—she pricked her little ears at that—“you and I shall have to go with them, for we are poor.”

“Oh,” said little Grace, impressed by his manner as well as his words, and nodded her pretty head with apparent wisdom, and seemed greatly impressed.

Then her father fed her with bread and milk, and afterward laid her on the bed, and asked her whether she loved him.

“Dearly, dearly,” said she.

“Then if you do,” said he, “you will go to sleep like a good girl, and not stir off that bed till I come back.”

“No more I will,” said she.

However, he waited until she was in an excellent condition for keeping her promise, being fast as a church.

Then he looked long at her beautiful face, wax-like and even-tinted, but full of life after her meal, and prayed to Him who loved little children, and went with a beating heart to Mr. Bartley’s office.

But in the short time, little more than an hour and a half, which elapsed between Hope’s first and second visit, some most unexpected and remarkable events took place.

Bartley came in from his child’s dying bed distracted with grief; but business to him was the air he breathed, and he went to work as usual, only in a hurried and bitter way unusual to him. He sent out his clerk Bolton with some bills, and told him sharply not to return without the money; and whilst Bolton, so-called, was making his toilette in the lobby, his eye fell on his other clerk, Monckton.

Monckton was poring over the ledger with his head down, the very picture of a faithful servant absorbed in his master’s work.

But appearances are deceitful. He had a small book of his own nestled between the ledger and his stomach. It was filled with hieroglyphics, and was his own betting book. As for his brown-study, that was caused by his owing L100 in the ring, and not knowing

how to get it. To be sure, he could rob Mr. Bartley. He had done it again and again by false accounts, and even by abstraction of coin, for he had false keys to his employer's safe, cash-box, drawers, and desk. But in his opinion he had played this game often enough, and was afraid to venture it again so soon and on so large a scale.

He was so absorbed in these thoughts that he did not hear Mr. Bartley come to him; to be sure, he came softly, because of the other clerk, who was washing his hands and brushing his hair in the lobby.

So Bartley's hand, fell gently, but all in a moment, on Monckton's shoulder, and they say the shoulder is a sensitive part in conscious rogues. Anyway, Monckton started violently, and turned from pale to white, and instinctively clapped both hands over his betting book.

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“Monckton,” said his employer, gravely, “I have made a very ugly discovery.”

Monckton began to shiver.

“Periodical errors in the balances, and the errors always against me.”

Monckton began to perspire. Not knowing what to say, he faltered, and at last stammered out, “Are you sure, sir?”

“Quite sure. I have long seen reason to suspect it, so last night I went through all the books, and now I am sure. Whoever the villain is, I will send him to prison if I can only catch him.”

Monckton winced and turned his head away, debating in his mind whether he should affect indignation and sympathy, and pretend to court inquiry, or should wait till lunch-time, and then empty the cash-box and bolt.

Whilst thus debating, these words fell unexpectedly on his ear:

“And you must help me.”

Then Monckton’s eyes turned this way and that in a manner that is common among thieves, and a sardonic smile curled his pale thin lip.

“It is my duty,” said the sly rogue, demurely. Then, after a pause, “But how?”

Then Mr. Bartley glanced at Bolton in the lobby, and not satisfied with speaking under his breath, drew this ill-chosen confidant to the other end of the office.

“Why, suspect everybody, and watch them. Now there’s this clerk Bolton: I know nothing about him; I was taken by his looks. Have your eye on *him*.”

“I will, sir,” said Monckton, eagerly. He drew a long breath of relief. For all that, he was glad when a voice in the little office announced a visitor.

It was a clear, peremptory voice, short, sharp, incisive, and decisive. The clerk called Bolton heard it in the lobby, and scuttled into the street with a rapidity that contrasted drolly enough with the composure and slowness with which he had been brushing his hair and titivating his nascent whiskers.

A tall, stiff military figure literally marched into the middle of the office, and there stood like a sentinel.

Mr. Bartley could hardly believe his senses.

“Colonel Clifford!” said he, roughly.

“You are surprised to see me here?”

“Of course I am. May I ask what brings you?”

“That which composes all quarrels and squares all accounts—Death.”

Colonel Clifford said this solemnly, and with less asperity. He added, with a glance at Monckton, “This is a very private matter.”

Bartley took the hint, and asked Monckton to retire into the inner office.

As soon as he and Colonel Clifford were alone, that warrior, still standing straight as a dart, delivered himself of certain short sentences, each of which seemed to be propelled, or indeed jerked out of him, by some foreign power seated in his breast.

“My sister, your injured wife, is no more.”

“Dead! This is very sudden. I am very, very sorry. I—”

Colonel Clifford looked the word “Humbug,” and continued to expel short sentences.

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“On her death-bed she made me promise to give you my hand. There it is.”

His hand was propelled out, caught flying by Bartley, released, and drawn back again, all by machinery it seemed.

“She leaves you L20,000 in trust for the benefit of her child and yours—Mary Bartley.”

“Poor, dear Eliza.”

The Colonel looked as less high-bred people do when they say “Gammon,” but proceeded civilly though brusquely.

“In dealing with the funds you have a large discretion. Should the girl die before you, or unmarried, the money lapses to your nephew, my son, Walter Clifford. He is a scapegrace, and has run away from me; but I must protect his just interests. So as a mere matter of form I will ask you whether Mary Bartley is alive.”

Bartley bowed his head.

Colonel Clifford had not heard she was ill, so he continued: “In that case”—and then, interrupting himself for a moment, turned away to Bartley’s private table, and there emptied his pockets of certain documents, one of which he wanted to select.

His back was not turned more than half a minute, yet a most expressive pantomime took place in that short interval.

The nurse opened a door of communication, and stood with a rush at the threshold: indeed, she would have rushed in but for the stranger. She was very pale, and threw up her hands to Bartley. Her face and her gesture were more expressive than words.

Then Bartley, clinging by mere desperate instinct to money he could not hope to keep, flew to her, drove her out by a frenzied movement of both hands, though he did not touch her, and spread-eagled himself before the door, with his face and dilating eyes turned toward Colonel Clifford.

The Colonel turned and stepped toward him with the document he had selected at the table. Bartley went to meet him.

The Colonel gave it to him, and said it was a copy of the will.

Bartley took it, and Colonel Clifford expelled his last sentences.

“We have shaken hands. Let us forget our past quarrels, and respect the wishes of the dead.”

With that he turned sharply on both heels, and faced the door of the little office before he moved; then marched out in about seven steps, as he had marched in, and never looked behind him for two hundred miles.

The moment he was out of sight, Bartley, with his wife's will in his hand and ice at his heart, went to his child's room. The nurse met him, crying, and said, "A change"—mild but fatal words that from a nurse's lips end hope.

He came to the bedside just in time to see the breath hovering on his child's lips, and then move them as the summer air stirs a leaf.

Soon all was still, and the rich man's child was clay.

The unhappy father burst into a passion of grief, short but violent. Then he ordered the nurse to watch there, and let no one enter the room; then he staggered back to his office, and flung himself down at his table and buried his head. To do him justice, he was all parental grief at first, for his child was his idol.

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The arms were stretched out across the table; the head rested on it; the man was utterly crushed.

Whilst he was so, the little office door opened softly, and a pale, worn, haggard face looked in. It was the father of the poor man's child in mortal danger from privation and hereditary consumption. That haggard face was come to ask the favor of employment, and bread for his girl, from the rich man whose child was clay.

CHAPTER III.

The two fathers.

Hope looked wistfully at that crushed figure, and hesitated; it seemed neither kind nor politic to intrude business upon grief.

But if the child was Bartley's idol, money was his god, and soon in his strange mind defeated avarice began to vie with nobler sorrow. His child dead! his poor little flower withered, and her death robbed him of L20,000, and indeed of ten times that sum, for he had now bought experience in trade and speculation, and had learned to make money out of money, a heap out of a handful. Stung by this vulgar torment in its turn, he started suddenly up, and dashed his wife's will down upon the floor in a fury, and paced the room excitedly. Hope still stood aghast, and hesitated to risk his application.

But presently Bartley caught sight of him, and stared at him, but said nothing.

Then the poor fellow saw it was no use waiting for a better opportunity, so he came forward and carried out Bolton's instructions; he put on a tolerably jaunty air, and said, cheerfully, "I beg your pardon, sir; can I claim your attention for a moment?"

"What do you want?" asked Bartley, but like a man whose mind was elsewhere.

"Only employment for my talent, sir. I hear you have a vacancy for a manager."

"Nothing of the sort. *I* am manager."

Hope drew back despondent, and his haggard countenance fell at such prompt repulse. But he summoned courage, and, once more acting genial confidence, returned to the attack.

"But you don't know, sir, in how many ways I can be useful to you. A grand and complicated business like yours needs various acquirements in those who have the honor to serve you. For instance, I saw a small engine at work in your yard; now I am a mechanic, and I can double the power of that engine by merely introducing an extra band and a couple of cogs."

“It will do as it is,” said Bartley, languidly, “and I can do without a manager.”

Bartley’s manner was not irritated but absorbed. He seemed in all his replies to Hope to be brushing away a fly mechanically and languidly. The poor fly felt sick at heart, and crept away disconsolate. But at the very door he turned, and for his child’s sake made another attempt.

“Have you an opening for a clerk? I can write business letters in French, German, and Dutch; and keep books by double entry.”

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“No vacancy for a clerk,” was the weary reply.

“Well, then, a foreman in the yard. I have studied the economy of industry, and will undertake to get you the greatest amount of labor out of the smallest number of men.”

“I have a foreman already,” said Bartley, turning his back on him peevishly, for the first time, and pacing the room, absorbed in his own disappointment.

Hope was in despair, and put on his hat to go. But he turned at the window and said: “You have vans and carts. I understand horses thoroughly. I am a veterinary surgeon, and I can drive four-in-hand. I offer myself as carman, or even hostler.”

“I do not want a hostler, and I have a carman.”

Bartley, when he had said this, sat down like a man who had finally disposed of the application.

Hope went to the very door, and leaned against it. His jaw dropped. He looked ten years older. Then, with a piteous attempt at cheerfulness, he came nearer, and said: “A messenger, then. I’m young and very active, and never waste my employer’s time.”

Even this humble proposal was declined, though Hope’s cheeks burned with shame as he made it. He groaned aloud, and his head dropped on his breast.

His eye fell on the will lying on the ground; he went and picked it up, and handed it respectfully to Bartley.

Bartley stared, took it, and bowed his head an inch or two in acknowledgment of the civility. This gave the poor daunted father courage again. Now that Bartley’s face was turned to him by this movement, he took advantage of it, and said, persuasively:

“Give me some kind of employment, sir. You will never repent it.” Then he began to warm with conscious power. “I’ve intelligence, practicability, knowledge; and in this age of science knowledge is wealth. Example: I saw a swell march out of this place that owns all the parish I was born in. I knew him in a moment—Colonel Clifford. Well, that old soldier draws his rents when he can get them, and never looks deeper than the roots of the grass his cattle crop. But *I* tell *you* he never takes a walk about his grounds but he marches upon millions—coal! sir, coal! and near the surface. I know the signs. But I am impotent: only fools possess the gold that wise men can coin into miracles. Try me, sir; honor me with your sympathy. You are a father—you have a sweet little girl, I hear.”—Bartley winced at that.—“Well, so have I, and the hole my poverty makes me pig in is not good for her, sir. She needs the sea air, the scent of flowers, and, bless her little heart, she does enjoy them so! Give them to her, and I will give you zeal, energy, brains, and a million of money.”

This, for the first time in the interview, arrested Mr. Bartley's attention.

"I see you are a superior man," said he, "but I have no way to utilize your services."

"You can give me no hope, sir?" asked the poor fellow, still lingering.

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“None—and I am sorry for it.”

This one gracious speech affected poor Hope so that he could not speak for a moment. Then he fought for manly dignity, and said, with a lamentable mixture of sham sprightliness and real anguish, “Thank you, sir; I only trust that you will always find servants as devoted to your interest as my gratitude would have made me. Good-morning, sir.” He clapped his hat on with a sprightly, ghastly air, and marched off resolutely.

But ere he reached the door, Nature overpowered the father’s heart; way went Bolton’s instructions; away went fictitious deportment and feigned cheerfulness. The poor wretch uttered a cry, indeed a scream, of anguish, that would have thrilled ten thousand hearts had they heard it; he dashed his hat on the ground, and rushed toward Bartley, with both hands out—“*For god’s sake don’t send me away—my child is starving*!”

Even Bartley was moved. “Your child!” said he, with some little feeling. This slight encouragement was enough for a father. His love gushed forth. “A little golden-haired, blue-eyed angel, who is all the world to me. We have walked here from Liverpool, where I had just buried her mother. God help me! God help us both! Many a weary mile, sir, and never sure of supper or bed. The birds of the air have nests, the beasts of the field a shelter, the fox a hole, but my beautiful and fragile girl, only four years old, sir, is houseless and homeless. Her mother died of consumption, sir, and I live in mortal fear; for now she is beginning to cough, and I can not give her proper nourishment. Often on this fatal journey I have felt her shiver, and then I have taken off my coat and wrapped it round her, and her beautiful eyes have looked up in mine, and seemed to plead for the warmth and food I’d sell my soul to give her.”

“Poor fellow,” said Bartley; “I suppose I ought to pity you. But how can I? Man—man—-your child is alive, and while there is life there is hope; but mine is dead—dead!” he almost shrieked.

“Dead!” said Hope, horrified.

“Dead,” cried Bartley. “Cut off at four years old, the very age of yours. There—go and judge for yourself. You are a father. I can’t look upon my blasted hopes, and my withered flower. Go and see *my* blue-eyed, fair-haired darling—clay, hastening to the tomb; and you will trouble me no more with your imaginary griefs.” He flung himself down with his head on his desk.

Hope, following the direction of his hand, opened the door of the house, and went softly forward till he met the nurse. He told her Mr. Bartley wished him to see the deceased. The nurse hesitated, but looked at him. His sad face inspired confidence, and she ushered him into the chamber of mourning. There, laid out in state, was a little figure that, seen in the dim light, drew a cry of dismay from Hope. He had left his own girl

sleeping, and looking like tinted wax. Here lay a little face the very image of hers, only this was pale wax.

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Had he looked more closely, the chin was unlike his own girl's, and there were other differences. But the first glance revealed a thrilling resemblance. Hope hurried away from the room, and entered the office pale and disturbed. "Oh, sir! the very image of my own. It fills me with forebodings. I pity you, sir, with all my heart. That sad sight reconciles me to my lot. God help you!" and he was going away; for now he felt an unreasoning terror lest his own child should have turned from colored wax to pale.

Mr. Bartley stopped him. "Are they so very like?" said he.

"Wonderfully like." And again he was going, but Bartley, who had received him so coldly, seemed now unwilling to part with him.

"Stay," said he, "and let me think." The truth is, a daring idea had just flashed through that brain of his; and he wanted to think it out. He walked to and fro in silent agitation, and his face was as a book in which you may read strange matter. At last he made up his mind, but the matter was one he did not dare to approach too bluntly, so he went about a little.

"Stay—you don't know all my misfortunes. I am ambitious—like you. I believe in science and knowledge—like you. And, if my child had lived, you should have been my adviser and my right hand: I want such a man as you."

Hope threw up his hands. "My usual luck!" said he: "always a day too late." Bartley resumed:

"But my child's death robs me of the money to work with, and I can't help you nor help myself."

Hope groaned.

Bartley hesitated. But after a moment he said, timidly, "Unless—" and then stopped.

"Unless what?" asked Hope, eagerly. "I am not likely to raise objections my child's life is at stake."

"Well, then, unless you are really the superior man you seem to be: a man of ability and —courage."

"Courage!" thought Hope, and began to be puzzled. However, he said, modestly, that he thought he could find courage in a good cause.

"Then you and I are made men," said Bartley. These were stout words; but they were not spoken firmly; on the contrary, Mr. Bartley's voice trembled, and his brow began to perspire visibly.

His agitation communicated itself to Hope, and the latter said, in a low, impressive voice, “This is something very grave, Mr. Bartley. Sir, what is it?”

Mr. Bartley looked uneasily all round the room, and came close to Hope. “The very walls must not hear what I now say to you.” Then, in a thrilling whisper, “My daughter must not die.”

Hope looked puzzled.

“Your daughter must take her place.”

Now just before this, two quick ears began to try and catch the conversation. Monckton had heard all that Colonel Clifford said, that warrior’s tones were so incisive; but, as the matter only concerned Mr. Bartley, he merely grinned at the disappointment likely to fall on his employer, for he knew Mary Bartley was at death’s door. He said as much to himself, and went out for a sandwich, for it was his lunch-time. But when he returned with stealthy foot, for all his movements were cat-like, he caught sight of Bartley and Hope in earnest conversation, and felt very curious.

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There was something so mysterious in Bartley's tones that Monckton drew up against the little window, pushed it back an inch, and listened hard.

But he could hear nothing at all until Hope's answer came to Bartley's proposal.

Then the indignant father burst out, so that it was easy enough to hear every word. "I part with my girl! Not for the world's wealth. What! You call yourself a father, and would tempt me to sell my own flesh and blood? No! Poverty, beggary, anything, sooner than that. My darling, we will thrive together or starve together; we will live together or die together!"

He snatched up his hat to leave. But Bartley found a word to make him hesitate. He never moved, but folded his arms and said, "So, then, your love for your child is selfish."

"Selfish!" cried Hope; "so selfish that I would die for her any hour of the day." For all that, the taunt brought him down a step, and Bartley, still standing like a rock, attacked him again. "If it is not selfish, it is blind." Then he took two strides, and attacked him with sudden power. "Who will suffer most if you stand in her light? Your daughter: why, she may die." Hope groaned. "Who will profit most if you are wise, and really love her, not like a jealous lover, but like a father? Why, your daughter: she will be taken out of poverty and want, and carried to sea-breezes and scented meadows; her health and her comfort will be my care; she will fill the gap in my house and in my heart, and will be my heiress when I die."

"But she will be lost to me," sighed poor Hope.

"Not so. You will be my right hand; you will be always about us; you can see her, talk to her, make her love you, do anything but tell her you are her father. Do this one thing for me, and I will do great things for you and for her. To refuse me will be to cut your own throat and hers—as well as mine."

Hope faltered a little. "Am I selfish?" said he.

"Of course not," was the soothing reply. "No true father is—give him time to think."

Hope clinched his hands in agony, and pressed them against his brow. "It is selfish to stand in her light; but part with her—I can't; I can't."

"Of course not: who asks you? She will never be out of your sight; only, instead of seeing her sicken, linger, and die, you will see her surrounded by every comfort, nursed and tended like a princess, and growing every day in health, wealth, and happiness."

"Health, wealth, and happiness?"

"Health, wealth, and happiness!"

These words made a great impression on the still hesitating father; he began to make conditions. They were all granted heartily.

“If ever you are unkind to her, the compact is broken, and I claim my own again.”

“So be it. But why suppose anything so monstrous; men do not ill-treat children. It is only women, who adore them, that kill them and ill-use them accordingly. She will be my little benefactress, God bless her! I may love her more than I ought, being yours, for my home is desolate without her; but that is the only fault you shall ever find with me. There is my hand on it.”

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Hope at the last was taken off his guard, and took the proffered hand. That is a binding action, and somehow he could no longer go back.

Then Bartley told him he should live in the house at first, to break the parting. “And from this hour,” said he, “you are no clerk nor manager, but my associate in business, and on your own terms.”

“Thank you,” said Hope, with a sigh.

“Now lose no time; get her into the house at once while the clerks are away, and meantime I must deal with the nurse, and overcome the many difficulties. Stay, here is a five-pound note. Buy yourself a new suit, and give the child a good meal. But pray bring her here in half an hour if you can.”

Then Bartley took him to the lobby, and let him out in the street, whilst he went into the house to buy the nurse, and make her his confidante.

He had a good deal of difficulty with her; she was shocked at the proposal, and, being a woman, it was the details that horrified her. She cried a good deal. She stipulated that her darling should have Christian burial, and cried again at the doubt. But as Bartley conceded everything, and offered to settle a hundred pounds a year on her, so long as she lived in his house and kept his secret, he prevailed at last, and found her an invaluable ally.

To dispose of this character for the present we must inform the reader that she proved a woman can keep a secret, and that in a very short time she was as fond of Grace Hope as she had been of Mary Bartley.

We have said that Colonel Clifford’s talk penetrated Monckton’s ear, but produced no great impression at the time. Not so, however, when he had listened to Bartley’s proposal, Hope’s answer, and all that followed. Then he put this and Colonel Clifford’s communication together, and saw the terrible importance of the two things combined. Thus, as a congenital worm grew with Jonah’s gourd, and was sure to destroy it, Bartley’s bold and elaborate scheme was furnished from the outset with a most dangerous enemy.

Leonard Monckton was by nature a schemer and by habit a villain, and he was sure to put this discovery to profit. He came out of the little office and sat down at his desk, and fell into a brown-study.

He was not a little puzzled, and here lay his difficulty. Two attractive villainies presented themselves to his ingenious mind, and he naturally hesitated between them. One was to levy black-mail on Bartley; the other, to sell the secret to the Cliffords.

But there was a special reason why he should incline toward the Cliffords, and, whilst he is in his brown-study, we will let the reader into his secret.

This artful person had immediately won the confidence of young Clifford, calling himself Bolton, and had prepared a very heartless trap for him. He introduced to him a most beautiful young woman—tall, dark, with oval face and glorious black eyes and eyebrows, a slight foreign accent, and ingratiating manners. He called this beauty his sister, and instructed her to win Walter Clifford in that character, and to marry him. As she was twenty-two, and Master Clifford nineteen, he had no chance with her, and they were to be married this very day at the Register Office.

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Manoeuvring Monckton then inclined to let Bartley's fraud go on and ripen, but eventually expose it for the benefit of young Walter and his wife, who adored this Monckton, because, when a beautiful woman loves an ugly blackguard, she never does it by halves.

But he had no sooner thought out this conclusion than there came an obstacle. Lucy Muller's heart failed her at the last moment, and she came into the office with a rush to tell her master so. She uttered a cry of joy at sight of him, and came at him panting and full of love. "Oh, Leonard, I am so glad you are alone! Leonard, dear Leonard, pray do not insist on my marrying that young man. Now it comes to the time, my heart fails me." The tears stood in her glorious eyes, and an honest man would have pitied her, and even respected her a little for her compunction, though somewhat tardy.

But her master just fixed his eyes coldly on his slave, and said, brutally, "Never mind your heart; think of your interest."

The weak woman allowed herself to be diverted into this topic. "Why, he is no such great catch, I am sure."

"I tell you he is, more than ever: I have just discovered another L20,000 he is heir to, and not got to wait for that any longer than I choose."

Lucy stamped her foot. "I don't care for his money. Till he came with his money you loved me."

"I love you as much as ever," said Monckton, coldly.

Lucy began to sob. "No, you don't, or you wouldn't give me up to that young fool."

The villain made a cynical reply, that not every Newgate thief could have matched. "You fool," said he, "can't you marry him, and go on loving me? you won't be the first. It is done every day, to the satisfaction of all parties."

"And to their unutterable shame," said a clear, stern voice at their back. Walter Clifford, coming rapidly in, had heard but little, but heard enough; and there he stood, grim and pale, a boy no longer. These two skunks had made a man of him in one moment. They recoiled in dismay, and the woman hid her face.

He turned upon the man first, you may be sure. "So you have palmed this lady off on me as your sister, and trapped me, and would have destroyed me." His lip quivered; for they had passed the iron through his heart. But he manned himself, and carried it off like a soldier's son:

"But if I was fool enough to leave my father, I am not fool enough to present to the world your cast-off mistress as my wife." (Lucy hid her face in her hands.) "Here, Miss Lucy

Monckton—or whatever your name may be—here is the marriage license. Take that and my contempt, and do what you like with them."

With these words he dashed into Bartley's private room, and there broke down. It was a bitter cup, the first in his young life.

The baffled schemers drank wormwood too; but they bore it differently. The woman cried, and took her punishment meekly; the man raged and threatened vengeance.

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“No, no,” said Lucy; “it serves us right. I wish I had never seen the fellow: then you would have kept your word, and married me.”

“I will marry you now, if you can obey me.”

“Obey you, Leonard? You have been my ruin; but only marry me, and I will be your slave in everything—your willing, devoted, happy slave.”

“That is a bargain,” said Monckton, coolly. “I’ll be even with him; I will marry you in his name and in his place.”

This puzzled Lucy.

“Why in his name?” said she.

He did not answer.

“Well, never mind the name,” said she, “so that it is the right man—and that is you.”

Then Monckton’s fertile brain, teeming with villainies, fell to hatching a new plot more felonious than the last. He would rob the safe, and get Clifford convicted for the theft; convicted as Bolton, Clifford would never tell his real name, and Lucy should enter the Cliffords’ house with a certificate of his death and a certificate of his marriage, both obtained by substitution, and so collar his share of the L20,000, and off with the real husband to fresh pastures.

Lucy looked puzzled. Hers was not a brain to disentangle such a monstrous web.

Monckton reflected a moment. “What is the first thing? Let me see. Humph! I think the first thing is to get married.”

“Yes,” said Lucy, with an eagerness that contrasted strangely with his cynical composure, “that is the first thing, and the most understandable.” And she went dancing off with him as gay as a lark, and leaning on him at an angle of forty-five; whilst he went erect and cold, like a stone figure marching.

Walter Clifford came out in time to see them pass the great window. He watched them down the street, and cursed them—not loud but deep.

“Mooning, as usual,” said a hostile voice behind him. He turned round, and there was Mr. Bartley seated at his own table. Young Clifford walked smartly to the other side of the table, determined this should be his last day in that shop.

“There are the payments,” said he.

Bartley inspected them.

“About one in five,” said he, dryly.

“Thereabouts,” was the reply. (Consummate indifference.)

“You can’t have pressed them much.”

“Well, I am not good at dunning.”

“What *are* you good at?”

“Should be puzzled to say.”

“You are not fit for trade.”

“That is the highest compliment was ever paid me.”

“Oh, you are impertinent as well as incompetent, are you? Then take a week’s warning, Mr. Bolton.”

“Five minutes would suit me better, Mr. Bartley.”

“Oh! indeed! Say one hour.”

“All right, sir; just time for a city clerk’s luncheon—glass of bitter, sandwich, peep at *Punch*, cigarette, and a chat with the bar-maid.”

Mr. Walter Clifford was a gentleman, but we must do him the justice to say that in this interview with his employer he was a very impertinent one, not only in words, but in the delivery thereof. Bartley, however, thought this impertinence was put on, and that he had grave reasons for being in a hurry. He took down the numbers of the notes Clifford had given him, and looked very grave and suspicious all the time.

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Then he locked up the notes in the safe, and just then Hope opened the door of the little office and looked in.

“At last,” said Bartley.

“Well, sir,” said Hope, “I have only been half an hour, and I have changed my clothes and stood witness to a marriage. She begged me so hard: I was at the door. Such a beautiful girl! I could not take my eyes off her.”

“The child?” said Bartley, with natural impatience.

“I have hidden her in the yard.”

“Bring her this moment, while the clerks are out.”

Hope hurried out, and soon returned with his child, wrapped up in a nice warm shawl he had bought her with Bartley’s money.

Bartley took the child from him, looked at her face, and said, “Little darling, I shall love her as my own;” then he begged Hope to sit down in the lobby till he should call him and introduce him to his clerks. “One of them is a thief, I’m afraid.”

He took the child inside, and gave her to his confederate, the nurse.

“Dear me,” thought Hope, “only two clerks, and one of them dishonest. I hope it is not that good-natured boy. Oh no! impossible.”

And now Bartley returned, and at the same time Monckton came briskly in through the little office.

At sight of him Bartley said, “Oh, Monckton, I gave that fellow Bolton a week’s notice. But he insists on going directly,” Monckton replied, slyly, that he was sorry to hear that.

“Suspicious? Eh?” said Bartley.

“So suspicious that if I were you—Indeed, Mr. Bartley, I think, in justice to *me*, the matter ought to be cleared to the bottom.”

“You are right,” said Bartley: “I’ll have him searched before he goes. Fetch me a detective at once.”

Bartley then wrote a line upon his card, and handed it to Monckton, directing him to lose no time. He then rushed out of the house with an air of virtuous indignation, and went to make some delicate arrangements to carry out a fraud, which, begging his pardon, was as felonious, though not so prosaic, as the one he suspected his young clerk of.

Monckton was at first a little taken aback by the suddenness of all this; but he was too clear-headed to be long at fault. The matter was brought to a point. Well, he must shoot flying.

In a moment he was at the safe, whipped out a bunch of false keys, opened the safe, took out the cash-box, and swept all the gold it contained into his own pockets, and took possession of the notes. Then he locked up the cash-box again, restored it to the safe, locked that, and sat down at Bartley's table. He ran over the notes with feverish fingers, and then took the precaution to examine Bartley's day-book. His caution was rewarded—he found that the notes Bolton had brought in were *numbered*. He instantly made two parcels—clapped the unnumbered notes into his pocket. The numbered ones he took in his hand into the lobby. Now this

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lobby must be shortly described. First there was a door with a glass window, but the window had dark blue gauze fixed to it, so that nobody could see into the lobby from the office; but a person in the lobby, by putting his eye close to the gauze, could see into the office in a filmy sort of way. This door opened on a lavatory, and there were also pegs on which the clerks hung their overcoats. Then there was a swing-door leading direct to the street, and sideways into a small room indispensable to every office.

Monckton entered this lobby, and inserted the numbered notes into young Clifford's coat, and the false keys into his bag. Then he whipped back hastily into the office, with his craven face full of fiendish triumph.

He started for the detective. But it was bitter cold, and he returned to the lobby for his own overcoat. As he opened the lobby door the swing-door moved, or he thought so; he darted to it and opened it, but saw nobody, Hope having whipped behind the open door of the little room. Monckton then put on his overcoat, and went for the detective.

He met Clifford at the door, and wore an insolent grin of defiance, for which, if they had not passed each other rapidly, he would very likely have been knocked down. As it was, Walter Clifford entered the office flushed with wrath, and eager to leave behind him the mortifications and humiliations he had endured.

He went to his own little desk and tore up Lucy Mailer's letters, and his heart turned toward home. He went into the lobby, and, feeling hot, which was no wonder, bundled his office overcoat and his brush and comb into his bag. He returned to the office for his penknife, and was going out all in a hurry, when Mr. Bartley met him.

Bartley looked rather stern, and said, "A word with you, sir."

"Certainly, sir," said the young man, stiffly.

Mr. Bartley sat down at his table and fixed his eyes upon the young man with a very peculiar look.

"You seem in a very great hurry to go."

"Well, I *am*."

"You have not even demanded your salary up to date."

"Excuse the oversight; I was not made for business, you know."

"There is something more to settle besides your salary."

“Premium for good conduct?”

“No, sir. Mr. Bolton, you will find this no jesting matter. There are defalcations in the accounts, sir.”

The young man turned serious at once. “I am sorry to hear that, sir,” said he, with proper feeling.

Bartley eyed him still more severely. “And even cash abstracted.”

“Good heavens!” said the young man, answering his eyes rather than his words. “Why, surely you can’t suspect me?”

Bartley answered, sternly, “I know I have been robbed, and so I suspect everybody whose conduct is suspicious.”

This was too much for a Clifford to bear. He turned on him like a lion. “Your suspicions disgrace the trader who entertains them, not the gentleman they wrong. You are too old for me to give you a thrashing, so I won’t stay here any longer to be insulted.”

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He snatched up his bag and was marching off, when the door opened, and Monckton with a detective confronted him.

“No,” roared Bartley, furious in turn; “but you will stay to be examined.”

“Examined!”

“Searched, then, if you like it better.”

“No, don’t do that,” said the young fellow. “Spare me such a humiliation.”

Bartley, who was avaricious, but not cruel, hesitated.

“Well,” said he, “I will examine the safe before I go further.”

Mr. Bartley opened the safe and took out the cash-box. It was empty. He uttered a loud exclamation. “Why, it’s a clean sweep! A wholesale robbery! Notes and gold all gone! No wonder you were in such a hurry to leave! Luckily some of the notes were numbered. Search him.”

“No, no. Don’t treat me like a thief!” cried the poor boy, almost sobbing.

“If you are innocent, why object?” said Monckton, satirically.

“You villain,” cried Clifford, “this is your doing! I am sure of it!”

Monckton only grinned triumphantly; but Bartley fired up. “If there is a villain here, it is you. *He* is a faithful servant, who warned his employer.” He then pointed sternly at young Bolton, and the detective stepped up to him and said, curtly, “Now, sir, if I *must*.”

He then proceeded to search his waistcoat pockets. The young man hung his head, and looked guilty. He had heard of money being put into an innocent man’s pockets, and he feared that game had been played with him.

The detective examined his waistcoat pockets and found—nothing. His other pockets —nothing.

The detective patted his breast and examined his stockings—nothing.

“Try the bag,” said Monckton.

Then the poor fellow trembled again.

The detective searched the bag—nothing.

He took the overcoat and turned the pockets out—nothing.

Bartley looked surprised. Monckton still more so. Meantime Hope had gone round from the lobby, and now entered by the small office, and stood watching a part of this business, *viz*., the search of the bag and the overcoat, with a bitter look of irony.

“But my safe must have been opened with false keys,” cried Bartley. “Where are they?”

“And the numbered notes,” said Monckton, “where are they?”

“Gentlemen,” said Hope, “may I offer my advice?”

“Who the devil are you?” said Monckton.

“He is my new partner, my associate in business,” said the politic Bartley. Then deferentially to Hope, “What do you advise?”

“You have two clerks. I would examine them both.”

“Examine me?” cried Monckton. “Mr. Bartley, will you allow such an affront to be put on your old and faithful servant?”

“If you are innocent, why object?” said young Clifford, spitefully, before Bartley could answer.

The remark struck Bartley, and he acted on it.

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“Well, it is only fair to Mr. Bolton,” said he. “Come, come, Monckton, it is only a form.”

Then he gave the detective a signal, and he stepped up to Monckton, and emptied his waistcoat pockets of eighty-five sovereigns.

“There!” cried Walter Clifford, “There! there!”

“My own money, won at the Derby,” said Monckton, coolly; “and only a part of it, I am happy to say. You will find the remainder in banknotes.”

The detective found several notes.

Bartley examined the book and the notes. The Derby! He was beginning to doubt this clerk, who attended that meeting on the sly. However, he was just, though no longer confiding.

“I am bound to say that not one of the numbered notes is here.”

The detective was now examining Monckton’s overcoat. He produced a small bunch of keys.

“How did they come there?” cried Monckton, in amazement.

It was an incautious remark. Bartley took it up directly, and pounced on the keys. He tried them on the safe. One opened the safe, another opened the cash-box.

Meantime the detective found some notes in the pocket of the overcoat, and produced them.

“Great heavens!” cried Monckton, “how did they come there?”

“Oh, I dare say you know,” said the detective.

Bartley examined them eagerly. They were the numbered notes.

“You scoundrel,” he roared, “these show me where your gold and your other notes came from. The whole contents of my safe—in that villain’s pockets!”

“No, no,” cried Monckton, in agony. “It’s all a delusion. Some rogue has planted them there to ruin me.”

“Keep that for the beak,” said the policeman; “he is sure to believe it. Come, my bloke. I knew who was my bird the moment I clapped eyes on the two. ’Tain’t his first job, gents, you take my word. We shall find his photo in some jail or other in time for the assizes.”

“Away with him!” cried Bartley, furiously.

As the policeman took him off, the baffled villain’s eye fell on Hope, who stood with folded arms, and looked down on him with lowering brow and the deep indignation of the just, and yet with haughty triumph.

That eloquent look was a revelation to Monckton.

“Ah,” he cried, “it was *you*.”

Hope’s only reply was this: “You double felon, false accuser and thief, you are caught in your own trap.”

And this he thundered at him with such sudden power that the thief went cringing out, and even those who remained were awed. But Hope never told anybody except Walter Clifford that he had undone Monckton’s work in the lobby; and then the poor boy fell upon his neck, and kissed his hand.

To run forward a little: Monckton was tried, and made no defense. He dared not call Hope as his witness, for it was clear Hope must have seen him commit the theft and attempt the other villainy. But the false accusation leaked out as well as the theft. A previous conviction was proved, and the indignant judge gave him fourteen years.

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Thus was Bartley's fatal secret in mortal peril on the day it first existed; yet on that very day it was saved from exposure, and buried deep in a jail.

Bartley set Hope over his business, and was never heard of for months. Then he turned up in Sussex with a little girl, who had been saved from diphtheria by tracheotomy, and some unknown quack.

There was a scar to prove it. The tender parent pointed it out triumphantly, and railed at the regular practitioners of medicine.

CHAPTER IV.

AN OLD SERVANT.

Walter Clifford returned home pretty well weaned from trade, and anxious to propitiate his father, but well aware that on his way to reconciliation he must pass through jobation.

He slipped into Clifford Hall at night, and commenced his approaches by going to the butler's pantry. Here he was safe, and knew it; a faithful old butler of the antique and provincial breed is apt to be more unreasonably paternal than Pater himself.

To this worthy, then, Walter owed a good bed, a good supper, and good advice: "Better not tackle him till I have had a word with him first."

Next morning this worthy butler, who for seven years had been a very good servant, and for the next seven years rather a bad one, and would now have been a hard master if the Colonel had not been too great a Tartar to stand it, appeared before his superior with an air slightly respectful, slightly aggressive, and very dogged.

"There is a young gentleman would be glad to speak to you, if you will let him."

"Who is he?" asked the Colonel, though by old John's manner he divined.

"Can't ye guess?"

"Don't know why I should. It is your business to announce my visitors."

"Oh, I'll announce him, when I am made safe that he will be welcome."

"What! isn't he sure of a welcome—good, dutiful son like him?"

"Well, sir, he deserves a welcome. Why, he is the returning prodigal."

“We are not told that *he* deserved a welcome.”

“What signifies?—he got one, and Scripture is the rule of life for men of our age, *now we are out of the army*.”

“I think you had better let him plead his own cause, John; and if he takes the tone you do, he will get turned out of the house pretty quick; as you will some of these days, Mr. Baker.”

“We sha’n’t go, neither of us,” said Mr. Baker, but with a sudden tone of affectionate respect, which disarmed the words of their true meaning. He added, hanging his head for the first time, “Poor young gentleman! afraid to face his own father!”

“What’s he afraid of?” asked the Colonel, roughly.

“Of you cursing and swearing at him,” said John.

“Cursing and swearing!” cried the Colonel—“a thing I never do now. Cursing and swearing, indeed! You be ——!”

“There you go,” said old John. “Come, Colonel, be a father. What has the poor boy done?”

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“He has deserted—a thing I have seen a fellow shot for, and he has left me a prey to parental anxieties.”

“And so he has me, for that matter. But I forgive him. Anyway, I should like to hear his story before I condemn him. Why, he’s only nineteen and four months, come Martinmas. Besides, how do we know?—he may have had some very good reason for going.”

“His age makes that probable, doesn’t it?”

“I dare say it was after some girl, sir.”

“Call that a good reason?”

“I call it a strong one. Haven’t you never found it?” (the Colonel was betrayed into winking). “From sixteen to sixty a woman will draw a man where a horse can’t.”

“Since that is *so*,” said the Colonel, dryly, “you can tell him to come to breakfast.”

“Am I to say that from you?”

“No; you can take that much upon yourself. I have known you presume a good deal more than that, John.”

“Well, sir,” said John, hanging his head for a moment, “old servants are like old friends—they do presume a bit; but then” (raising his head proudly) “they care for their masters, young and old. New servants, sir—why, this lot that we’ve got now, they would not shed a tear for you if you was to be hanged.”

“Why should they?” said the Colonel. “A man is not hanged for building churches. Come, beat a retreat. I’ve had enough of you. See there’s a good breakfast.”

“Oh,” said John, “I’ve took care of that.”

When the Colonel came down he found his son leaning against the mantel-piece; but he left it directly and stood erect, for the Colonel had drilled him with his own hands.

“Ugh!” said the Colonel, giving a snort peculiar to himself, but he thought, “How handsome the dog is!” and was proud of him secretly, only he would not show it. “Good-morning, sir,” said the young man, with civil respect.

“Your most obedient, sir,” said the old man, stiffly.

After that neither spoke for some time, and the old butler glided about like a cat, helping both of them, especially the young one, to various delicacies from the side table. When

he had stuffed them pretty well, he retired softly and listened at the door. Neither of the gentlemen was in a hurry to break the ice; each waited for the other.

Walter made the first remark—“What delicious tea!”

“As good as where you come from?” inquired Colonel Clifford, insidiously.

“A deal better,” said Walter.

“By-the-bye,” said the Colonel, “where *do* you come from?”

Walter mentioned the town.

“You astonish me,” said the Colonel. “I made sure you had been enjoying the pleasures of the capital.”

“My purse wouldn’t have stood that, sir.”

“Very few purses can,” said Colonel Clifford. Then, in an off-hand way, “Have you brought her along with you?”

“Certainly not,” said Walter, off his guard. “Her? Who?”

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“Why, the girl that decoyed you from your father’s roof.”

“No girl decoyed me from here, sir, upon my honor.”

“Whom are we talking about, then? Who is *her*?”

“Her? Why, Lucy Monckton.”

“And who is Lucy Monckton?”

“Why, the girl I fell in love with, and she deceived me nicely; but I found her out in time.”

“And so you came home to snivel?”

“No, sir, I didn’t; I’m not such a muff. I’m too much your son to love any woman long when I have learned to despise her. I came home to apologize, and to place myself under your orders, if you will forgive me, and find something useful for me to do.”

“So I will, my boy; there’s my hand. Now out with it. What did you go away for, since it wasn’t a petticoat?”

“Well, sir, I am afraid I shall offend you.”

“Not a bit of it, after I’ve given you my hand. Come, now, what was it?”

Walter pondered and hesitated, but at last hit upon a way to explain.

“Sir,” said he, “until I was six years old they used to give me peaches from Oddington House; but one fine day the supply stopped, and I uttered a small howl to my nurse. Old John heard me, and told me Oddington was sold, house, garden, estate, and all.”

Colonel Clifford snorted.

Walter resumed, modestly but firmly:

“I was thirteen; I used to fish in a brook that ran near Drayton Park. One day I was fishing there, when a brown velveteen chap stopped me, and told me I was trespassing. ‘Trespassing?’ said I. ’I have fished here all my life; I am Walter Clifford, and this belongs to my father.’ ‘Well,’ said the man, ’I’ve heerd it did belong to Colonel Clifford onst, but now it belongs to Muster Mills; so you must fish in your own water, young gentleman, and leave ourn to us as owns it.’ Till I was eighteen I used to shoot snipes in a rushy bottom near Calverley Church. One day a fellow in black velveteen, and gaiters up to his middle, warned me out of that in the name of Muster Cannon.”

Colonel Clifford, who had been drumming on the table all this time, looked uneasy, and muttered, with some little air of compunction: "They have plucked my feathers deucedly, that's a fact. Hang that fellow Stevens, persuading me to keep race-horses; it's all his fault. Well, sir, proceed with your observations."

"Well, I inquired who could afford to buy what we were too poor to keep, and I found these wealthy purchasers were all in *trade*, not one of them a gentleman."

"You might have guessed that," said Colonel Clifford: "it is as much as a gentleman can do to live out of jail nowadays."

"Yes, sir," said Walter. "Cotton had bought one of these estates, tallow another, and lucifer-matches the other."

"Plague take them all three!" roared the Colonel.

"Well, then, sir," said Walter, "I could not help thinking there must be some magic in trade, and I had better go into it. I didn't think you would consent to that. I wasn't game to defy you; so I did a meanish thing, and slipped away into a merchant's office."

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“And made your fortune in three months?” inquired the Colonel.

“No, I didn’t; and don’t think trade is the thing for *me*. I saw a deal of avarice and meanness, and a thief of a clerk got his master to suspect me of dishonesty; so I snapped my fingers at them all, and here I am. But,” said the poor young fellow, “I do wish, father, you would put me into something where I can make a little money, so that when *this* estate comes to be sold, I may be the purchaser.”

Colonel Clifford started up in great emotion.

“Sell Clifford Hall, where I was born, and you were born, and everybody was born! Those estates I sold were only outlying properties.”

“They were beautiful ones,” said Walter. “I never see such peaches now.”

“As you did when you were six years old,” suggested the Colonel. “No, nor you never will. I’ve been six myself. Lord knows when it was, though!”

“But, sir, I don’t see any such trout, and no such haunts for snipe.”

“Do you mean to insult me?” cried the Colonel, rather suddenly. “This is what we are come to now. Here’s a brat of six begins taking notes against his own father; and he improves on the Scotch poet—he doesn’t print ’em. No, he accumulates them cannily until he is twenty, but never says a word. He loads his gun up to the muzzle, and waits, as the years roll on, with his linstock in his hand, and one fine day *at breakfast* he fires his treble charge of grape-shot at his own father.”

This was delivered so loudly that John feared a quarrel, and to interrupt it, put in his head, and said, mighty innocently:

“Did you call, sir? Can I do anything for you, sir?”

“Yes: go to the devil!”

John went, but not down-stairs, as suggested—a mere lateral movement that ended at the keyhole.

“Well, but, sir,” said Walter, half-reproachfully, “it was you elicited my views.”

“Confound your views, sir, and—your impudence! You’re in the right, and I am in the wrong” (this admission with a more ill-used tone than ever). “It’s the race-horses. Ring the bell. What sawneys you young fellows are! it used not to take six minutes to ring a bell when I was your age.”

Walter, thus stimulated, sprang to the bell-rope, and pulled it all down to the ground with a single gesture.

The Colonel burst out laughing, and that did him good; and Mr. Baker answered the bell like lightning; he quite forgot that the bell must have rung fifty yards from the spot where he was enjoying the dialogue.

“Send me the steward, John; I saw him pass the window.”

Meantime the Colonel marched up and down with considerable agitation. Walter, who had a filial heart, felt very uneasy, and said, timidly, “I am truly sorry, father, that I answered your questions so bluntly.”

“I’m not, then,” said the Colonel. “I hold him to be less than a man who flies from the truth, whether it comes from young lips or old. I have faced cavalry, sir, and I can face the truth.”

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At this moment the steward entered. “Jackson,” said the Colonel, in the very same tone he was speaking in, “put up my race-horses to auction by public advertisement.”

“But, sir, Jenny has got to run at Derby, and the brown colt at Nottingham, and the six-year-old gelding at a handicap at Chester, and the chestnut is entered for the Syllinger next year.”

“Sell them with their engagements.”

“And the trainer, sir?”

“Give him his warning.”

“And the jockey?”

“Discharge him on the spot, and take him by the ear out of the premises before he poisons the lot. Keep one of the stable-boys, and let my groom do the rest.”

“But who is to take them to the place of auction, sir?”

“Nobody. I’ll have the auction here, and sell them where they stand. Submit all your books of account to this young gentleman.”

The steward looked a little blue, and Walter remonstrated gently. “To me, father?”

“Why, you can cipher, can’t ye?”

“Rather; it is the best thing I do.”

“And you have been in trade, haven’t ye?”

“Why, yes.”

“Then you will detect plenty of swindles, if you find out one in ten. Above all, cut down my expenditure to my income. A gentleman of the nineteenth century, sharpened by trade, can easily do that. Sell Clifford Hall? I’d rather live on the rabbits and the pigeons and the blackbirds, and the carp in the pond, and drive to church in the wheelbarrow.”

So for a time Walter administered his father’s estate, and it was very instructive. Oh! the petty frauds—the swindles of agency—a term which, to be sure, is derived from the Latin word “agere,” *to do*—the cobweb of petty commissions—the flat bribes—the smooth hush-money!

Walter soon cut the expenses down to the income, which was ample, and even paid off the one mortgage that encumbered this noble estate at five per cent., only four per cent. of which was really fingered by the mortgagee; the balance went to a go-between, though no go-between was ever wanted, for any solicitor in the country would have found the money in a week at four per cent.

The old gentleman was delighted, and engaged his own son as steward at a liberal salary; and so Walter Clifford found employment and a fair income without going away from home again.

CHAPTER V.

MARY'S PERIL.

Whilst Mr. Bartley's business was improving under Hope's management, Hope himself was groaning under his entire separation from his daughter. Bartley had promised him this should not be; but among Hope's good qualities was a singular fidelity to his employers, and he was also a man who never broke his word. So when Bartley showed him that the true parentage of Grace Hope—now called Mary Bartley—could never be disguised unless her memory of him was interrupted and puzzled before she grew older, and that she as well as the world must be made to believe Bartley was her father, he assented, and it was two years before he ventured to come near his own daughter.

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But he demanded to see her at a distance, himself unseen, and this was arranged. He provided himself with a powerful binocular of the kind that is now used at sea, instead of the unwieldy old telescope, and the little girl was paraded by the nurse, who was in the secret. She played about in the sight of this strange spy. She was plump, she was rosy, she was full of life and spirit. Joy filled the father's heart; but then came a bitter pang to think that he had faded out of her joyous life; by-and-by he could see her no longer, for a mist came from his heart to his eyes; he bowed his head and went back to his business, his prosperity, and his solitude. These experiments were repeated at times. Moreover, Bartley had the tact never to write to him on business without telling him something about his girl, her clever sayings, her pretty ways, her quickness at learning from all her teachers, and so on. When she was eight years old a foreign agent was required in Bartley's business, and Hope agreed to start this agency and keep it going till some more ordinary person could be intrusted to work it.

But he refused to leave England without seeing his daughter with his own eyes and hearing her voice. However, still faithful to his pledge, he prepared a disguise; he actually grew a mustache and beard for this tender motive only, and changed his whole style of dress; he wore a crimson neck-tie and dark green gloves with a plaid suit, which combination he abhorred as a painter, and our respected readers abominate, for surely it was some such perverse combination that made a French dressmaker lift her hands to heaven and say, "*Quelle immoralite*!" So then Bartley himself took his little girl for a walk, and met Mr. Hope in an appointed spot not far from his own house. Poor Hope saw them coming, and his heart beat high. "Ah!" said Bartley, feigning surprise; "why, it's Mr. Hope. How do you do, Hope? This is my little girl. Mary, my dear, this is an old friend of mine. Give him your hand."

The girl looked in Hope's face, and gave him her hand, and did not recognize him.

"Fine girl for her years, isn't she?" said Bartley. "Healthy and strong, and quick at her lessons; and, what's better still, she is a good girl, a very good girl."

"Papa!" said the child, blushing, and hid her face behind Bartley's elbow, all but one eye, with which she watched the effect of these eulogies upon the strange gentleman.

"She is all a father could wish," said Hope, tenderly.

Instantly the girl started from her position, and stood wrapt in thought; her beautiful eyes wore a strange look of dreamy intelligence, and both men could see she was searching the past for that voice.

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Bartley drew back, that the girl might not see him, and held up his finger. Hope gave a slight nod of acquiescence, and spoke no more. Bartley invited him to take an early dinner, and talk business. Before he left he saw his child more than once; indeed, Bartley paraded her accomplishments. She played the piano to Hope; she rode her little Shetland pony for Hope; she danced a minuet with singular grace for so young a girl; she conversed with her governess in French, or something very like it, and she worked a little sewing-machine, all to please the strange gentleman; and whatever she was asked to do she did with a winning smile, and without a particle of false modesty, or the real egotism which is at the bottom of false modesty.

Anybody who knew William Hope intimately might almost recognize his daughter in this versatile little mind with its faculty of learning so many dissimilar things.

Hope left for the Continent with a proud heart, a joyful heart, and a sore heart. She was lovely, she was healthy, she was happy, she was accomplished, but she was his no longer, not even in name; her love was being gained by a stranger, and there was a barrier of iron, as well as the English Channel, between William Hope and his own Mary Bartley.

It would weary the reader were we to detail the small events bearing on the part of the story which took place during the next five years. They might be summed up thus: That William Hope got a peep at his daughter now and then; and, making a series of subtle experiments by varying his voice as much as possible, confused and nullified her memory of that voice to all appearance. In due course, however, father and daughter were brought into natural contact by the last thing that seemed likely to do it, *viz*., by Bartley's avarice. Bartley's legitimate business at home and abroad could now run alone. So he invited Hope to England to guide him in what he loved better than steady business, *viz*., speculation. The truth is, Bartley could execute, but had few original ideas. Hope had plenty, and sound ones, though not common ones. Hope directed the purchase of convertible securities on this principle: Select good ones; avoid time bargains, which introduce a distinct element of risk; and buy largely at every panic not founded on a permanent reason or out of proportion. Example: A great district bank broke. The shares of a great district railway went down thirty per cent. Hope bade his employer and pupil observe that this was rank delusion, the dividends of the railway were not lowered one per cent. by the failure of that bank, nor could they be: the shareholders of the bank had shares in the railway, and were compelled to force them on the market; hence the fall in the shares. "But," said Hope, "those depreciated shares are now in the hands of men who can hold them, and will, too, until they return from this ridiculous 85 to their normal value, which is from 105 to 115. Invest every shilling you have got; I shall." Bartley invested L30,000, and cleared twenty per cent. in three months.

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Example 2: There was a terrible accident on another railway, and part of the line broken up. Vast repairs needed. Shares fell twenty per cent.

“Out of proportion,” said Hope. “The sum for repairs will not deduct from the dividends one-tenth of the annual sum represented by the fall, and, in three months, fear of another such disaster will not keep a single man, woman, child, bullock, pig, or coal truck off that line. Put the pot on.”

Bartley put the pot on, and made fifteen per cent.

Hope said to Bartley:

“When an English speculator sends his money abroad at all, he goes wild altogether. He rushes at obscure transactions, and lends to Peru, or Guatemala, or Tierra del Fuego, or some shaky place he knows nothing about. The insular maniac overlooks the continent of Europe, instead of studying it, and seeking what countries there are safe and others risky. Now, why overlook Prussia? It is a country much better governed than England, especially as regards great public enterprises and monopolies. For instance, the directors of a Prussian railway can not swindle the shareholders by false accounts, and passing off loans for dividends. Against the frauds of directors, the English shareholder has only a sham security. He is invited to leave his home, and come two hundred miles to the directors’ home, and vote in person. He doesn’t do it. Why should he? In Prussia the Government protects the shareholder, and inspects the accounts severely. So much for the superior system of that country. Now, take a map. Here is Hamburg, the great port of the Continent, and Berlin, the great Continental centre; and there is one railway only between the two. What English railway can compare with this? The shares are at 150. But they must go to 300 in time unless the Prussian Government allows another railway, and that is not likely, and, if so, you will have two years to back out. This is the best permanent investment of its class that offers on the face of the globe.”

Bartley invested timidly, but held for years, and the shares went up over 300 before he sold.

“Do not let your mind live in an island if your body does,” was a favorite saying of William Hope; and we recommend it impartially to Britons and Bornese.

On one of Hope’s visits Bartley complained he had nothing to do. “I can sit here and speculate. I want to be in something myself; I think I will take a farm just to occupy me and amuse me.”

“It will not amuse you unless you make money by it,” suggested Hope.

“And nobody can do that nowadays. Farms don’t pay.”

“Ploughing and sowing don’t pay, but brains and money pay wherever found together.”

“What, on a farm?”

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“Why not, sir? You have only to go with the times. Observe the condition of produce: grain too cheap for a farmer because continents can export grain with little loss; fruit dear; meat dear, because cattle can not be driven and sailed without risk of life and loss of weight; agricultural labor rising, and in winter unproductive, because to farm means to plough and sow, and reap and mow, and lose money. But meet those conditions. Breed cattle, sheep, and horses, and make the farm their feeding-ground. Give fifty acres to fruit; have a little factory on the land for winter use, and so utilize all your farm hands and the village women, who are cheaper laborers than town brats, and I think you will make a little money in the form of money, besides what you make in gratuitous eggs, poultry, fruit, horses to ride, and cart things for the house—items which seldom figure in a farmer’s books as money, but we stricter accountants know they are.”

“I’ll do it,” said Bartley, “if you’ll be my neighbor, and work it with me, and watch the share market at home and abroad.”

Hope acquiesced joyfully to be near his daughter; and they found a farm in Sussex, with hills for the sheep, short grass for colts, plenty of water, enough arable land and artificial grasses for their purpose, and a grand sunny slope for their fruit trees, fruit bushes, and strawberries, with which last alone they paid the rent.

“Then,” said Hope, “farm laborers drink an ocean of beer. Now look at the retail price of beer: eighty per cent. over its cost, and yet deleterious, which tells against your labor. As an employer of labor, the main expense of a farm, you want beer to be slightly nourishing, and very inspiriting, not somniferous.”

So they set up a malt-house and a brew-house, and supplied all their own hands with genuine liquor on the truck system at a moderate but remunerative price, and the grains helped to feed their pigs. Hope’s principle was this: Sell no produce in its primitive form; if you change its form you make two profits. Do you grow barley? Malt it, and infuse it, and sell the liquor for two small profits, one on the grain, and one on the infusion. Do you grow grass? Turn it into flesh, and sell for two small profits, one on the herb, and one on the animal.

And really, when backed by money, the results seemed to justify his principle.

Hope lived by himself, but not far from his child, and often, when she went abroad, his loving eyes watched her every movement through his binocular, which might be described as an opera-glass ten inches long, with a small field, but telescopic power.

Grace Hope, whom we will now call Mary Bartley, since everybody but her father, who generally avoided *her name*, called her so, was a well-grown girl of thirteen, healthy, happy, beautiful, and accomplished. She was the germ of a woman, and could detect who loved her. She saw in Hope an affection she thought extraordinary, but instinct told her it was not like a young man’s love, and she accepted it with complacency, and

returned it quietly, with now and then a gush, for she could gush, and why not? “Far from us and from our friends be the frigid philosophy”—of a girl who can’t gush.

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Hope himself was loyal and guarded, and kept his affection within bounds; and a sore struggle it was. He never allowed himself to kiss her, though he was sore tempted one day, when he bought her a cream-colored pony, and she flung her arms round his neck before Mr. Bartley and kissed him eagerly; but he was so bashful that the girl laughed at him, and said, half pertly, “Excuse the liberty, but if you will be such a duck, why, you must take the consequences.”

Said Bartley, pompously, “You must not expect middle-aged men to be as demonstrative as very young ladies; but he has as much real affection for you as you have for him.”

“Then he has a good deal, papa,” said she, sweetly. Both the men were silent, and Mary looked to one and the other, and seemed a little puzzled.

The great analysts that have dealt microscopically with commonplace situations would revel in this one, and give you a curious volume of small incidents like the above, and vivisect the father’s heart with patient skill. But we poor dramatists, taught by impatient audiences to move on, and taught by those great professors of verbosity, our female novelists and nine-tenths of our male, that it is just possible for “masterly inactivity,” *alias* sluggish narrative, creeping through sorry flags and rushes with one lily in ten pages, to become a bore, are driven on to salient facts, and must trust a little to our reader’s intelligence to ponder on the singular situation of Mary Bartley and her two fathers.

One morning Mary Bartley and her governess walked to a neighboring town and enjoyed the sacred delight of shopping. They came back by a short-cut, which made it necessary to cross a certain brook, or rivulet, called the Lyn. This was a rapid stream, and in places pretty deep; but in one particular part it was shallow, and crossed by large stepping-stones, two-thirds of which were generally above-water. The village girls, including Mary Bartley, used all to trip over these stones, and think nothing of it, though the brook went past at a fine rate, and gradually widened and deepened as it flowed, till it reached a downright fall; after that, running no longer down a decline, it became rather a languid stream.

Mary and her governess came to this ford and found it swollen by recent rains, and foaming and curling round the stepping-stones, and their tops only were out of the water now.

The governess objected to pass this current.

“Well, but,” said Mary, “the other way is a mile round, and papa expects us to be punctual at meals, and I am, oh, so hungry! Dear Miss Everett, I have crossed it a hundred times.”

“But the water is so deep.”

“It is deeper than usual; but see, it is only up to my knee. I could cross it without the stones. You go round, dear, and I’ll explain against you come home.”

“Not until I’ve seen you safe over.”

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“That you will soon see,” said the girl, and, fearing a more authoritative interference, she gathered up her skirts and planted one dainty foot on the first stepping-stone, another on the next, and so on to the fourth; and if she had been a boy she would have cleared them all. But holding her skirts instead of keeping her arms to balance herself, and wearing idiotic shoes, her heels slipped on the fifth stone, which was rather slimy, and she fell into the middle of the current with a little scream.

To her amazement she found that the stream, though shallow, carried her off her feet, and though she recovered them, she could not keep them, but was alternately up and down, and driven along, all the time floundering. Oh, then she screamed with terror, and the poor governess ran screaming too, and making idle clutches from the bank, but powerless to aid.

Then, as the current deepened, the poor girl lost her feet altogether, and was carried on toward the deep water, flinging her arms high and screaming, but powerless. At first she was buoyed up by her clothes, and particularly by a petticoat of some material that did not drink water. But as her other clothes became soaked and heavy, she sank to her chin, and death stared her in the face.

She lost hope, and being no common spirit, she gained resignation; she left screaming, and said to Everett, “Pray for me.”

But the next moment hope revived, and fear with it—this is a law of nature—for a man, bare-headed and his hair flying, came galloping on a bare-backed pony, shouting and screaming with terror louder than both the women. He urged the pony furiously to the stream; then the beast planted his feet together, and with the impulse thus given Hope threw himself over the pony’s head into the water, and had his arm round his child in a moment. He lashed out with the other hand across the stream. But it was so powerful now as it neared the lasher that they made far more way onward to destruction than they did across the stream; still they did near the bank a little. But the lasher roared nearer and nearer, and the stream pulled them to it with iron force. They were close to it now. Then a willow bough gave them one chance. Hope grasped it, and pulled with iron strength. From the bough he got to a branch, and finally clutched the stem of the tree, just as his feet were lifted up by the rushing water, and both lives hung upon that willow-tree. The girl was on his left arm, and his right arm round the willow.

“Grace,” said he, feigning calmness. “Put your arm around my neck, Mary.”

“Yes, dear,” said she, firmly.

“Now don’t hurry yourself—*there’s no danger*; move slowly across me, and hold my right arm very tight.”

She did so.

“Now take hold of the bank with your left hand; but don’t let go of me.”

“Yes, dear,” said the little heroine, whose fear was gone now she had Hope to take care of her.

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Then Hope clutched the tree with his left hand, pushed Mary on shore with his right, and very soon had her in his arms on *terra firma*.

But now came a change that confounded Mary Bartley, to whom a man was a very superior being; only not always intelligible.

The brave man fell to shaking like an aspen leaf; the strong man to sobbing and gasping, and kissing the girl wildly. “Oh, my child! my child!”

Then Mary, of course, must gulp and cry a little for sympathy; but her quick-changing spirit soon shook it off, and she patted his cheek and kissed him, and then began to comfort him, if you please. “Good, dear, kind Mr. Hope,” said she. “La! don’t go on like that. You were so brave in the water, and now the danger is over. I’ve had a ducking, that is all. Ha! ha! ha!” and the little wretch began to laugh.

Hope looked amazed; neither his heart nor his sex would let him change his mood so swiftly.

“Oh, my child,” said he, “how can you laugh? You have been near eternity, and if you had been lost, what should I—O God!”

Mary turned very grave. “Yes,” said she, “I have been near eternity. It would not have mattered to you—you are such a good man—but I should have caught it for disobedience. But, dear Mr. Hope, let me tell you that the moment you put your arm round me I felt just as safe in the water as on dry land; so you see I have had longer to get over it than you have; that accounts for my laughing. No, it doesn’t; I am a giddy, giggling girl, with *no depth of character*, and not worthy of all this affection. Why does everybody love *me*? They ought to be ashamed of themselves.”

Hope told her she was a little angel, and everybody was right to love her; indeed, they deserved to be hanged if they did not.

Mary fixed on the word angel. “If I was an angel,” she said, “I shouldn’t be hungry, and I am, awfully. Oh, please come home; papa is so punctual. Mr. Hope, are you going to tell papa? Because if you *are*, just you take me and throw me in again. I’d rather be drowned than scolded.” (This with a defiant attitude and flashing eyes.)

“No, no,” said Hope. “I will not tell him, to vex him, and get you scolded.”

“Then let us run home.”

She took his hand, and he ran with her like a playmate, and oh! the father’s heart leaped and glowed at this sweet companionship after danger and terror.

When they got near the house Mary Bartley began to walk and think. She had a very thinking countenance at times, and Hope watched her, and wondered what were her thoughts. She was very grave, so probably she was thinking how very near she had been to the other world.

Standing on the door-step, whilst he stood on the gravel, she let him know her thoughts. All her life, and even at this tender age, she had very searching eyes; they were gray now, though they had been blue. She put her hands to her waist, and bent those searching eyes on William Hope.

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“Mr. Hope,” said she, in a resolute sort of way.

“My dear,” said he, eagerly.

“YOU LOVE ME BETTER THAN PAPA DOES, THAT’S ALL.”

And having administered this information as a dry fact that might be worth looking into at leisure, she passed thoughtfully into the house.

CHAPTER VI.

SHARP PRACTICE.

Hope paid a visit to his native place in Derbyshire, and his poor relations shared his prosperity, and blessed him, and Mr. Bartley upon his report; for Hope was one of those choice spirits who praise the bridge that carries them safe over the stream of adversity.

He returned to Sussex with all the news, and, amongst the rest, that Colonel Clifford had a farm coming vacant. Walter Clifford had insisted on a higher rent at the conclusion of the term, but the tenant had demurred.

Bartley paid little attention at the time; but by-and-by he said, “Did you not see signs of coal on Colonel Clifford’s property?”

“That I did, and on this very farm, and told him so. But he is behind the age. I have no patience with him. Take one of those old iron ramrods that used to load the old musket, and cover that ramrod with prejudices a foot and a half deep, and there you have Colonel Clifford.”

“Well, but a tenant would not be bound by his prejudices.”

“A tenant! A tenant takes no right to mine, under a farm lease; he would have to propose a special contract, or to ask leave, and Colonel Clifford would never grant it.”

There the conversation dropped. But the matter rankled in Bartley’s mind. Without saying any more to Hope, he consulted a sharp attorney.

The result was that he took Mary Bartley with him into Derbyshire.

He put up at a little inn, and called at Clifford Hall.

He found Colonel Clifford at home, and was received stiffly, but graciously. He gave Colonel Clifford to understand that he had left business.

“All the better,” said Colonel Clifford, sharply.

“And taken to farming.”

“Ugh!” said the other, with his favorite snort.

At this moment, who should walk into the room but Walter Clifford.

Bartley started and stared. Walter started and stared.

“Mr. Bolton,” said Bartley, scarcely above a whisper.

But Colonel Clifford heard it, and said, brusquely: “Bolton! No. Why, this is Walter Clifford, my son, and my man of business.—Walter, this is Mr. Bartley.”

“Proud to make your acquaintance, sir,” said the astute Bartley, ignoring the past.

Walter was glad he took this line before Colonel Clifford: not that he forgave Mr. Bartley that old affront the reader knows of.

The judicious Bartley read his face, and, as a first step toward propitiation, introduced him to his daughter. Walter was amazed at her beauty and grace, coming from such a stock. He welcomed her courteously, but shyly. She replied with rare affability, and that entire absence of mock-modesty which was already a feature in her character. To be sure, she was little more than fifteen, though she was full grown, and looked nearer twenty.

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Bartley began to feel his way with Colonel Clifford about the farm. He told him he was pretty successful in agriculture, thanks to the assistance of an experienced friend, and then he said, half carelessly, “By-the-bye, they tell me you have one to let. Is that so?”

“Walter,” said Colonel Clifford, “have you a farm to let?”

“Not at present, sir; but one will be vacant in a month, unless the present tenant consents to pay thirty per cent. more than he has done.”

“Might I see that farm, Mr. Walter?” asked Bartley.

“Certainly,” said Walter; “I shall be happy to show you over it.” Then he turned to Mary. “I am afraid it would be no compliment to you. Ladies are not interested in farms.”

“Oh, but *I* am, since papa is, and Mr. Hope: and then on *our* farm there are so many dear little young things: little calves, little lambs, and little pigs. Little pigs are ducks—-*very* little ones, I mean; and there is nearly always a young colt about, that eats out of my hand. Not like a farm? The idea!”

“Then I will show you all over ours, you and your papa,” said Walter, warmly. He then asked Mr. Bartley where he was to be found; and when Bartley told him at the “Dun Cow,” he looked at Mary and said, “Oh!”

Mary understood in a moment, and laughed and said: “We are very comfortable, I assure you. We have the parlor all to ourselves, and there are samplers hung up, and oh! such funny pictures, and the landlady is beginning to spoil me already.”

“Nobody can spoil you, Mary,” said Mr. Bartley.

“You ought to know, papa, for you have been trying a good many years.”

“Not very many, Miss Bartley,” said Colonel Clifford, graciously. Then he gave half a start and said: “Here am I calling her miss when she is my own niece, and, now I think of it, she can’t be half as old as she looks. I remember the very day she was born. My dear, you are an impostor.”

Bartley changed color at this chance shaft. But Colonel Clifford explained:

“You pass for twenty, and you can’t be more than—Let me see.”

“I am fifteen and four months,” said Mary, “and I do take people in—*cruelly*.”

“Well,” said Colonel Clifford, “you see you can’t take me in. I know your date. So come and give your old ruffian of an uncle a kiss.”

“That I will,” cried Mary, and flew at Colonel Clifford, and flung both arms round his neck and kissed him. “Oh, papa,” said she, “I have got an uncle now. A hero, too; and me that is so fond of heroes! Only this is my first—out of books.”

“Mary, my dear,” said Bartley, “you are too impetuous. Please excuse her, Colonel Clifford. Now, my dear, shake hands with your cousin, for we must be going.”

Mary complied; but not at all impetuously. She lowered her long lashes, and put out her hand timidly, and said, “Good-by, Cousin Walter.”

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He held her hand a moment, and that made her color directly. “You will come over the farm. Can you ride? Have you your habit?”

“No, cousin; but never mind that. I can put on a long skirt.”

“A skirt! But, after all, it does not matter a straw what *you* wear.”

Mary was such a novice that she did not catch the meaning of this on the spot, but half-way to the inn, and in the middle of a conversation, her cheeks were suddenly suffused with blushes. A young man had admired her and *said* so. Very likely that was the way with young men. *No* doubt they were bolder than young women; but somehow it was not so very objectionable *in them*.

That short interview was a little era in Mary’s young life. Walter had fixed his eyes on her with delight, had held her hand some seconds, and admired her to her face. She began to wonder a little, and flutter a little, and to put off childhood.

Next day, punctual to the minute, Walter drove up to the door in an open carriage drawn by two fast steppers. He found Mr. Bartley alone, and why? because, at sight of Walter, Mary, for the first time in her life, had flown upstairs to look at herself in the glass before facing the visitor, and to smooth her hair, and retouch a bow, *etc*., underrating, as usual, the power of beauty, and overrating nullities. Bartley took this opportunity, and said to young Clifford:

“I owe you an apology, and a most earnest one. Can you ever forgive me?”

Walter changed color. Even this humble allusion to so great an insult was wormwood to him. He bit his lip, and said:

“No man can do more than say he is sorry. I will try to forget it, sir.”

“That is as much as I can expect,” said Bartley, humbly. “But if you only knew the art, the cunning, the apparent evidence, with which that villain Monckton deluded me—”

“That I can believe.”

“And permit me one observation before we drop this unhappy subject forever. If you had done me the honor to come to me as Walter Clifford, why, then, strong and misleading as the evidence was, I should have said, ‘Appearances are deceitful, but no Clifford was ever disloyal.’”

This artful speech conquered Walter Clifford. He blushed, and bowed a little haughtily at the compliment to the Cliffords. But his sense of justice was aroused.

“You are right,” said he. “I must try and see both sides. If a man sails under false colors, he mustn’t howl if he is mistaken for a pirate. Let us dismiss the subject forever. I am Walter Clifford now—at your service.”

At that moment Mary Bartley came in, beaming with youth and beauty, and illumined the room. The cousins shook hands, and Walter’s eyes glowed with admiration.

After a few words of greeting he handed Mary into the drag. Her father followed, and he was about to drive off, when Mary cried out, “Oh, I forgot my skirt, if I am to ride.”

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The skirt was brought down, and the horses, that were beginning to fret, dashed off. A smart little groom rode behind, and on reaching the farm they found another with two saddle-horses, one of them, a small, gentle Arab gelding, had a side-saddle. They rode all over the farm, and inspected the buildings, which were in excellent repair, thanks to Walter's supervision. Bartley inquired the number of acres and the rent demanded. Walter told him. Bartley said it seemed to him a fair rent; still, he should like to know why the present tenant declined.

"Perhaps you had better ask him," said Walter. "I should wish you to hear both sides."

"That is like you," said Bartley; "but where does the shoe pinch, in your opinion?"

"Well, he tells me, in sober earnest, that he loses money by it as it is; but when he is drunk he tells his boon companions he has made seven thousand pounds here. He has one or two grass fields that want draining, but I offer him the pipes; he has only got to lay them and cut the drains. My opinion is that he is the slave of habit; he is so used to make an unfair profit out of these acres that he can not break himself of it and be content with a fair one."

"I dare say you have hit it," said Bartley. "Well, I am fond of farming; but I don't live by it, and a moderate profit would content me."

Walter said nothing. The truth is, he did not want to let the farm to Bartley.

Bartley saw this, and drew Mary aside.

"Should not you like to come here, my child?"

"Yes, papa, if you wish it; and you know it's dear Mr. Hope's birth-place."

"Well, then, tell this young fellow so. I will give you an opportunity."

That was easily managed, and then Mary said, timidly, "Cousin Walter, we should all three be so glad if we might have the farm."

"Three?" said he. "Who is the third?"

"Oh, somebody that everybody likes and I love. It is Mr. Hope. Such a duck! I am sure you would like him."

"Hope! Is his name William?"

"Yes, it is. Do you know him?" asked Mary, eagerly.

"I have reason to know him: he did me a good turn once, and I shall never forget it."

“Just like him!” cried Mary. “He is always doing people good turns. He is the best, the truest, the cleverest, the dearest darling dear that ever stepped, and a second father to me; and, cousin, this village is his birth-place, and he didn’t say much, but it was he who told us of this farm, and he would be so pleased if I could write and say, ’We are to have the farm—Cousin Walter says so.’”

She turned her lovely eyes, brimming with tenderness, toward her cousin Walter, and he was done for.

“Of course you shall have it,” he said, warmly. “Only you will not be angry with me if I insist on the increased rent. You know, cousin, I have a father, too, and I must be just to him.”

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“To be sure, you must, dear,” said Mary, incautiously; and the word penetrated Walter’s heart as if a woman of twenty-five had said it all of a sudden and for the first time.

When they got home, Mary told Mr. Bartley he was to have the farm if he would pay the increased rent.

“That is all right,” said Bartley. “Then to-morrow we can go home.”

“So soon!” said Mary, sorrowfully.

“Yes,” said Bartley, firmly; “the rest had better be done in writing. Why, Mary, what is the use of staying on now? We are going to live here in a month or two.”

“I forgot that,” said Mary, with a little sigh. It seemed so ungracious to get what they wanted, and then turn their backs directly. She hinted as much, very timidly.

But Bartley was inexorable, and they reached home next day.

Mary would have liked to write to Walter, and announce their safe arrival, but nature withheld her. She was a child no longer.

Bartley went to the sharp solicitor, and had a long interview with him. The result was that in about ten days he sent Walter Clifford a letter and the draft of a lease, very favorable to the landlord on the whole, but cannily inserting one unusual clause that looked inoffensive.

It came by post, and Walter read the letter, and told his father whom it was from.

“What does the fellow say?” grunted Colonel Clifford.

“He says: ’We are doing very well here, but Hope says a bailiff can now carry out our system; and he is evidently sweet on his native place, and thinks the proposed rent is fair, and even moderate. As for me, my life used to be so bustling that I require a change now and then; so I will be your tenant. Hope says I am to pay the expense of the lease, so I have requested Arrowsmith & Cox to draw it. I have no experience in leases. They have drawn hundreds. I told them to make it fair. If they have not, send it back with objections.’”

“Oh! oh!” said Colonel Clifford. “He draws the lease, does he? Then look at it with a microscope.”

Walter laughed.

“I should not like to encounter him on his own ground. But here he is a fish out of water; he must be. However, I will pass my eye over it. Where the farmer generally over-

reaches us, if he draws the lease, is in the clauses that protect him on leaving. He gets part possession for months without paying rent, and he hampers and fleeces the incoming tenant, so that you lose a year's rent or have to buy him out. Now, let me see, that will be at the end of the document—No; it is exceedingly fair, this one."

"Show it to our man of business, and let him study every line. Set an attorney to catch an attorney."

"Of course I shall submit it to our solicitor," said Walter.

This was done, and the experienced practitioner read it very carefully. He pronounced it unusually equitable for a farmer's lease.

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“However,” said he, “we might suggest that he does *all* the repairs and draining, and that you find the materials; and also that he insures all the farm buildings. But you can hardly stand out for the insurance if he objects. There’s no harm trying. Stay! here is one clause that is unusual: the tenant is to have the right to bore for water, or to penetrate the surface of the soil, and take out gravel or chalk or minerals, if any. I don’t like that clause. He might quarry, and cut the farm in pieces. Ah, there’s a proviso, that any damage to the surface or the agricultural value shall be fully compensated, the amount of such injury to be settled by the landlord’s valuer or surveyor. Oh, come, if you can charge your own price, that can’t kill you.”

In short, the draft was approved, subject to certain corrections. These were accepted. The lease was engrossed in duplicate, and in due course signed and delivered. The old tenant left, abusing the Cliffords, and saying it was unfair to bring in a stranger, for *he* would have given all the money.

Bartley took possession.

Walter welcomed Hope very warmly, and often came to see him. He took a great interest in Hope’s theories of farming, and often came to the farm for lessons. But that interest was very much increased by the opportunities it gave him of seeing and talking to sweet Mary Bartley. Not that he was forward or indiscreet. She was not yet sixteen, and he tried to remember she was a child.

Unfortunately for that theory she looked a ripe woman, and this very Walter made her more and more womanly. Whenever Walter was near she had new timidity, new blushes, fewer gushes, less impetuosity, more reserve. Sweet innocent! She was set by Nature to catch the man by the surest way, though she had no such design.

Oh, it was a pretty, subtle piece of nature, and each sex played its part. Bold advances of the man, with internal fear to offend, mock retreats of the girl, with internal throbs of complacency, and life invested with a new and growing charm to both. Leaving this pretty little pastime to glide along the flowery path that beautifies young lives to its inevitable climax, we go to a matter more prosaic, yet one that proved a source of strange and stormy events.

Hope had hardly started the farm when Bartley sent him off to Belgium—TO STUDY COAL MINES.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

Mr. Hope left his powerful opera-glass with Mary Bartley. One day that Walter called she was looking through it at the landscape, and handed it to him. He admired its power. Mary told him it had saved her life once.

“Oh,” said he, “how could that be?”

Then she told him how Hope had seen her drowning, a mile off, with it, and ridden a bare-backed steed to her rescue.

“God bless him!” cried Walter. “He is our best friend. Might I borrow this famous glass?”

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“Oh,” said Mary, “I am not going into any more streams; I am not so brave now as I used to be.”

“Please lend it me, for all that.”

“Of course I will, if you wish it.”

Strange to say, after this, whether Mary walked out or rode out, she very often met Mr. Walter Clifford. He was always delighted and surprised. She was surprised three times, and said so, and after that she came to lower her lashes and blush, but not to start. Each meeting was a pure accident, no doubt, only she foresaw the inevitable occurrence.

They talked about everything in the world except what was most on their minds. Their soft tones and expressive eyes supplied that little deficiency.

One day he caught her riding on her little Arab. The groom fell behind directly. After they had ridden some distance in silence, Walter broke out:

“How beautifully you ride!”

“Me!” cried Mary. “Why, I never had a lesson in my life.”

“That accounts for it. Let a lady alone, and she does everything more gracefully than a man; but let some cad undertake to teach her, she distrusts herself and imitates the snob. If you could only see the women in Hyde Park who have been taught to ride, and compare them with yourself!”

“I should learn humility.”

“No; it would make you vain, if anything could.”

“You seem inclined to do me that good turn. Come, pray, what do these poor ladies do to offend you so?”

“I’ll tell you. They square their shoulders vulgarly; they hold the reins in their hands as if they were driving, and they draw the reins to their waists in a coarse, absurd way. They tighten both these reins equally, and saw the poor devil’s mouth with the curb and the snaffle at one time. Now you know, Mary, the snaffle is a mild bit, and the curb is a sharp one; so where is the sense of pulling away at the snaffle when you are tugging at the curb? Why, it is like the fellow that made two holes at the bottom of the door—a big one for the cat to come through and a little one for the kitten. But the worst of all is they show the caddess so plainly.”

“Caddess! What is that; goddess you mean, I suppose?”

“No; I mean a cad of the feminine gender. They seem bursting with affectation and elated consciousness that they are on horseback. That shows they have only just made the acquaintance of that animal, and in a London riding-school. Now you hold both reins lightly in the left hand, the curb loose, since it is seldom wanted, the snaffle just feeling the animal’s mouth, and you look right and left at the people you are talking to, and don’t seem to invite one to observe that you are on a horse: that is because you are a lady, and a horse is a matter of course to you, just as the ground is when you walk upon it.”

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The sensible girl blushed at his praise, but she said, dryly, “How meritorious! Cousin Walter, I have heard that flattery is poison. I won’t stay here to be poisoned—so.” She finished the sentence in action; and with a movement of her body she started her Arab steed, and turned her challenging eye back on Walter, and gave him a hand-gallop of a mile on the turf by the road-side. And when she drew bridle her cheeks glowed so and her eyes glistened, that Walter was dazzled by her bright beauty, and could do nothing but gaze at her for ever so long.

If Hope had been at home, Mary would have been looked after more sharply. But if she was punctual at meals, that went a long way with Robert Bartley.

However, the accidental and frequent meetings of Walter and Mary, and their delightful rides and walks, were interfered with just as they began to grow into a habit. There arrived at Clifford Hall a formidable person—in female eyes, especially—a beautiful heiress. Julia Clifford, great-niece and ward of Colonel Clifford; very tall, graceful, with dark gray eyes, and black eyebrows the size of a leech, that narrowed to a point and met in finer lines upon the bridge of a nose that was gently aquiline, but not too large, as such noses are apt to be. A large, expressive mouth, with wonderful rows of ivory, and the prettiest little black down, fine as a hair, on her upper lip, and a skin rather dark but clear, and glowing with the warm blood beneath it, completed this noble girl. She was nineteen years of age.

Colonel Clifford received her with warm affection and old-fashioned courtesy; but as he was disabled by a violent fit of gout, he deputed Walter to attend to her on foot and horseback.

Miss Clifford, accustomed to homage, laid Walter under contribution every day. She was very active, and he had to take her a walk in the morning, and a ride in the afternoon. He winced a little under this at first; it kept him so much from Mary. But there was some compensation. Julia Clifford was a lady-like rider, and also a bold and skillful one.

The first time he rode with her he asked her beforehand what sort of a horse she would like.

“Oh, anything,” said she, “that is not vicious nor slow.”

“A hack or a hunter?”

“Oh, a hunter, if I *may*.”

“Perhaps you will do me the honor to look at them and select.”

“You are very kind, and I will.”

He took her to the stables, and she selected a beautiful black mare, with a coat like satin.

“There,” said Walter, despondingly. “I was afraid you would fix on *her*. She is impossible, I can’t ride her myself.”

“Vicious?”

“Not in the least.”

“Well, then—”

Here an old groom touched his hat, and said, curtly, “Too hot and fidgety, miss. I’d as lieve ride of a boiling kettle.”

Walter explained: “The poor thing is the victim of nervousness.”

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“Which I call them as rides her the victims,” suggested the ancient groom.

“Be quiet, George. She would go sweetly in a steeple-chase, if she didn’t break her heart with impatience before the start. But on the road she is impossible. If you make her walk, she is all over lather in five minutes, and she’d spoil that sweet habit with flecks of foam. My lady has a way of tossing her head, and covering you all over with white streaks.”

“She wants soothing,” suggested Miss Clifford.

“Nay, miss. She wants bleeding o’ Sundays, and sweating over the fallows till she drops o’ week-days. But if she was mine I’d put her to work a coal-cart for six months; that would larn her.”

“I will ride her,” said Miss Clifford, calmly; “her or none.”

“Saddle her, George,” said Walter, resignedly. “I’ll ride Goliah. Black Bess sha’n’t plead a bad example. Goliah is as meek as Moses, Miss Clifford. He is a gigantic mouse.”

“I’d as lieve ride of a dead man,” said the old groom.

“Mr. George,” said the young lady, “you seem hard to please. May I ask what sort of animal you do like to ride?”

“Well, miss, summat between them two. When I rides I likes to be at peace. If I wants work, there’s plenty in the yard. If I wants fretting and fuming, I can go home: I’m a married man, ye know. But when I crosses a horse I looks for a smart trot and a short stepper, or an easy canter on a bit of turf, and not to be set to hard labor a-sticking my heels into Goliah, nor getting a bloody nose every now and then from Black Bess a-throwing back her uneasy head when I do but lean forward in the saddle. I be an old man, miss, and I looks for peace on horseback if I can’t get it nowhere else.”

All this was delivered whilst saddling Black Bess. When she was ready, Miss Clifford asked leave to hold the bridle, and walk her out of the premises. As she walked her she patted and caressed her, and talked to her all the time—told her they all misunderstood her because she was a female; but now she was not to be tormented and teased, but to have her own way.

Then she asked George to hold the mare’s head as gently as he could, and Walter to put her up. She was in the saddle in a moment. The mare fidgeted and pranced, but did not rear. Julia slackened the reins, and patted and praised her, and let her go. She made a run, but was checked by degrees with the snaffle. She had a beautiful mouth, and it was in good hands at last.

When they had ridden a few miles they came to a very open country, and Julia asked, demurely, if she might be allowed to try her off the road. “All right,” said Walter; and Miss Julia, with a smart decision that contrasted greatly with the meekness of her proposal, put her straight at the bank, and cleared it like a bird. They had a famous gallop, but this judicious rider neither urged the mare nor greatly checked her. She moderated her. Black Bess came home that day sweating properly, but with a marked diminution of lather and foam. Miss Clifford asked leave to ride her into the stable-yard, and after dismounting talked to her, and patted her, and praised her. An hour later the pertinacious beauty asked for a carrot from the garden, and fed Black Bess with it in the stable.

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By these arts, a very light hand, and tact in riding, she soothed Black Bess's nerves, so that at last the very touch of her habit skirt, or her hand, or the sound of her voice, seemed to soothe the poor nervous creature; and at last one day in the stable Bess protruded her great lips and kissed her fair rider on the shoulder after her manner.

All this interested and amused Walter Clifford, but still he was beginning to chafe at being kept from Miss Bartley, when one morning her servant rode over with a note.

"DEAR COUSIN WALTER,—Will you kindly send me back my opera glass? I want to see what is going on at Clifford Hall.

"Yours affectionately,

"MARY BARTLEY."

Walter wrote back directly that he would bring it himself, and tell her what was going on at Clifford Hall.

So he rode over and told her of Julia Clifford's arrival, and how his father had deputed him to attend on her, and she took up all his time. It was beginning to be a bore.

"On the contrary," said Mary, "I dare say she is very handsome."

"That she is," said Walter.

"Please describe her."

"A very tall, dark girl, with wonderful eyebrows; and she has broken in Black Bess, that some of us men could not ride in comfort."

Mary changed color. She murmured, "No wonder the Hall is more attractive than the farm!" and the tears shone in her eyes.

"Oh, Mary," said Walter, reproachfully, "how can you say that? What is Julia Clifford to me?"

"I can't tell," said Mary, dryly. "I never saw you together *through my glasses, you know*."

Walter laughed at this innuendo.

"You shall see us together to-morrow, if you will bless one of us with your company."

"I might be in the way."

“That is not very likely. Will you ride to Hammond Church to-morrow at about ten, and finish your sketch of the tower? I will bring Miss Clifford there, and introduce you to each other.”

This was settled, and Mary was apparently quite intent on her sketch when Walter and Julia rode up, and Walter said:

“That is my cousin, Mary Bartley. May I introduce her to you?”

“Of course. What a sweet face!”

So the ladies were introduced, and Julia praised Mary’s sketch, and Mary asked leave to add her to it, hanging, with pensive figure, over a tombstone. Julia took an admirable pose, and Mary, with her quick and facile fingers, had her on the paper in no time. Walter asked her, in a whisper, what she thought of her model.

“I like her,” said Mary. “She is rather pretty.”

“Rather pretty! Why, she is an acknowledged beauty.”

“A beauty? The idea! Long black thing!”

Then they rode all together to the farm. There Mary was all innocent hospitality, and the obnoxious Julia kissed her at parting, and begged her to come and see her at the Hall.

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Mary did call, and found her with a young gentleman of short stature, who was devouring her with his eyes, but did not overflow in discourse, having a slight impediment in his speech. This was Mr. Percy Fitzroy. Julia introduced him.

“And where are you staying, Percy?” inquired she.

“At the D—D—Dun Cow.”

“What is that?”

Walter explained that it was a small hostelry, but one that was occasionally honored by distinguished visitors. Miss Bartley staid there three days.

“I h—hope to st—ay more than that,” said little Percy, with an amorous glance at Julia.

Miss Clifford took Mary to her room, and soon asked her what she thought of him; then, anticipating criticism, she said there was not much of him, but he was such a duck.

“He dresses beautifully,” was Mary’s guarded remark.

However, when Walter rode home with her, being now relieved of his attendance on Julia, she was more communicative. Said she: “I never knew before that a man could look like fresh cambric. Dear me! his head and his face and his little whiskers, his white scarf, his white waistcoat, and all his clothes, and himself, seem just washed and ironed and starched. *I looked round for the bandbox*.”

“Never mind,” said Walter. “He is a great addition. My duties devolve on him. And I shall be free to—How her eyes shone and her voice mellowed when she spoke to him! Confess, now, love is a beautiful thing.”

“I can not say. Not experienced in beautiful things.” And Mary looked mighty demure.

“Of course not. What am I thinking of? You are only a child.”

“A little more than that, *please*.”

“At all events, love beautified *her*.”

“I saw no difference. She was always a lovely girl.”

“Why, you said she was ‘a long black thing.’”

“Oh, that was before—she looked engaged.”

After this young Fitzroy was generally Miss Clifford’s companion in her many walks, and Walter Clifford had a delightful time with Mary Bartley.

Her nurse discovered how matters were going. But she said nothing. From something Bartley let fall years ago she divined that Bartley was robbing Walter Clifford by substituting Hope's child for his own, and she thought the mischief could be repaired and the sin atoned for if he and Mary became man and wife. So she held her tongue and watched.

The servants at the Hall watched the whole game, and saw how the young people were pairing, and talked them over very freely.

The only person in the dark was Colonel Clifford. He was nearly always confined to his room. However, one day he came down, and found Julia and Percy together. She introduced Percy to him. The Colonel was curt, but grumpy, and Percy soon beat a retreat.

The Colonel sent for Walter to his room. He did not come for some time, because he was wooing Mary Bartley.

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Colonel Clifford's first word was, "Who was that little stuttering dandy I caught spooning *your* Julia?"

"Only Percy Fitzroy."

"Only Percy Fitzroy! Never despise your rivals, sir. Always remember that young women are full of vanity, and expect to be courted all day long. I will thank you not to leave the field open a single day till you have secured the prize."

"What prize, sir?"

"What prize, you ninny? Why, the beautiful girl that can buy back Oddington and Drayton, peaches and fruit and all. They are both to be sold at this moment. What prize? Why, the wife I have secured for you, if you don't go and play the fool and neglect her."

Walter Clifford looked aghast.

"Julia Clifford!" said he. "Pray don't ask me to marry *her*."

"Not ask you?—but I do ask you; and what is more, I command you. Would you revolt again against your father, who has forgiven you, and break my heart, now I am enfeebled by disease? Julia Clifford is your wife, or you are my son no more."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

The next time Walter Clifford met Mary Bartley he was gloomy at intervals. The observant girl saw he had something on his mind. She taxed him with it, and asked him tenderly what it was.

"Oh, nothing," said he.

"Don't tell me!" said she. "Mind, nothing escapes my eye. Come, tell me, or we are not friends."

"Oh, come, Mary. That is hard."

"Not in the least. I take an interest in you."

"Bless you for saying so!"

"And so, if you keep your troubles from me, we are not friends, nor cousins."

“Mary!”

“Nor anything else.”

“Well, dear Mary, sooner than not be anything else to you I will tell you, and yet I don’t like. Well, then, if I must, it is that dear old wrong-headed father of mine. He wants me to marry Julia Clifford.”

Mary turned pale directly. “I guessed as much,” said she. “Well, she is young and beautiful and rich, and it is your duty to obey your father.”

“But I can’t.”

“Oh yes, you can, if you try.”

“But I can’t try.”

“Why not?”

“Can’t you guess?”

“No.”

“Well, then, I love another girl. As opposite to her as light is to darkness.”

Mary blushed and looked down. “Complimentary to Julia,” she said. “I pity her opposite, for Julia is a fine, high-minded girl.”

“Ah, Mary, you are too clever for me; of course I mean the opposite in appearance.”

“As ugly as she is pretty?”

“No; but she is a dark girl, and I don’t like dark girls. It was a dark girl that deceived me so heartlessly years ago.”

“Ah!”

“And made me hate the whole sex.”

“Or only the brunettes?”

“The whole lot.”

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“Cousin Walter, I thank you in the name of that small company.”

“Until I saw you, and you converted me in one day.”

“Only to the blondes?”

“Only to one of them. My sweet Mary, the situation is serious. You, whose eye nothing escapes—you must have seen long ago how I love you.”

“Never mind what I have seen, Walter,” said Mary, whose bosom was beginning to heave.

“Very well,” said Walter; “then I will tell you as if you didn’t know it. I admired you at first sight; every time I was with you I admired you, and loved you more and more. It is my heaven to see you and to hear you speak. Whether you are grave or gay, saucy or tender, it is all one charm, one witchcraft. I want you for my wife, and my child, and my friend. Mary, my love, my darling, how could I marry any woman but you? and you, could you marry any man but me, to break the heart that beats only for you?”

This and the voice of love, now ardent, now broken with emotion, were more than sweet, saucy Mary could trifle with; her head drooped slowly upon his shoulder, and her arm went round his neck, and the tremor of her yielding frame and the tears of tenderness that flowed slowly from her fair eyes told Walter Clifford without a word that she was won.

He had the sense not to ask her for words. What words could be so eloquent as this? He just held her to his manly bosom, and trembled with love and joy and triumph.

She knew, too, that she had replied, and treated her own attitude like a sentence in rather a droll way. “But *for all that*,” said she, “I don’t mean to be a wicked girl if I can help. This is an age of wicked young ladies. I soon found that out in the newspapers; that and science are the two features. And I have made a solemn vow not to be one of them”—(query, a science or a naughty girl)—“making mischief between father and son.”

“No more you shall, dear,” said Walter. “Leave it to me. We must be patient, and all will come right.”

“Oh, I’ll be true to you, dear, if that is all,” said Mary.

“And if you would not mind just temporizing a little, for my sake, who love you?”

“Temporize!” said Mary, eagerly. “With all my heart. I’ll temporize till we are all dead and buried.”

“Oh, that will be too long for me,” said Walter.

“Oh, never do things by halves,” said the ready girl.

If his tongue had been as prompt as hers, he might have said that “temporizing” was doing things by halves; but he let her have the last word. And perhaps he lost nothing, for she would have had that whether or no.

So this day was another era in their love. Girls after a time are not content to see they are beloved; they must hear it too; and now Walter had spoken out like a man, and Mary had replied like a woman. They were happy, and walked hand in hand purring to one another, instead of sparring any more.

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On his return home Walter found Julia marching swiftly and haughtily up and down upon the terrace of Clifford Hall, and he could not help admiring the haughty magnificence of her walk. The reason soon appeared. She was in a passion. She was always tall, but now she seemed lofty, and to combine the supple panther with the erect peacock in her ireful march. Such a fine woman as Julia really awes a man with her carriage at such a time. The poor soul thinks he sees before him the indignation of the just; when very likely it is only what in a man would be called Petulance.

“Anything the matter, Miss Clifford?” said he, obsequiously.

“No, sir” (very stiffly).

“Can I be of any service?”

“No, you can not.” And then, swifter than any weather-cock ever turned: “You are a good creature: why should I be rude to you? I ought to be ashamed of myself. It is that little wretch.”

“Not our friend Fitzroy?”

“Why, what other little wretch is there about? We are all Grenadiers and May-poles in this house except him. Well, let him go. I dare say somebody else—hum—and Uncle Clifford has told me more than once I ought to look higher. I couldn’t well look lower than five feet nothing. Ha! ha! ha! I told him so.”

“That was cruel.”

“Don’t scold *me*. I won’t be lectured by any of you. Of course it was, *dear*. Poor little Percy. Oh! oh! oh!”

And after all this thunder there was a little rain, by a law that governs Atmosphere and Woman impartially.

Seeing her softened, and having his own reasons for wishing to keep Fitzroy to his duty, Walter begged leave to mediate, if possible, and asked if she would do him the honor to confide the grievance to him.

“Of course I will,” said Julia. “He is angry with Colonel Clifford for not wishing him to stay here, and he is angry with me for not making Uncle Clifford invite him. As if I *could*! I should be ashamed to propose such a thing. The truth is, he is a luxurious little fellow, and my society out-of-doors does not compensate him for the cookery at the Dun Cow. There! let him go.”

“But I want him to stay.”

“Then that is very kind of you.”

“Isn’t it?” said Walter, slyly. “And I must make him stay somehow. Now tell me, isn’t he a little jealous?”

“A little jealous! Why, he is eaten up with it; he is *petrie de jalousie*.”

“Then,” said Walter, timidly, and hesitating at every word, “you can’t be angry if I work on him a little. Would there be any great harm if I were to say that nobody can see you without admiring you; that I have always respected his rights, but that if he abandons them—”

Julia caught it in a moment. She blushed, and laughed heartily. “Oh, you good, sly Thing!” said she; “and it is the truth, for I am as proud as he is vain; and if he leaves me I will turn round that moment and make you in love with me.”

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Walter looked queer. This was a turn he had not counted on.

“Do you think I couldn’t, sir?” said she, sharply.

“It is not for me to limit the power of beauty,” said Walter, meekly.

“Say the power of flattery. I could cajole any man in the world—if I chose.”

“Then you are a dangerous creature, and I will make Fitzroy my shield. I’m off to the Dun Cow.”

“You are a duck,” said this impetuous beauty. “So there!” She took him round the neck with both hands, and gave him a most delicious kiss.

“Why, he must be mad,” replied the recipient, bluntly. She laughed at that, and he went straight to the Dun Cow. He found young Fitzroy sitting rather disconsolate, and opened his errand at once by asking him if it was true that they were to lose him.

Percy replied stiffly that it was true.

“What a pity!” said Walter.

“I d—don’t think I shall be m—much m—missed,” said Percy, rather sullenly.

“I know two people who will miss you.”

“I d—don’t know one.”

“Two, I assure you—Miss Clifford and myself. Come, Mr. Fitzroy, I will not beat about the bush. I am afraid you are mortified, and I must say, justly mortified, at the coolness my father has shown to you. But I assure you that it is not from any disrespect to you personally.”

“Oh, indeed!” said Percy, ironically.

“No; quite the reverse—he is afraid of you.”

“That is a g—g—good joke.”

“No; let me explain. Fathers are curious people. If they are ever so disinterested in their general conduct, they are sure to be a little mercenary for their children. Now you know Miss Clifford is a beauty who would adorn Clifford Hall, and an heiress whose money would purchase certain properties that join ours. You understand?”

“Yes,” said the little man, starting up in great wrath. “I understand, and it’s a—bom—-inable. I th—thought you were my friend, and a m—man of h—honor.”

“So I am, and that is why I warn you in time. If you quarrel with Miss Clifford, and leave this place in a pet, just see what risks we both run, you and I. My father will be always at me, and I shall not be able to insist on your prior claim; he will say you have abandoned it. Julia will take the huff, and you know beautiful women will do strange things—mad things—when once pique enters their hearts. She might turn round and marry me.”

“You forget, sir, you are a man of honor.”

“But not a man of stone. Now, my dear Fitzroy, be reasonable. Suppose that peerless creature went in for female revenge; why, the first thing she would do would be to *make* me love her, whether I chose or no. She wouldn’t give *me* a voice in the matter. She would flatter me; she would cajole me; she would transfix my too susceptible heart with glances of fire and bewitching languor from those glorious eyes.”

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“D—d——! Ahem!” cried Percy, turning green.

Walter had no mercy. “I heard her say once she could make any man love her if she chose.”

“So she could,” said Percy, ruefully. “She made me. I had an awful p—p—prejudice against her, but there was no resisting.”

“Then don’t subject *me* to such a trial. Stick to her like a man.”

“So I will; b—but it is a m—m—mortifying position. I’m a man of family. We came in with the C—Conquest, and are respected in our c—county; and here I have to meet her on the sly, and live at the D—Dun Cow.”

“Where the *cuisine* is wretched.”

“A—b—b—bominable!”

Having thus impregnated his mind with that soothing sentiment, jealousy, Walter told him he had a house to let on the estate—quite a gentleman’s house, only a little dilapidated, with a fine lawn and garden, only neglected into a wilderness. “But all the better for you,” said he. “You have plenty of money, and no occupation. Perhaps that is what leads to these little quarrels. It will amuse you to repair the crib and restore the lawn. Why, there is a brook runs through it—it isn’t every lawn has that—and there used to be water-lilies floating, and peonies nodding down at them from the bank: a paradise. She adores flowers, you know. Why not rent that house from me? You will have constant occupation and amusement. You will become a rival potentate to my governor. You will take the shine out of him directly; you have only to give a ball, and then all the girls will worship you, Julia Clifford especially, for she could dance the devil to a stand-still.”

Percy’s eyes flashed. “When can I have the place?” said he, eagerly.

“In half an hour. I’ll draw you a three months’ agreement. Got any paper? Of course not. Julia is so near. What are those? Playing-cards. What do you play? ‘Patience,’ all by yourself. No wonder you are quarrelsome! Nothing else to bestow your energy on.”

Percy denied this imputation. The cards were for pistol practice. He shot daily at the pips in the yard.

“It is the fiend *Ennui* that loads your pistols, and your temper too. Didn’t I tell you so?”

Walter then demanded the ace of diamonds, and on its face let him the house and premises on a repairing lease for three years, rent L5 a year: which was a good bargain

for both parties, since Percy was sure to lay out a thousand pounds or two on the property, and to bind Julia more closely to him, who was worth her weight in gold ten times over.

Walter had brought the keys with him, so he drove Percy over at once and gave him possession, and, to do the little fellow justice, the moisture of gratitude stood in his eyes when they parted.

Walter told Julia about it the same night, and her eyes were eloquent too.

The next day he had a walk with Mary Bartley, and told her all about it. She hung upon him, and gazed admiringly into his eyes all the time, and they parted happy lovers.

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Mr. Bartley met her at the gate, “Mary,” said he, gravely, “who was that I saw with you just now?”

“Cousin Walter.”

“I feared so. You are too much with him.”

Mary turned red and white by turns, but said nothing.

Bartley went on: “You are a good child, and I have always trusted you. I am sure you mean no harm. But you must be more discreet. I have just heard that you and that young man are looked upon as engaged lovers. They say it is all over the village. Of course a father is the last to hear these things. Does Mrs. Easton know of this?”

“Oh yes, papa, and approves it.”

“Stupid old woman! She ought to be ashamed of herself.”

“Oh, papa!” said Mary, in deep distress; “why, what objection can there be to Cousin Walter?”

“None whatever as a cousin, but every objection to intimacy. Does he court you?”

“I don’t know, papa. I suppose he does.”

“Does he seek your love?”

“He does not say so exactly.”

“Come, Mary, you have never deceived me. Does he love you?”

“I am afraid he does; and if you reject him he will be very unhappy. And so shall I.”

“I am truly sorry to hear it, Mary, for there are reasons why I can not consent to an engagement between him and you.”

“What reasons, papa?”

“It would not be proper to disclose my reasons; but I hope, Mary, that it will be enough to say that Colonel Clifford has other views for his son, and I have other views for my daughter. Do you think a blessing will attend you or him if you defy both fathers?”

“No, no,” said poor Mary. “We have been hasty and very foolish. But, oh, papa, have you not seen from the first? Oh, why did you not warn me in time? Then I could have obeyed you easily. Now it will cost me the happiness of my life. We are very unfortunate. Poor Walter! He left me so full of hope. What shall I do? what shall I do?”

It was Mary Bartley's first grief. She thought all chance of happiness was gone forever, and she wept bitterly for Walter and herself.

Bartley was not unmoved, but he could not change his nature. The sum he had obtained by a crime was dearer to him than all his more honest gains. He was kind on the surface, but hard as marble.

"Go to your room, my child," said he, "and try and compose yourself. I am not angry with you. I ought to have watched you. But you are so young, and I trusted to that woman."

Mary retired, sobbing, and he sent for Mrs. Easton.

"Mrs. Easton," said he, "for the first time in all these years I have a fault to find with you."

"What is that, sir, if you please?"

"Young Clifford has been courting that child, and you have encouraged it."

"Nay, sir," said the woman, "I have not done that. She never spoke to me, nor I to her."

"Well, then, you never interfered."

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“No, sir; no more than you did.”

“Because I never observed it till to-day.”

“How could I know that, sir? Everybody else observed it. Mr. Hope would have been the first to see it, if he had been in your place.” This sudden thrust made Bartley wince, and showed him he had a tougher customer to deal with than poor Mary.

“You can’t bear to be found fault with, Easton,” said he, craftily, “and I don’t wonder at it, after fourteen years’ fidelity to me.”

“I take no credit for that,” said the woman, doggedly. “I have been paid for it.”

“No doubt. But I don’t always get the thing I pay for. Then let by-gones be by-gones; but just assist me now to cure the girl of this folly.”

“Sir,” said the woman, firmly, “it is not folly; it is wisest and best for all; and I can’t make up my mind to lift a finger against it.”

“Do you mean to defy me, then?”

“No, sir. I don’t want to go against you, nor yet against my own conscience, what’s left on’t. I have seen a pretty while it must come to this, and I have written to my sister Sally. She keeps a small hotel at the lakes. She is ready to have me, and I’m not too old to be useful to her. I’m worth my board. I’ll go there this very day, if you please. I’m as true to you as I can be, sir. For I see by Miss Mary crying so you have spoken to her, and so now she is safe to come to me for comfort; and if she does, I shall take her part, you may be sure, for I love her like my own child.” Here the dogged voice began to tremble; but she recovered herself, and told him she would go at once to her sister Gilbert, that lived only ten miles off, and next day she would go to the little hotel at the lakes, and leave him to part two true lovers if he could and break both their hearts; she should wash her hands of it.

Bartley asked a moment to consider.

“Shall we be friends still if you leave me like that? Surely, after all these years, you will not tell your sister? You will not betray me?”

“Never, sir,” said she. “What for? To bring those two together? Why, it would part them forever. I wonder at you, a gentleman, and in business all your life, yet you don’t seem to see through the muddy water as I do that is only a plain woman.”

She then told him her clothes were nearly all packed, and she could start in an hour.

“You shall have the break and the horses,” said he, with great alacrity.

Everything transpires quickly in a small house, and just as she had finished packing, in came Mary in violent distress. “What, is it true? Are you going to leave me, now my heart is broken? Oh, nurse! nurse!”

This was too much even for stout-hearted Nancy Easton.

“Oh, my child! my child!” she cried, and sat down on her box sobbing violently, Mary infolded in her arms, and then they sat crying and rocking together.

“Papa does not love me as I do him,” sobbed Mary, turning bitter for the first time. “He breaks my heart, and sends you away the same day, for fear you should comfort me.”

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“No, my dear,” said Mrs. Easton; “you are wrong. He does not send me away; I go by my own wish.”

“Oh, nurse, you desert me! then you don’t know what has happened.”

“Oh yes, I do; I know all about it; and I’m leaving because I can’t do what he wishes. You see it is this way, Miss Mary—your father has been very good to me, and I am his debtor. I must not stay here and help you to thwart him—that would be ungrateful—and yet I can’t take his side against you. Master has got reasons why you should not marry Walter Clifford, and—”

“He told me so himself,” said Mary.

“Ah, but he didn’t tell you his reasons.”

“No.”

“No more must I. But, Miss Mary, I’ll tell you this. I know his reasons well; his reasons why you should not marry Walter Clifford are my reasons why you should marry no other man.”

“Oh, nurse! oh, you dear, good angel!”

“So when friends differ like black and white, ’tis best to part. I’m going to my sister Gilbert this afternoon, and to-morrow to my sister Sally, at her hotel.”

“Oh, nurse, must you? must you? I shall have not a friend to advise or console me till Mr. Hope comes back. Oh, I hope that won’t be long now.”

Mrs. Easton dropped her hands upon her knees and looked at Mary Bartley.

“What, Miss Mary, would you go to Mr. Hope in such a matter as this? Surely you would not have the face?”

“Not take my breaking heart to Mr. Hope!” cried Mary, with a sudden flood of tears. “You might as well tell me not to lay my trouble before my God. Dear, dear Mr. Hope, who saved my life in those deep waters, and then cried over me, darling dear! I think more of that than of his courage. Do you think I am blind? He loves me better than my own father does; and it is not a young man’s love; it is an angel’s. Not cry to *him* when I am in the deep waters of affliction? I could not write of such a thing to him for blushing, but the moment he returns I shall find some way to let him know how happy I have been, how broken-hearted I am, and that papa has reasons against *him*, and they are your reasons for him, and that you are both afraid to let *me* know these *curious* reasons—-me, the poor girl whose heart is being made a foot-ball of in this house. Oh! oh! oh!”

“Don’t cry, Miss Mary,” said Nurse Easton, tenderly; “and pray don’t excite yourself so. Why, I never saw you like this before.”

“Had I ever the same reason? You have only known the happy, thoughtless child. They have made a woman of me now, and my peace is gone. I *must* not defy my father, and I *will* not break poor Walter’s heart—the truest heart that ever beat. Not tell dear Mr. Hope? I’ll tell him everything, if I’m cut in pieces for it.” And her beautiful eyes flashed lightning through her tears.

“Hum!” said Mrs. Easton, under her breath, and looking down at her own feet.

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“And pray what does ‘hum’ mean?” asked Mary, fixing her eyes with prodigious keenness on the woman’s face.

“Well, I don’t suppose ‘hum’ means anything,” said Mrs. Easton, still looking down.

“Doesn’t it?” said Mary. “With such a face as *that* it means a volume. And I’ll make it my business to read that volume.”

“Hum!”

“And Mr. Hope shall help me.”

CHAPTER IX.

LOVERS PARTED.

Walter, little dreaming the blow his own love had received, made Percy write Julia an apology, and an invitation to visit his new house if he was forgiven. Julia said she could not forgive him, and would not go. Walter said, “Put on your bonnet, and take a little drive with me.”

“Oh, with pleasure,” said Julia, slyly.

So then Walter drove her to the new house, without a word of remonstrance on her part, and Fitzroy met her radiant, and Walter slipped away round a corner, and when he came back the quarrel had dissolved. He had brought a hamper with all the necessaries of life—table-cloth, napkins, knives, forks, spoons, cold pie, salad, and champagne. They lunched beside the brook on the lawn. The lovers drank his health, and Julia appointed him solemnly to the post of “peace-maker,” “for,” said she, “you have shown great talent that way, and I foresee we shall want one, for we shall be always quarrelling; sha’n’t we, Percy?”

“N—o; n—never again.”

“Then you mustn’t be jealous.”

“I’m not. I d—despise j—jealousy. I’m above it.”

“Oh, indeed,” said Julia, dryly.

“Come, don’t begin again, you two,” said Walter, “or—no champagne.”

“Now what a horrid threat!” said Julia. “I’ll be good, for one.”

In short they had a merry time, and Walter drove Julia home. Both were in high spirits.

In the hall Walter found a short note from Mary Bartley:

"DEAR, DEAR WALTER,—I write with a bleeding heart to tell you that papa has only just discovered our attachment, and I am grieved to say he disapproves of it, and has forbidden me to encourage your love, that is dearer to me than all the world. It is very hard. It seems so cruel. But I must obey. Do not make obedience too difficult, dear Walter. And pray, pray do not be as unhappy as I am. He says he has reasons, but he has not told me what they are, except that your father has other views for you; but, indeed, with both parents against us what can we do? Forgive me the pain this will give you. Ask yourself whether it gives me any less. You were all the world to me. Now everything is dull and distasteful. What a change in one little day! We are very unfortunate. But it can not be forever. And if you will be constant to me, you know I shall to you. I *could not* change. Ah, Walter, I little thought when I said I would temporize, how soon I should be called on to do it. I can't write any more for crying. I do nothing but cry ever since papa was so cruel; but I must obey. Your loving, sorrowful

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“MARY.”

This letter was a chilling blow to poor Walter. He took it into his own room and read it again and again. It brought the tears into his own eyes, and discouraged him deeply for a time. But, of course, he was not so disposed to succumb to authority as the weaker vessel was. He wrote back:

“My own Love,—Don’t grieve for me. I don’t care for anything so long as you love me. I shall resist, of course. As for my father, I am going to marry Julia to Percy Fitzroy, and so end my governor’s nonsense. As for your father, I do not despair of softening him. It is only a check; it is not a defeat. Who on earth can part us if we are true to each other? God bless you, dearest! I did not think you loved me so much. Your letter gives me comfort forever, and only disappointment for a time. Don’t fret, sweet love. It will be all right in the end.

“Your grateful, hopeful love, till death, WALTER.”

Mary opened this letter with a beating heart. She read it with tears and smiles and utter amazement. She knew so little about the male character that this way of receiving a knockdown blow astonished and charmed her. She thought to herself, no wonder women look up to men. They *will* have their own way; they resist, *of course*. How sensible! We give in, right or wrong. What a comfort I have got a man to back me, and not a poor sorrowing, despairing, obeying thing like myself!

So she was comforted for the minute, and settled in her own mind that she would be good and obedient, and Walter should do all the fighting. But letters soon cease to satisfy the yearning hearts of lovers unnaturally separated. Walter and Mary lived so near each other, yet now they never met. Bartley took care of that. He told Mary she must not walk out without a maid or ride without a servant; and he gave them both special orders. He even obliged her with his own company, though that rather bored him.

Under this severe restraint Mary’s health and spirits suffered, and she lost some of her beautiful color.

Walter’s spirits were kept up only by anger. Julia Clifford saw he was in trouble, and asked him what was the matter.

“Oh, nothing that would interest you,” said he, rather sullenly.

“Excuse me,” said she. “I am always interested in the troubles of my friends, and you have been a good friend to me.”

“It is very good of you to think so. Well, then, yes, I am unhappy. I am crossed in love.”

“Is it that fair girl you introduced me to when out riding?”

“Yes.”

“She is lovely.”

“Miss Clifford, she is an angel.”

“Ha! ha! We are all angels till we are found out. Who is the man?”

“What man?”

“That she prefers to my good Walter. She deserves a good whipping, your angel.”

“Much obliged to you, Miss Clifford; but she prefers no man to your good Walter, though I am not worthy to tie her shoes. Why, we are devoted to each other.”

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“Well, you needn’t fly out at *me*. I am your friend, as you will see. Make me your confidante. Explain, please. How can you be crossed in love if there’s no other man?”

“It’s her father. He has discovered our love, and forbids her to speak to me.”

“Her father!” said Julia, contemptuously. “Is that all? *That* for her father! You shall have her in spite of fifty fathers. If it had been a lover, now.”

“I should have talked to him, not to you,” said Walter, with his eyes flashing.

“Be quiet, Walter; as it is not a lover, nor even a mother, you shall have the girl; and a very sweet girl she is. Will you accept me for your ally? Women are wiser than men in these things, and understand one another.”

“Oh, Miss Clifford,” said Walter, “this is good of you! Of course it will be a great blessing to us both to have your sympathy and assistance.”

“Well, then,” said Julia, “begin by telling me—have you spoken to her father?”

“No.”

“Then that is the very first thing to be done. Come, order our horses. We will ride over directly. I will call on *Miss* Bartley, and you on *Mister*. Now mind, you must ignore all that has passed, and just ask his permission to court his daughter. Whilst you are closeted with him, the young lady and I will learn each other’s minds with a celerity you poor slow things have no idea of.”

“I see one thing,” said Walter, “that I am a child in such matters compared with you. What decision! what promptitude!”

“Then imitate it, young man. Order the horses directly;” and she stamped her foot impatiently.

Walter turned to the stables without another word, and Julia flew upstairs to put on her riding-habit.

* * * * *

Bartley was in his study with a map of the farm before him, and two respectable but rather rough men in close conference over it. These were practical men from the county of Durham, whom he had ferreted out by means of an agent, men who knew a great deal about coal. They had already surveyed the farm, and confirmed Hope’s opinion that coal lay below the surface of certain barren fields, and the question now was as to the exact spot where it would be advisable to sink the first shaft.

Bartley was heart and soul in this, and elevated by love of gain far above such puny considerations as the happiness of Mary Bartley and her lover. She, poor girl, sat forlorn in her little drawing-room, and tried to draw a bit, and tried to read a bit, and tried to reconcile a new German symphony to her ear as well as to her judgment, which told her it was too learned not to be harmonious, though it sounded very discordant. But all these efforts ended in a sigh of despondency, and in brooding on innocent delights forbidden, and a prospect which, to her youth and inexperience, seemed a wilderness robbed of the sun.

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Whilst she sat thus pensive and sad there came a sudden rush and clatter of hoofs, and Miss Clifford and Walter Clifford reined up their horses under the very window.

Mary started up delighted at the bare sight of Walter, but amazed and puzzled. The next moment her quick intelligence told her this was some daring manoeuvre or other, and her heart beat high.

Walter opened the door and stood beside it, affecting a cold ceremony.

“Miss Bartley, I have brought Miss Clifford to call on you at her request. My own visit is to your father. Where shall I find him?”

“In his study,” murmured Miss Bartley.

Walter returned, and the two ladies looked at each other steadily for one moment, and took stock of one another’s dress, looks, character, and souls with supernatural rapidity. Then Mary smiled, and motioned her visitor to a seat, and waited.

Miss Clifford made her approaches obliquely at first.

“I ought to apologize to you for not returning your call before this. At any rate, here I am at last.”

“You are most welcome, Miss Clifford,” said Mary, warmly.

“Now the ice is broken, I want you to call me Julia.”

“May I?”

“You may, and you must, if I call you Mary. Why, you know we are cousins; at least I suppose so. We are both cousins of Walter Clifford, so we must be cousins to each other.”

And she fixed her eyes on her fair hostess in a very peculiar way.

Mary returned this fixed look with such keen intelligence that her gray eyes actually scintillated.

“Mary, I seldom waste much time before I come to the point. Walter Clifford is a good fellow; he has behaved well to me. I had a quarrel with mine, and Walter played the peace-maker, and brought us together again without wounding my pride. By-and-by I found out Walter himself was in grief about you. It was my turn, wasn’t it? I made him tell me all. He wasn’t very willing, but I would know. I see his love is making him miserable, and so is yours, dear.”

“Oh yes.”

“So I took it on me to advise him. I have made him call on your father. Fathers sometimes pooh-pooh their daughters’ affections; but when the son of Colonel Clifford comes with a formal proposal of marriage, Mr. Bartley can not pooh-pooh *him*.”

Mary clasped her hands, but said nothing.

Julia flowed on:

“And the next thing is to comfort you. You seem to want a good cry, dear.”

“Yes, I d—do.”

“Then come here and take it.”

No sooner said than done. Mary’s head on Julia’s shoulder, and Julia’s arm round Mary’s waist.

“Are you better, dear?”

“Oh, so much.”

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“It is a comfort, isn’t it? Well, now, listen to me. Fathers sometimes delay a girl’s happiness; but they don’t often destroy it; they don’t go and break her heart as some mothers do. A mother that is resolved to have her own way brings another man forward; fathers are too simple to see that is the only way. And then a designing mother cajoles the poor girl and deceives her, and does a number of things a man would call villainies. Don’t you fret your heart out for so small a thing as a father’s opposition. You are sure to tire him out if he loves you, and if he doesn’t love you, or loves money better, why, then, he is not a worthy rival to my cousin Walter, for that man really loves you, and would marry you if you had not a penny. So would Percy Fitzroy marry me. And that is why I prefer him to the grenadiers and plungers with silky mustaches, and half an eye on me and an eye and a half on my money.”

Many other things passed between these two, but what we have endeavored to repeat was the cream of Julia’s discourse, and both her advice and her sympathy were for the time a wonderful comfort to the love-sick, solitary girl.

But our business is with Walter Clifford. As soon as he was announced, Mr. Bartley dismissed his rugged visitors, and received Walter affably, though a little stiffly.

Walter opened his business at once, and told him he had come to ask his permission to court his daughter. He said he had admired her from the first moment, and now his happiness depended on her, and he felt sure he could make her happy; not, of course, by his money, but by his devotion. Then as to making a proper provision for her—

Here Bartley stopped him.

“My young friend,” said he, “there can be no objection either to your person or your position. But there are difficulties, and at present they are serious ones. Your father has other views.”

“But, Mr. Bartley,” said Walter, eagerly, “he must abandon them. The lady is engaged.”

“Well, then,” said Bartley, “it will be time to come to me when he has abandoned those views, and also overcome his prejudices against me and mine. But there is another difficulty. My daughter is not old enough to marry, and I object to long engagements. Everything, therefore, points to delay, and on this I must insist.”

Bartley having taken this moderate ground, remained immovable. He promised to encourage no other suitor; but in return he said he had a right to demand that Walter would not disturb his daughter’s peace of mind until the prospect was clearer. In short, instead of being taken by surprise, the result showed Bartley quite prepared for this interview, and he baffled the young man without offending him. He was cautious not to do that, because he was going to mine for coal, and feared remonstrances, and wanted Walter to take his part, or at least to be neutral, knowing his love for Mary. So they

parted good friends; but when he retailed the result to Julia Clifford she shook her head, and said the old fox had outwitted him. Soon after, knitting her brows in thought for some time, she said, “She is very young, much younger than she looks. I am afraid you will have to wait a little, and watch.”

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“But,” said Walter, in dismay, “am I not to see her or speak to her all the time I am waiting?”

“I’d see both fathers hanged first, if I was a man,” said Julia.

In short, under the courageous advice of Julia Clifford, Walter began to throw himself in Mary’s way, and look disconsolate; that set Mary pining directly, and Julia found her pale, and grieving for Walter, and persuaded her to write him two or three lines of comfort; she did, and that drew pages from him. Unfortunately he did not restrain himself, but flung his whole heart upon paper, and raised a tumult in the innocent heart of her who read his passionate longings.

She was so worked upon that at last one day she confided to Julia that her old nurse was going to visit her sister, Mrs. Gilbert, who lived only ten miles off, and she thought she should ride and see her.

“When?” asked Julia, carelessly.

“Oh, any day next week,” said Mary, carelessly. “Wednesday, if it is fine. She will not be there till Monday.”

“Does she know?” asked Julia.

“Oh yes; and left because she could not agree with papa about it; and, dear, she said a strange thing—a very strange thing: she knew papa’s reasons against him, and they were her reasons for him.”

“Fancy that!” said Julia. “Your father told you what the reasons were?”

“No; he wouldn’t. They both treat me like a child.”

“You mean they pretend to,” she added.

“I see one thing; there is some mystery behind this. I wonder what it is?”

“Ten to one, it is money. I am only twenty, but already I have found out that money governs the world. Let me see—your mother was a Clifford. She must have had money. Did she settle any on you?”

“I am sure I don’t know.”

“Ten to one she did, and your father is your trustee; and when you marry, he must show his accounts and cash up. There, that is where the shoe pinches.”

Mary was distressed.

“Oh, don’t say so, dear. I can’t bear to think that of papa. You make me very unhappy.”

“Forgive me, dear,” said Julia. “I am too bitter and suspicious. Some day I will tell you things in my own life that have soured me. Money—I hate the very word,” she said, clinching her teeth.

She urged her view no more, but in her own heart she felt sure that she had read Mr. Bartley aright. Why, he was a trader, into the bargain.

As for Mary, when she came to think over this conversation, her own subtle instinct told her that stronger pressure than ever would now be brought on her. Her timidity, her maiden modesty, and her desire to do right set her on her defense. She determined to have loving but impartial advice, and so she overcame her shyness, and wrote to Mr. Hope. Even then she was in no hurry to enter on such a subject by letter, so she must commence by telling him that her father had set a great many people, most of them strangers, to dig

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for coal. That cross old thing, Colonel Clifford, had been heard to sneer at her dear father, and say unkind and disrespectful things—that the love of money led to loss of money, and that papa might just as well dig a well and throw his money into that. She herself was sorry he had not waited for Mr. Hope's return before undertaking so serious a speculation. Warmed by this preliminary, she ventured into the delicate subject, and told him the substance of what we have told the reader, only in a far more timid and suggestive way, and implored him to advise her by return of post if possible—or why not come home? Papa had said only yesterday, "I wish Hope was here." She got an answer by return of post. It disappointed her, on the whole. Mr. Hope realized the whole situation, though she had sketched it faintly instead of painting it boldly. He was all sympathy, and he saw at once that he could not himself imagine a better match for her than Walter Clifford. But then he observed that Mr. Bartley himself offered no personal objection, but wished the matter to be in abeyance until she was older, and Colonel Clifford's objection to the connection should be removed or softened. That might really be hoped for should Miss Clifford marry Mr. Fitzroy; and really in the mean time he (Hope) could hardly take on him to encourage her in impatience and disobedience. He should prefer to talk to Bartley first. With him he should take a less hesitating line, and set her happiness above everything. In short, he wrote cautiously. He inwardly resolved to be on the spot very soon, whether Bartley wanted him or not; but he did not tell Mary this.

Mary was disappointed. "How kind and wise he is!" she said to Julia—"too wise."

Next Wednesday morning Mary Bartley rode to Mrs. Gilbert, and was received by her with courtesy, but with a warm embrace by Mrs. Easton. After a while the latter invited her into the parlor, saying there is somebody there; but no one knows. This, however, though hardly unexpected, set Mary's heart beating, and when the parlor door was opened, Mrs. Easton stepped back, and Mary was alone with Walter Clifford.

Then might those who oppose an honest and tender affection have learned a lesson. It was no longer affection only. It was passion. Walter was pale, agitated, eager; he kissed her hands impetuously, and drew her to his bosom. She sobbed there; he poured inarticulate words over her, and still held her, panting, to his beating heart. Even when the first gush of love subsided a little he could not be so reasonable as he used to be. He was wild against his own father, hers, and every obstacle, and implored her to marry him at once by special license, and leave the old people to untie the knot if they could.

Then Mary was astonished and hurt.

"A clandestine marriage, Mr. Clifford!" said she. "I thought you had more respect for me than to mention such a thing."

Then he had to beg her pardon, and say the separation had driven him mad.

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Then she forgave him.

Then he took advantage of her clemency, and proceeded calmly to show her it was their only chance.

Then Mary forgot how severely she had checked him, and merely said that was the last thing she would consent to, and bound him on his honor never to mention to Julia Clifford that he had proposed such a thing. Walter promised that readily enough, but stuck to his point; and as Mary's pride was wounded, and she was a girl of great spirit though love-sick, she froze to him, and soon after said she was very sorry, but she must not stay too long or papa would be angry. She then begged him not to come out of the parlor, or the servant would see him.

"That is a trifle," said Walter. "I am going to obey you in greater things than that. Ah! Mary, Mary, you don't love me as I love you!"

"No, Walter," said Mary, "I do not love you as you love me, for I respect you." Then her lip trembled, and her eyes filled with tears.

Walter fell on his knees, and kissed her skirt several times; then ended with her hand. "Oh, don't harbor such a thought as that!" said he.

She sobbed, but made no reply.

They parted good friends, but chilled.

That made them both unhappy to think of.

It was only two, or at the most three, days after this that, as Mary was walking in the garden, a nosegay fell at her feet. She picked it up, and immediately found a note half secreted in it. The next moment it was entirely secreted in her bosom. She sauntered in-doors, and scudded upstairs to her room to read it.

The writer told her in a few agitated words that their fathers had met, and he must speak to her directly. Would she meet him for a moment at the garden gate at nine o'clock that evening?

"No, no, no!" cried Mary, as if he was there. She was frightened. Suppose they should be caught. The shame—the disgrace. But oh, the temptation! Well, then, how wrong of him to tempt her! She must not go. There was no time to write and refuse; but she must not go. She would not go. And in this resolution she persisted. Nine o'clock struck, and she never moved. Then she began to picture Walter's face of disappointment and his unhappiness. At ten minutes past nine she tied a handkerchief round her head and went.

There he was at the gate, pale and agitated. He did not give her time to scold him.

“Pray forgive me,” he said; “but I saw no other way. It is all over, Mary, unless you love me as I love you.”

“Don’t begin by doubting me,” she said. “Tell me, dear.”

“It is soon told. Our fathers have met at that wretched pit, and the foreman has told me what passed between them. My father complained that mining for coal was not husbandry, and it was very unfair to do it, and to smoke him out of house and home. (Unfortunately the wind was west, and blew the smoke of the steam-engine over his lawn.) Your father said he took the farm under that express stipulation. Colonel Clifford said, ’No; the condition was smuggled in.’ ‘Then smuggle it out,’ said Mr. Bartley.”

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“Oh!”

“If it had only ended there, Mary. But they were both in a passion, and must empty their hearts. Colonel Clifford said he had every respect for you, but had other views for his son. Mr. Bartley said he was thankful to hear it, for he looked higher for his daughter. ’Higher in trade, I suppose,’ said my father; ‘the Lord Mayor’s nephew.’ ‘Well,’ said Mr. Bartley, ‘I would rather marry her to money than to mortgages.’ And the end of it was they parted enemies for life.”

“No, no; not for life!”

“For life, Mary. It is an old grudge revived. Indeed, the first quarrel was only skinned over. Don’t deceive yourself. We have nothing to do but disobey them or part.”

“And you can say that, Walter? Oh, have a little patience!”

“So I would,” said Walter, “if there was any hope. But there is none. There is nothing to wait for but the death of our parents, and by that time I shall be an elderly man, and you will have lost your bloom and wasted your youth—for what? No; I feel sometimes this will drive me mad, or make me a villain. I am beginning to hate my own father, and everybody else that thwarts my love. How can they earn my hate more surely? No, Mary; I see the future as plainly as I see your dear face, so pale and shocked. I can’t help it. If you will marry me, and so make sure, I will keep it secret as long as you like; I shall have got you, whatever they may say or do; but if you won’t, I’ll leave the country at once, and get peace if I can’t get love.”

“Leave the country?” said Mary, faintly. “What good would that do?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps bring my father to his senses for one thing; and—who knows?—perhaps you will listen to reason when you see I can’t wait for the consent of two egotists—for that is what they both are—that have no real love or pity for you or me.”

“Ah,” said Mary, with a deep sigh, “I see even men have their faults, and I admired them so. They are impatient, selfish.”

“Yes, if it is selfish to defend one’s self against brutal selfishness, I am selfish; and that is better than to be a slave to egotists, and lie down to be trodden on as you would do. Come, Mary, for pity’s sake, decide which you love best—your father, who does not care much for you, or me, who adore you, and will give you a life of gratitude as well as love, if you will only see things as they are and always will be, and trust yourself to me as my dear, dear, blessed, adored wife!”

“I love you best,” said Mary, “and I hope it is not wicked. But I love him too, though he does say ‘wait.’ And I respect *myself*, and I dare not defy my parent, and I will not marry secretly; that is degrading. And, oh, Walter, think how young I am and inexperienced,

and you that are so much older, and I hoped would be my guide and make me better; is it you who tempt me to clandestine meetings that I blush for, and a clandestine marriage for which I should despise myself?”

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Walter turned suddenly calm, for these words pricked his conscience.

“You are right,” said he. “I am a blackguard, and you are an angel of purity and goodness. Forgive me, I will never tempt nor torment you again. For pity’s sake forgive me. You don’t know what men’s passions are. Forgive me!”

“With all my heart, dear,” said Mary, crying gently.

He put both arms suddenly round her neck and kissed her wet eyes with a sigh of despair. Then he seemed to tear himself away by a great effort, and she leaned limp and powerless on the gate, and heard his footsteps die away into the night. They struck chill upon her foreboding heart, for she felt that they were parted.

CHAPTER X.

THE GORDIAN KNOT.

Walter, however, would not despair until he had laid the alternative before his father. He did so, firmly but coolly.

His father, irritated by the scene with Bartley, treated Walter’s proposal with indignant scorn.

Walter continued to keep his temper, and with some reluctance asked him whether he owed nothing, not even a sacrifice of his prejudices, to a son who had never disobeyed him, and had improved his circumstances.

“Come, sir,” said he; “when the happiness of my life is at stake I venture to lay aside delicacy, and ask you whether I have not been a good son, and a serviceable one to you?”

“Yes, Walter,” said the Colonel, “with this exception.”

“Then now or never give me my reward.”

“I’ll try,” said the grim Colonel; “but I see it will be hard work. However, I’ll try and save you from a *mesalliance*.”

“A *mesalliance*, sir? Why, she is a Clifford.”

“The deuce she is!”

“As much a Clifford as I am.”

“That is news to me.”

“Why, one of her parents was a Clifford, and your own sister. And one of mine was an Irish woman.”

“Yes; an O’Ryan; not a trader; not a small-coal man.”

“Like the Marquis of Londonderry, sir, and the Earl of Durham. Come, father, don’t sacrifice your son, and his happiness and his love for you, to notions the world has outlived. Commerce does not lower a gentleman, nor speculation either, in these days. The nobility and the leading gentry of these islands are most of them in business. They are all shareholders, and often directors of railways, and just as much traders as the old coach proprietors were. They let their land, and so do you, to the highest bidder, not for honor or any romantic sentiment, but for money, and that is trade. Mr. Bartley is his own farmer; well, so was Mr. Coke, of Norfolk, and the Queen made him a peer for it—what a sensible sovereign! Are Rothschild and Montefiore shunned for their speculations by the nobility? Whom do their daughters marry? Trade rules the world, and keeps it from stagnation. Genius writes, or paints, or plays Hamlet—for money; and is respected in exact proportion to the amount of money it gets. Charity holds bazars, and sells at one hundred per cent. profit, and nearly every new church is a trade speculation. Is my happiness and hers to be sacrificed to the chimeras and crotchets that everybody in England but you has outlived?”

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“All this,” replied the unflinching sire, “I have read in the papers, and my son shall not marry the daughter of a trader and cad who has insulted me grossly; but that, I presume, you don’t object to.”

This stung Walter so that he feared to continue the discussion.

“I will not reply,” said he. “You drive me to despair. I leave you to reflect. Perhaps you will prize me when you see me no more.”

With this he left the room, packed up his clothes, went to the nearest railway, off to London, collected his funds, crossed the water, and did not write one word to Clifford Hall, except a line to Julia. “Left England heart-broken, the victim of two egotists and my sweet Mary’s weak conscientiousness. God forgive me, I am angry even with her, but I don’t doubt her love.”

This missive and the general consternation at Clifford Hall brought Julia full gallop to Mary Bartley.

They read the letter together, and Julia was furious against Colonel Clifford. But Mary interposed.

“I am afraid,” said she, “that I am the person who was most to blame.”

“Why, what have you done?”

“He said our case was desperate, and waiting would not alter it; and he should leave the country unless—”

“Unless what? How can I advise you if you have any concealments from me?”

“Well, then, it was unless I would consent to a clandestine marriage.”

“And you refused—very properly.”

“And I refused—very properly one would think—and what is the consequence? I have driven the man I love away from his friends, as well as from me, and now I begin to be very sorry for my properness.”

“But you don’t blush for it as you would for the other. The idea! To be married on the sly and to have to hide it from everybody, and to be found out at last, or else be suspected of worse things.”

“What worse things?”

“Never you mind, child; your womanly instinct is better than knowledge or experience, and it has guided you straight. If you had consented, I should have lost my respect for you.”

And then, as the small view of a thing is apt to enter the female head along with the big view, she went on, with great animation:

“And then for a young lady to sneak into a church without her friends, with no carriages, no favors, no wedding cake, no bishop, no proper dress, not even a bridal veil fit to be seen! Why, it ought to be the great show of a girl’s life, and she ought to be a public queen, at all events for that one day, for ten to one she will be a slave all the rest of her life if she loves the fellow.”

She paused for breath one moment.

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“And it isn’t as if you were low people. Why, it reminds me of a thing I read in some novel: a city clerk, or some such person, took a walk with his sweetheart into the country, and all of a sudden he said, ’Why, there is something hard in my pocket. What is it, I wonder? A plain gold ring. Does it fit you? Try it on, Polly. Why, it fits you, I declare; then keep it till further orders.’ Then they walked a little further. ’Why, what is this? Two pairs of white gloves. Try the little pair on, and I will try the big ones. Stop! I declare here’s a church, and the bells beginning to ring. Why, who told them that I’ve got a special license in my pocket? Hallo! there are two fellows hanging about; best men, witnesses, or some such persons, I should not wonder. I think I know one of them; and here is a parson coming over a stile! What an opportunity for us now just to run in and get married! Come on, old girl, lend me that wedding ring a minute, I’ll give it you back again in the church.’ No, thank you, Mr. Walter; we love you very dearly, but we are ladies, and we respect ourselves.”

In short, Julia confirmed Mary Bartley in her resolution, but she could not console her under the consequences. Walter did not write a line even to her; she couldn’t but fear that he was really in despair, and would cure himself of his affection if he could. She began to pine; the roses faded gradually out of her cheeks, and Mr. Bartley himself began at last to pity her, for though he did not love her, he liked her, and was proud of her affection. Another thing, Hope might come home now any day, and if he found the girl sick and pining, he might say this is a breach of contract.

He asked Mary one day whether she wouldn’t like a change. “I could take you to the sea-side,” said he, but not very cordially.

“No, papa,” said Mary; “why should you leave your mine when everything is going so prosperously? I think I should like to go to the lakes, and pay my old nurse a visit.”

“And she would talk to you of Walter Clifford?”

“Yes, papa,” said Mary, firmly, “she would; and that’s the only thing that can do me any good.”

“Well, Mary,” said Bartley, “if she could be content with praising him, and regretting the insuperable obstacles, and if she would encourage you to be patient—There, let me think of it.”

Things went hard with Colonel Clifford. He felt his son’s desertion very bitterly, though he was too proud to show it; he now found out that universally as he was *respected*, it was Walter who was the most beloved both in the house and in the neighborhood.

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One day he heard a multitude shouting, and soon learned the reason. Bartley had struck a rich vein of coal, and tons were coming up to the surface. Colonel Clifford would not go near the place, but he sent old Baker to inquire, and Baker from that day used to bring him back a number of details, some of them especially galling to him. By degrees, and rapid ones, Bartley was becoming a rival magnate; the poor came to him for the slack, or very small coal, and took it away gratis; they flattered him, and to please him, spoke slightingly of Colonel Clifford, which they had never ventured to do before. But soon a circumstance occurred which mortified the old soldier more than all. He was sole proprietor of the village, and every house in it, with the exception of a certain beer-house, flanked by an acre and a half of ground. This beer-house was a great eye-sore to him; he tried to buy this small freeholder out; but the man saw his advantage, and demanded L1500—nearly treble the real value. Walter, however, by negotiating in a more friendly spirit, had obtained a reduction, and was about to complete the purchase for L1150. But when Walter left the country the proprietor never dreamed of going again to the haughty Colonel. He went to Bartley, and Bartley bought the property in five minutes for L1200, and paid a deposit to clinch the contract. He completed the purchase with unheard-of rapidity, and set an army of workmen to raise a pit village, or street of eighty houses. They were ten times better built than the Colonel's cottages; not one of them could ever be vacant, they were too great a boon to the miners; nor could the rent be in arrears, with so sharp a hand as the mine-owner; the beer-house was to be perpetuated, and a nucleus of custom secured from the miners, partly by the truck system, and partly by the superiority of the liquor, for Bartley announced at once that he should brew the beer.

All these things were too much for a man with gout in his system; Colonel Clifford had a worse attack of that complaint than ever; it rose from his feet to other parts of his frame, and he took to his bed.

In that condition a physician and surgeon visited him daily, and his lawyer also was sent for, and was closeted with him for a long time on more than one occasion.

All this caused a deal of speculation in the village, and as a system of fetch and carry was now established by which the rival magnates also received plenty of information, though not always accurate, about each other, Mr. Bartley heard what was going on, and put his own construction upon it.

* * * * *

Just when Mr. Hope was expected to return came a letter to Mary to say that he should be detained a day or two longer, as he had a sore throat and fever, but nothing alarming. Three or four days later came a letter only signed by him, to say he had a slight attack of typhoid fever, and was under medical care.

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Mary implored Mr. Bartley to let her go to him. He refused, and gave his reasons, which were really sufficient, and now he became more unwilling than ever to let her visit Mrs. Easton.

This was the condition of affairs when one day an old man with white hair, dressed in black, and looking almost a gentleman, was driven up to the farm by Colonel Clifford's groom, and asked, in an agitated voice, if he might see Miss Mary Bartley.

Her visitors were so few that she was never refused on speculation, so John Baker was shown at once into her drawing-room. He was too much agitated to waste time.

"Oh, Miss Bartley," said he, "we are in great distress at the Hall. Mr. Walter has gone, and not left his address, and my poor master is dying!"

Mary uttered an unfeigned exclamation of horror.

"Ah, miss," said the old man, "God bless you; you feel for us, I'm not on the old man's side, miss; I'm on Mr. Walter's side in this as I was in the other business, but now I see my poor old master lying pale and still, not long for this world, I do begin to blame myself. I never thought that he would have taken it all to heart like this. But, there, the only thing now is to bring them together before he goes. We don't know his address, miss; we don't know what country he is in. He sent a line to Miss Clifford a month ago from Dover, but that is all; but, in course, he writes to you—*that* stands to reason; you'll give me his address, miss, won't you? and we shall all bless you."

Mary turned pale, and the tears streamed down her eyes. "Oh, sir," said she, "I'd give the world if I could tell you. I know who you are; my poor Walter has often spoken of you to me, Mr. Baker. One word from you would have been enough; I would have done anything for you that I could. But he has never written to me at all. I am as much deserted as any of you, and I have felt it as deeply as any father can, but never have I felt it as now. What! The father to die, and his son's hand not in his; no looks of love and forgiveness to pass between them as the poor old man leaves this world, its ambitions and its quarrels, and perhaps sees for the first time how small they all are compared with the love of those that love us, and the peace of God!" Then this ardent girl stretched out both her hands. "O God, if my frivolous life has been innocent, don't let me be the cause of this horrible thing; don't let the father die without comfort, nor the son without forgiveness, for a miserable girl who has come between them and meant no harm!"

This eloquent burst quite overpowered poor old John Baker. He dropped into a chair, his white head sunk upon his bosom, he sobbed and trembled, and for the first time showed his age.

“What on earth is the matter?” said Mr. Bartley’s voice, as cold as an icicle, at the door. Mary sprang toward him impetuously. “Oh, papa!” she cried, “Colonel Clifford is dying, and we don’t know where Walter is; we can’t know.”

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“Wait a little,” said Bartley, in some agitation. “My letters have just come in, and I thought I saw a foreign postmark.” He slipped back into the hall, brought in several letters, selected one, and gave it to Mary, “This is for you, from Marseilles.”

He then retired to his study, and without the least agitation or the least loss of time returned with a book of telegraph forms.

Meanwhile Mary tore the letter open, and read it eagerly to John Baker.

“GRAND HOTEL, NOAILLES, MARSEILLES, *May* 16.

“MY OWN DEAR LOVE,—I have vowed that I will not write again to tempt you to anything you think wrong; but it looks like quarrelling to hide my address from you. Only I do beg of you, as the only kindness you can do me now, never to let it be known by any living creature at Clifford Hall.

“Yours till death, WALTER.”

Mr. Bartley entered with the telegraph forms, and said to Mary, sharply, “Where is he?” Mary told him. “Well, write him a telegram. It shall be at the railway in half an hour, at Marseilles theoretically in one hour, practically in four.”

Mary sat down and wrote her telegram: “Pray come to Clifford Hall. Your father is dangerously ill.”

“Show it to me,” said Bartley. And on perusing it: “A woman’s telegram. Don’t frighten him too much; leave him the option to come or stay.”

He tore it up, and said, “Now write a business telegram, and make sure of the thing you want.”

“Come home directly—your father is dying.”

Old Baker started up. “God bless you, sir,” says he, “and God bless you, miss, and make you happy one day. I’ll take it myself, as my trap is at the door.” He bustled out, and his carriage drove away at a great rate.

Mr. Bartley went quietly to his study to business without another word, and Mary leaned back a little exhausted by the scene, but a smile almost of happiness came and tarried on her sweet face for the first time these many days; as for old John Baker, he told his tale triumphantly at the Hall, and not without vanity, for he was proud of his good judgment in going to Mary Bartley.

To the old housekeeper, a most superior woman of his own age, and almost a lady, he said something rather remarkable which he was careful not to bestow on the young

wags in the servants' hall: "Mrs. Milton," says he, "I am an old man, and have knocked about at home and abroad, and seen a deal of life, but I've seen something to-day that I never saw before."

"Ay, John, surely; and what ever was that?"

"I've seen an angel pray to God, and I have seen God answer her."

From that day Mary had two stout partisans in Clifford Hall.

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Mr. Bartley's views about Mary now began to waver. It occurred to him that should Colonel Clifford die and Walter inherit his estates, he could easily come to terms with the young man so passionately devoted to his daughter. He had only to say: "I can make no allowance at present, but I'll settle my whole fortune upon Mary and her children after my death, if you'll make a moderate settlement at present," and Walter would certainly fall into this, and not demand accounts from Mary's trustee. So now he would have positively encouraged Mary in her attachment, but one thing held him back a little: he had learned by accident that the last entail of Clifford Hall and the dependent estates dated two generations back, so that the entail expired with Colonel Clifford, and this had enabled the Colonel to sell some of the estates, and clearly gave him power now to leave Clifford Hall away from his son. Now the people who had begun to fetch and carry tales between the two magnates told him of the lawyer's recent visits to Clifford Hall, and he had some misgivings that the Colonel had sent for the lawyer to alter his will and disinherit, in whole or in part, his absent and rebellious son. All this taken together made Mr. Bartley resolve to be kinder to Mary in her love affair than he ever had been, but still to be guarded and cautious.

"Mary, my dear," said he, "I am sure you'll be on thorns till this young man comes home; perhaps now would be a good time to pay your visit to Mrs. Easton."

"Oh, papa, how good of you! but it's twenty miles, I believe, to where she is staying at the lakes."

"No, no," said Mr. Bartley; "she's staying with her sister Gilbert; quite within a drive."

"Are you sure, papa?"

"Quite sure, my dear; she wrote to me yesterday about her little pension; the quarter is just due."

"What! do you allow her a pension?"

"Certainly, my dear, or rather I pay her little stipend as before: how surprised you look, Mary! Why, I'm not like that old Colonel, intolerant of other people's views, when they advance them civilly. That woman helped me to save your life in a very great danger, and for many years she has been as careful as a mother, and we are not, so to say, at daggers drawn about Walter Clifford. Why, I only demand a little prudence and patience both from you and from her. Now tell me. Is there proper accommodation for you in Mrs. Gilbert's house?"

"Oh yes, papa; it is a farm-house now, but it was a grand place. There's a beautiful spare room with an oriel-window."

“Well, then, you secure that, and write to-day to have a blazing fire, and the bed properly aired as well as the sheets, and you shall go to-morrow in the four-wheel; and you can take her her little stipend in a letter.”

This sudden kindness and provision for her health and happiness filled Mary’s heart to overflowing, and her gratitude gushed forth upon Mr. Bartley’s neck. The old fox blandly absorbed it, and took the opportunity to say, “Of course it is understood that matters are to go no further between you and Walter Clifford. Oh, I don’t mean that you’re to make him unhappy, or drive him to despair; only insist upon his being patient like yourself. Everything comes sooner or later to those that can wait.”

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“Oh, papa,” cried Mary, “you’ve said more to comfort me than Mrs. Easton or anybody can; but I feel the change will do me good. I am, oh, so grateful!”

So Mary wrote her letter, and went to Mrs. Easton next day. After the usual embraces, she gave Mrs. Easton the letter, and was duly installed in the state bedroom. She wrote to Julia Clifford to say where she was, and that was her way of letting Walter Clifford know.

Walter himself arrived at Clifford Hall next day, worn, anxious, and remorseful, and was shown at once to his father’s bedside. The Colonel gave him a wasted hand, and said:

“Dear boy, I thought you’d come. We’ve had our last quarrel, Walter.”

Walter burst into tears over his father’s hand, and nothing was said between them about their temporary estrangement.

The first thing Walter did was to get two professional nurses from Derby, and secure his father constant attention night and day, and, above all, nourishment at all hours of the night when the patient would take it. On the afternoon after his arrival the Colonel fell into a sound sleep. Then Walter ordered his horse, and in less than an hour was at Mrs. Gilbert’s place.

CHAPTER XI.

THE KNOT CUT.—ANOTHER TIED.

The farm-house the Gilberts occupied had been a family mansion of great antiquity with a moat around it. It was held during the civil war by a stout royalist, who armed and garrisoned it after a fashion with his own servants. This had a different effect to what he intended. It drew the attention of one of Cromwell’s generals, and he dispatched a party with cannon and petards to reduce the place, whilst he marched on to join Cromwell in enterprises of more importance. The detachment of Roundheads summoned the place. The royalist, to show his respect for their authority, made his kitchen wench squeak a defiance from an upper window, from which she bolted with great rapidity as soon as she had thus represented the valor of the establishment, and when next seen it was in the cellar, wedged in between two barrels of beer. The men went at it hammer and tongs, and in twenty-four hours a good many cannon-balls traversed the building, a great many stuck in the walls like plums in a Christmas pudding, the doors were blown in with petards, and the principal defenders, with a few wounded Roundheads, were carried off to Cromwell himself; whilst the house itself was fired, and blazed away merrily.

Cromwell threatened the royalist gentleman with death for defending an untenable place.

“I didn’t know it was untenable,” said the gentleman. “How could I till I had tried?”

“You had the fate of fortified places to instruct you,” said Cromwell, and he promised faithfully to hang him on his own ruins.

The gentleman turned pale and his lips quivered, but he said, “Well, Mr. Cromwell, I’ve fought for my royal master according to my lights, and I can die for him.”

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“You shall, sir,” said Mr. Cromwell.

About next morning Mr. Cromwell, who had often a cool fit after a hot one, and was a very big man, take him altogether, gave a different order. “The fool thought he was doing his duty; turn him loose.”

The fool in question was so proud of his battered house that he left it standing there, bullets and all, and built him a house elsewhere.

King Charles the Second had not landed a month before he made him a baronet, and one tenant after another occupied a portion of the old mansion. Two state-rooms were roofed and furnished with the relics of the entire mansion, and these two rooms the present baronet’s surveyor occupied at rare intervals when he was inspecting the large properties connected with the baronet’s estate.

Mary Bartley now occupied these two rooms, connected by folding-doors, and she sat pensive in the oriel-window of her bedroom. Young ladies cling to their bedrooms, especially when they are pretty and airy. Suddenly she heard a scurry and patter of a horse’s hoof, reined up at the side of the house. She darted from the window and stood panting in the middle of the room. The next minute Mrs. Easton entered the sitting-room all in a flutter, and beckoned her. Mary flew to her.

“He is here.”

“I thought he would be.”

“Will you meet him down-stairs?”

“No, here.”

Mrs. Easton acquiesced, rapidly closed the folding-doors, and went out, saying, “Try and calm yourself, Miss Mary.”

Miss Mary tried to obey her, but Walter rushed in impetuously, pale, worn, agitated, yet enraptured at the first sight of her, and Mary threw herself round his neck in a moment, and he clasped her fluttering bosom to his beating heart, and this was the natural result of the restraint they had put upon a passionate affection: for what says the dramatist Destouches, improving upon Horace, so that in England his immortal line is given to Moliere. “*Chassez le naturel, il revient au galop*.”

The next thing was, they held each other at arm’s-length, and mourned over each other.

“Oh, my poor Mary, how ill you look!”

“Oh, my poor Walter, how pale and worn!”

“It’s all my fault,” said Mary.

“No; it’s all mine,” said Walter.

And so they blamed themselves, and grieved over each other, and vowed that come what might they would never part again. But, lo and behold! Walter went on from that to say:

“And that we may never part again let us marry at once, and put our happiness out of the reach of accidents.”

“What!” said Mary. “Defy your father upon his dying bed.”

“Oh no,” said Walter, “that I could not do. I mean marry secretly, and announce it after his decease, if I am to lose him.”

“And why not wait till after his decease?” said Mary.

“Because, then, the laws of society would compel us to wait six months, and in that six months some infernal obstacle or other would be sure to occur, and another would be sure to follow. I am a great deal older than you, and I see that whoever procrastinates happiness, risks it; and whoever shilly-shallies with it deserves to lose it, and generally does.”

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Where young ladies are concerned, logic does not carry all before it, and so Mary opposed all manner of feminine sentiments, and ended by saying she could not do such a thing.

Then Walter began to be mortified and angry; then she cunningly shifted the responsibility, and said she would consult Mrs. Easton.

“Then consult her in my presence,” said Walter.

Mary had not bargained for that; she had intended to secure Mrs. Easton on her side, and then take her opinion. However, as Walter’s proposal was fair, she called Mrs. Easton, and they put the case to her, and asked her to give her candid opinion.

Mrs. Easton, however, took alarm at the gravity of the proposal, and told them both she knew things that were unknown to both of them, and it was not so easy for her to advise.

“Well, but,” said Walter, “if you know more than we do, you are the very person that can advise. All I know is that if we are not married now, I shall have to wait six months at least, and if I stay here Mr. Bartley and I shall quarrel, and he will refuse me Mary; and if I go abroad again I shall get knocked on the head, or else Mary will pine away again, and Bartley will send her to Madeira, and we shall lose our happiness, as all shilly-shallying fools do.”

Mrs. Easton made no reply to this, though she listened attentively to it. She walked to the window and thought quietly to herself; then she came back again and sat down, and after a pause she said, very gravely, “Knowing all I know, and seeing all I see, I advise you two to marry at once by special license, and keep it secret from every one who knows you—but myself—till a proper time comes to reveal it; and it’s borne in upon me that that time will come before long, even if Colonel Clifford should not die this bout, which everybody says he will.”

“Oh, nurse,” said Mary, faintly, “I little thought that you’d be against me.”

“Against you, Miss Mary!” said Mrs. Eastern, with much feeling. “I admire Mr. Walter very much, as any woman must with eyes in her head, and I love him for loving of you so truly, and like a man, for it does not become a man to shilly-shally, but I never saw him till he *was* a man, but you are the child I nursed, and prayed over, and trembled for in sickness, and rejoiced over in health, and left a good master because I saw he did not love you so well as I did.”

These words went to Mary’s heart, and she flew to her nurse, and hung weeping round her neck. Her tears made the manly but tender-hearted Walter give a sort of gulp.

Mary heard it, and put her white hand out to him. He threw himself upon his knees, and kissed it devotedly, and the coy girl was won.

From this hour Walter gave her no breathing-time; he easily talked over old Baker, and got him to excuse his short absence; he turned his hunters into roadsters, and rode them very hard; he got the special license; he squared a clergyman at the head of the lake, who was an old friend of his and fond of fees, and in three days after her consent, Mary and Mrs. Easton drove a four-wheeled carriage Walter had lent them to the little hotel at the lakes. Walter had galloped over at eleven o'clock, and they all three took a little walk together. Walter Clifford and Mary Bartley returned from that walk MAN AND WIFE.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE.

Walter Clifford and Mary sat at a late breakfast in a little inn that looked upon a lake, which appeared to them more lovely than the lake of Thun or of Lucerne. He beamed steadily at her with triumphant rapture; she stole looks at him of wonder, admiration, and the deepest love.

As they had nothing now to argue about, they only spoke a few words at a time, but these were all musical with love.

To them, as we dramatists say, entered Mrs. Easton, with signs of hurry.

“Miss Mary—” said she.

“Mrs. Mary,” suggested Walter, meekly.

Mrs. Mary blew him a kiss.

“Ay, ay,” said Mrs. Easton, smiling. “Of course you will both hate me, but I have come to take you home, Mistress Mary.”

“Home!” said Mary; “why, this feels like home.”

“No doubt,” said Mrs. Easton, “but, for all that, in half an hour we must start.”

The married couple remonstrated with one accord, but Mrs. Easton was firm. “I dreamed,” said she, “that we were all found out—and that’s a warning. Mr. Walter, you know that you’ll be missed at Clifford Hall, and didn’t ought to leave your father another day. And you, Miss Mary, do but think what a weight I have taken upon my shoulders, and don’t put off coming home, for I am almost shaking with anxiety, and for sure and certain my dream it was a warning, and there’s something in the wind.”

They were both so indebted to this good woman that they looked at each other piteously, but agreed. Walter rang the bell, and ordered the four-wheeler and his own nag.

“Mary, one little walk in that sweet garden.”

“Yes, dear,” said Mary, and in another moment they were walking in the garden, intertwined like the ivy and the oak, and purring over their present delights and glowing prospects.

In the mean time Mrs. Easton packed up their things: Walter's were enrolled in a light rug with straps, which went upon his saddle. They left the little inn, Mary driving. When they had gone about two miles they came to cross-roads.

"Please pull up," said Mrs. Easton; then turning to Walter, who was riding ridiculously close to Mary's whip hand, "Isn't that the way to Clifford Hall?"

"It's one way," said he; "but I don't mean to go that way. How can I? It's only three miles more round by your house."

"Nurse," said Mary, appealingly.

"Ay, ay, poor things," said Mrs. Easton. "Well, well, don't loiter, anyway. I shall not be my own woman again till we're safe at the farm."

So they drove briskly on, and in about an hour more they got to a long hill, whence they could see the Gilberts' farm.

"There, nurse," said Mary, pouting a little, "now I hope you're content, for we have got safe home, and he and I shall not have a happy day together again."

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“Oh yes, you will, and many happy years,” said Mrs. Easton. “Well, yes, I don’t feel so fidgety now.”

“Oh!” cried Mary, all of a sudden. “Why, there’s our gray mare coming down the hill with the dog-cart! Who’s that driving her? It’s not papa. I declare it’s Mr. Hope, come home safe and sound. Dear Mr. Hope! Oh, now my happiness is perfect!”

“Mr. Hope!” screamed Mrs. Easton. “Drive faster, for Heaven’s sake! Turn your horse, sir, and gallop away from us as hard as you can!”

“Well, but, Mrs. Easton—” objected Walter.

Mrs. Easton stood up in the carriage. “Man alive!” she screamed, “you know nothing, and I know a deal; begone, or you are no friend of mine: you’ll make me curse the hour that I interfered.”

“Go, darling,” said Mary, kindly, and so decidedly that he turned his horse directly, gave her one look of love and disappointment, and galloped away.

Mary looked pale and angry, and drove on in sullen silence.

Mrs. Easton was too agitated to mind her angry looks. She kept wiping the perspiration from her brow with her handkerchief, and speaking in broken sentences: “If we could only get there first—fool not to teach my sister her lesson before we went, she’s such a simpleton!—can’t you drive faster?”

“Why, nurse,” said Mary, “don’t be so afraid of Mr. Hope. It’s not him I’m afraid of; it’s papa.”

“Yon don’t know what you’re talking about, child. Mr. Bartley is easily blinded; I won’t tell you why. It isn’t so with Mr. Hope. Oh, if I could only get in to have one word with my simple sister before he turns her inside out!”

This question was soon decided. Hope drove up to the door whilst Mary and Mrs. Eastern were still some distance off and hidden by a turn in the road. When they emerged again into sight of the farm they just caught sight of Hope’s back, and Mrs. Gilbert curtseying to him and ushering him into the house.

“Drive into the stable-yard,” said Mrs. Easton, faintly. “He mustn’t see your travelling basket, anyway.”

She told the servant to put the horse into the stable immediately, and the basket into the brew-house. Then she hurried Mary up the back stairs to her room, and went with a beating heart to find Mr. Hope and her sister.

Mrs. Gilbert, though a simple and unguarded woman, could read faces like the rest, and she saw at once that her sister was very much put out by this visit of Mr. Hope, and wanted to know what had passed between her and him. This set the poor woman all in a flutter for fear she should have said something injudicious, and there-upon she prepared to find out, if possible, what she ought to have said.

“What! Mr. Hope!” said Mrs. Easton. “Well, Mary will be glad. And have you been long home, sir?”

“Came last night,” said Hope. “She hasn’t been well, I hear. What is the matter?” And he looked very anxious.

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“Well, sir,” said Mrs. Easton, very guardedly, “she certainly gave me a fright when she came here. She looked quite pale; but whether it was that she wanted a change—but whatever it was, it couldn’t be very serious. You shall judge for yourself. Sister, go to Miss Mary’s room, and tell her.”

Mrs. Easton, in giving this instruction, frowned at her sister as much as to say, “Now don’t speak, but go.”

When she was gone, the next thing was to find out if the woman had made any foolish admission to Mr. Hope; so she waited for him.

She had not long to wait.

Hope said: “I hardly expected to see you; your sister said you were from home.”

“Well, sir,” said Mrs. Easton, “we were not so far off, but we did come home a little sooner than we intended, and I am rare glad we did, for Miss Mary wouldn’t have missed you for all the *views* in the county.”

With that she made an excuse, and left him. She found her sister in Mary’s room: they were comparing notes.

“Now,” said she to Mrs. Gilbert, “you tell me every word you said to Mr. Hope about Miss Mary and me.”

“Well, I said you were not at home, and that is every word; he didn’t give me time to say any more for questioning of me about her health.”

“That’s lucky,” said Mrs. Easton, dryly. “Thank Heaven, there’s no harm done; he sha’n’t see the carriage.”

“Dear me, nurse,” said Mary, “all this time I’m longing to see him.”

“Well, you shall see him, if you won’t own to having been a night from home.”

Mary promised, and went eagerly to Mr. Hope. It did not come natural to her to be afraid of him, and she was impatient for the day to come when she might tell him the whole story. The reception he gave her was not of a nature to discourage this feeling; his pale face—for he had been very ill—flushed at sight of her, his eyes poured affection upon her, and he held out both hands to her. “This the pale girl they frightened me about!” said he. “Why, you’re like the roses in July.”

“That’s partly with seeing of you, sir,” said Mrs. Easton, quietly following, “but we do take some credit to ourselves too; for Miss Mary *was* rather pale when she came here a week ago; but la, young folks want a change now and then.”

“Nurse,” said Mary, “I really was not well, and you have done wonders for me, and I hope you won’t think me ungrateful, but I *must* go home with Mr. Hope.”

Hope’s countenance flushed with delight, and Mrs. Easton saw in a moment that Mary’s affection was co-operating with her prudence. “I thought that would be her first word, sir,” said she. “Why, of course you will, miss. There, don’t you take any trouble; we’ll pack up your things and put them in the dog-cart; but you must eat a morsel both of you before you go. There’s a beautiful piece of beef in the pot, not oversalted, and some mealy potatoes and suet dumplings. You sit down and have your chat, whilst Polly and I get everything ready for you.”

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Then Mary asked Mr. Hope so many questions with such eager affection that he had no time to ask her any, and then she volunteered the home news, especially of Colonel Clifford's condition, and then she blushed and asked him if he had said anything to her father about Walter Clifford.

"Not much," said Mr. Hope. "You are very young, Mary, and it's not for me to interfere, and I won't interfere. But if you want my opinion, why, I admire the young man extremely. I always liked him; he is a straightforward, upright, manly, good-hearted chap, and has lots of plain good sense—Heaven knows where he got it!"

This eulogy was interrupted by Mary putting a white hand and a perfect nose upon Hope's shoulder, and kissing the cloth thereon.

"What," said Hope, tenderly, and yet half sadly—for he knew that all middle-aged men must now be second—"have I found the way to your heart?"

"You always knew that, Mr. Hope," said Mary, softly; "especially since my escapade in that horrid brook."

Their affectionate chat was interrupted by a stout servant laying a snowy cloth, and after her sailed in Mrs. Gilbert, with a red face, and pride unconcealed and justifiable, carrying a grand dish of smoking hot boiled beef, set in a very flower bed, so to speak, of carrots, turnips, and suet dumplings; the servant followed with a brown basin, almost as big as a ewer, filled with mealy potatoes, whose jackets hung by a thread. Around this feast the whole party soon collected, and none of them sighed for Russian soups or French ragouts; for the fact is that under the title of boiled beef there exist two things, one of which, without any great impropriety, might be called junk; but this was the powdered beef of our ancestors, a huge piece just slightly salted in the house itself, so that the generous juice remained in it, but the piquant slices, with the mealy potatoes, made a delightful combination. The glasses were filled with home-brewed ale, sparkling and clear and golden as the finest Madeira. They all ate manfully, stimulated by the genial hostess. Even Mary outshone all her former efforts, and although she couldn't satisfy Mrs. Gilbert, she declared she had never eaten so much in all her life. This set good Mrs. Gilbert's cheeks all aglow with simple, honest satisfaction.

Hope drove Mary home in the dog-cart. He was a happy man, but she could hardly be called a happy woman. She was warm and cold by turns. She had got her friend back, and that was a comfort, but she was not treating him with confidence; indeed, she was passively deceiving him, and that chilled her; but then it would not be for long, and that comforted her, and yet even when the day should come for the great doors of Clifford Hall to fly open to her, would not a sad, reproachful look from dear Mr. Hope somewhat imbitter her cup of happiness? Deceit, and even reticence, did not come so natural to her as they do to many women: she was not weak, and she was frank, though very modest.

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Mr. Bartley met them at the door, and, owing to Hope's presence, was more demonstrative than usual. He seemed much pleased at Mary's return, and delighted at her appearance.

"Well," said he, "I am glad I sent you away for a week. We have all missed you, my dear, but the change has set you up again, I never saw you look better. Now you are well, we must try and keep you well."

* * * * *

We must leave the reader to imagine the mixed feelings with which Mrs. Walter Clifford laid her head upon the pillow that night, and we undertake to say that the female readers, at all events, will supply this blank in our narrative much better than we could, though we were to fill a chapter with that subject alone.

* * * * *

Passion is a terrible enemy to mere affection. Walter Clifford loved his father dearly, yet for twenty-four hours he had almost forgotten him. But the moment he turned his horse's head toward Clifford Hall, uneasiness and something very like remorse began to seize him. Suppose his father had asked for him, and wondered where he was, and felt himself deserted and abandoned in his dying moments. He spurred his horse to a gallop, and soon reached Clifford Hall. As he was afraid to go straight to his father's room, he went at once to old Baker, and said, in an agitated voice,

"One word, John—is he alive?"

"Yes, sir, he is," said John, gravely, and rather sternly.

"Has he asked for me?"

"More than once or twice, sir."

Walter sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. This softened the old servant, whose manner till then had been sullen and grim.

"You need not fret, Mr. Walter," said he; "it's all right. In course I know where you have been."

Walter looked up alarmed.

"I mean in a general way," said the old man. "You have been a-courting of an angel. I know her, sir, and I hope to be her servant some day; and if you was to marry any but her, I'd leave service altogether, and so would Rhoda Milton; but, Mr. Walter, sir, there's

a time for everything: I hope you'll forgive me for saying so. However you are here now, and I was wide-awake, and I have made it all right, sir."

"That's impossible," said Walter. "How could you make it right with my poor dear father, if in his last moments he felt himself neglected?"

"But he didn't feel himself neglected."

"I don't understand you," said Walter.

"Well, sir," said old Baker, "I'm an old servant, and I have done my duty to father and son according to my lights: I told him a lie."

"A lie, John!" said Walter.

"A thundering lie," said John, rather aggressively. "I don't know as I ever told a greater lie in all my life. I told him you was gone up to London to fetch a doctor."

Walter grasped John Baker's hand. "God bless you, old man," said he, "for taking that on your conscience! Well, you sha'n't have yourself to reproach for my fault. I know a first-class gout doctor in London; he has cured it more than once. I'll wire him down this minute; you'll dispatch the message, and I'll go to my father."

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The message was sent, and when the Colonel awoke from an uneasy slumber he saw his son at the foot of the bed, gazing piteously at him.

“My dear boy,” said he, faintly, and held out a wasted hand. Walter was pricked to the heart at this greeting: not a word of remonstrance at his absence.

“I fear you missed me, father,” said he, sadly.

“That I have,” said the old man; “but I dare say you didn’t forget me, though you weren’t by my side.”

The high-minded old soldier said no more, and put no questions, but confided in his son’s affection, and awaited the result of it. From that hour Walter Clifford nursed his father day and night. Dr. Garner arrived next day. He examined the patient, and put a great many questions as to the history and progress of the disorder up to that date, and inquired in particular what was the length of time the fits generally endured. Here he found them all rather hazy. “Ah,” said he, “patients are seldom able to assist their medical adviser with precise information on this point, yet it’s very important. Well, can you tell me how long this attack has lasted?”

They told him that within a day or two.

“Then now,” said he, “the most important question of all: What day did the pain leave his extremities?”

The patient and John Baker had to compare notes to answer this question, and they made it out to be about twenty days.

“Then he ought to be as dead as a herring,” whispered the doctor.

After this he began to walk the room and meditate, with his hands behind him.

“Open those top windows,” said he. “Now draw the screen, and give his lungs a chance; no draughts must blow upon him, you know.” Then he drew Walter aside. “Do you want to know the truth? Well, then, his life hangs on a thread. The gout is creeping upward, and will inevitably kill him if we can’t get it down. Nothing but heroic remedies will do that, and it’s three to five against them. What do you say?”

“I dare not—I dare not. Pray put the question to *him*.”

“I will,” said the doctor; and accordingly he did put it to him with a good deal of feeling and gentleness, and the answer rather surprised him.

Weak as he was, Colonel Clifford’s dull eye flashed, and he half raised himself on his elbow. “What a question to put to a soldier!” said he. “Why, let us fight, to be sure. I

thought it was twenty to one—five to three? I have often won the rubber with five to three against me."

"Ah!" said Dr. Garner, "these are the patients that give the doctor a chance." Then he turned to Baker. "Have you any good champagne in the house—not sweet, and not too dry, and full of fire?"

"Irroy's Carte d'Or," suggested the patient, entering into the business with a certain feeble alacrity that showed his gout had not always been unconnected with imprudence in diet.

Baker was sent for the champagne. It was brought and opened, and the patient drank some of it fizzing. When he had drank what he could, his eyes twinkled, and he said,

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“That’s a hair of a dog that has often bitten me.”

The wine soon got into his weakened head, and he dropped asleep.

“Another draught when he wakes,” said the doctor, “but from a fresh bottle.”

“We’ll finish this one to your health in the servants’ hall,” said honest John Baker.

Dr. Garner staid there all night, keeping up the patient’s strength with eggs and brandy, and everything, in short, except medicine; and he also administered champagne, but at much longer intervals.

At one o’clock next day the patient gave a dismal groan; Walter and the others started up in alarm.

“Good!” said the doctor, calmly; “now I’ll go to bed. Call me if there’s any fresh symptom.”

At six o’clock old Baker burst in the room: “Sir, sir, he have swore at me twice. The Lord be praised!”

“Excellent!” said the doctor. “Now tell me what disagrees with him most after champagne?”

“Why, Green Chartreuse, to be sure,” said old Baker.

“Then give him a table-spoonful,” said the doctor. “Get me some hot water.”

“Which first?” inquired Baker.

“The patient, to be sure,” said Dr. Garner.

Soon after this the doctor stood by his patient’s side, and found him writhing, and, to tell the truth, he was using bad language occasionally, though he evidently tried not to.

Dr. Garner looked at his watch. “I think there’s time to catch the evening train.”

“Why,” said Walter, “surely you would not desert us; this is the crisis, is it not?”

“It’s something more than that,” said the doctor; “the disease knows its old place; it has gone back to the foot like a shot; and if you can keep it there, the patient will live; he’s not the sort of patient that strikes his colors while there’s a bastion left to defend.”

These words pleased the old Colonel so that he waved a feeble hand above his head, then groaned most dismally, and ground his teeth to avoid profanity.

The doctor, with exquisite gentleness, drew the clothes off his feet, and sent for a lot of fleecy cotton or wool, and warned them all not to touch the bed, nor even to approach the lower part of it, and then he once more proposed to leave, and gave his reasons.

“Now, look here, you know, I have done my part, and if I give special instructions to the nurses, they can do the rest. I’m rather dear, and why should you waste your money?”

“Dear!” said Walter, warmly; “you’re as cheap as dirt, and as good as gold, and the very sight of you is a comfort to us. There’s a fast train at ten; I’ll drive you to the station after breakfast myself. Your fees—they are nothing to us. We love him, and we are the happiest house in Christendom; we, that were the saddest.”

“Well,” said the doctor, “you north countrymen are hearty people. I’ll stay till to-morrow morning—indeed, I’ll stay till the afternoon, for my London day will be lost anyway.”

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He staid accordingly till three o'clock, left his patient out of all present danger, and advised Walter especially against allowing colchicum to be administered to him until his strength had recovered.

"There is no medicinal cure for gout," said he; "pain is a mere symptom, and colchicum soothes that pain, not by affecting the disease, but by stilling the action of the heart. Well, if you still the action of that heart there, you'll kill him as surely as if you stilled it with a pistol bullet. Knock off his champagne in three or four days, and wheel him into the sun as soon as you can with safety, fill his lungs with oxygen, and keep all worry and disputes and mental anxiety from him, if you can. Don't contradict him for a month to come."

The Colonel had a terrible bout of it so far as pain was concerned, but after about a fortnight the paroxysms intermitted, the appetite increased. Everybody was his nurse; everybody, including Julia Clifford, humored him; Percy Fitzroy was never mentioned, and the name of Bartley religiously avoided. The Colonel had got a fright, and was more prudent in his diet, and always in the open air.

Walter left him only at odd times, when he could hope to get a hasty word with Mary, and tell her how things were going, and do all that man could do to keep her heart up, and reconcile her to the present situation.

Returning from his wife one day, and leaving her depressed by their galling situation, though she was never peevish, but very sad and thoughtful, he found his father and Julia Clifford in the library. Julia had been writing letters for him; she gave Walter a deprecatory look, as much as to say, "What I am doing is by compulsion, and you won't like it." Colonel Clifford didn't leave the young man in any doubt about the matter. He said: "Walter, you heard me speak of Bell, the counsel who leads this circuit. I was once so fortunate as to do him a good turn, and he has not forgotten it; he will sleep here the day after to-morrow, and he will go over that black-guard's lease: he has been in plenty of mining cases. I have got a sort of half opinion out of him already; he thinks it contrary to the equity of contracts that minerals should pass under a farm lease where the surface of the soil is a just equivalent to the yearly payment; but the old fox won't speak positively till he has read every syllable of the lease. However, it stands to reason that it's a fraud; it comes from a man who is all fraud; but thank God I am myself again."

He started up erect as a dart. "I'll have him off my lands; I'll drag him out of the bowels of the earth, him and all his clan."

With this and other threats of the same character he marched out of the room, striking the floor hard with his stick as he went, and left Julia Clifford amazed, and Walter Clifford aghast, at his vindictive fury.

CHAPTER XIII.

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THE SERPENT LET LOOSE.

Walter Clifford was so distressed at this outburst, and the prospect of actual litigation between his father and his sweetheart's father, that Julia Clifford pitied him, and, after thinking a little, said she would stop it for the present. She then sat down, and in five minutes the docile pen of a female letter-writer produced an ingratiating composition impossible to resist. She apologized for her apparent insincerity, but would be candid, and confide the whole truth to Mr. Bell. Then she told him that Colonel Clifford "had only just been saved from death by a miracle, and a relapse was expected in case of any great excitement or irritation, such as a doubtful lawsuit with a gentleman he disliked would certainly cause. The proposed litigation was, *for various reasons*, most distressing to his son and successor, Walter Clifford, and would Mr. Bell be so very kind as to put the question off as long as possible by any means he thought proper?"

Walter was grateful, and said, "What a comfort to have a lady on one's side!"

"I would rather have a gentleman on mine," said Julia, laughing.

Mr. Bell wrote a discreet reply. He would wait till the Assizes—six weeks' delay—and then write to the Colonel, postponing his visit. This he did, and promised to look up cases meantime.

But these two allies not only baffled their irascible chief; they also humored him to the full. They never mentioned the name of Bartley, and they kept Percy Fitzroy out of sight in spite of his remonstrances, and, in a word, they made the Colonel's life so smooth that he thought he was going to have his own way in everything, and he improved in health and spirits; for you know it is an old saying, "Always get your own way, and you'll never die in a pet."

And then what was still a tottering situation was kept on its legs by the sweet character and gentle temper of Mary Bartley.

We have already mentioned that she was superior to most women in the habit of close attention to whatever she undertook. This was the real key to her facility in languages, history, music, drawing, and calisthenics, as her professor called female gymnastics. The flexible creature's limbs were in secret steel. She could go thirty feet up a slack rope hand over hand with wonderful ease and grace, and hang by one hand for ten minutes to kiss the other to her friends. So the very day she was surprised into consenting to marry Walter secretly she sat down to the Marriage Service and learned it all by heart directly, and understood most of it.

By this means she realized that now she had another man to obey as well as her father. So now, when Walter pressed her for secret meetings, she said, submissively,

“Oh yes, if you insist.” She even remarked that she concluded clandestine meetings were the natural consequence of a clandestine marriage.

She used to meet her husband in the day when she could, and often for five minutes under the moon. And she even promised to spend two or three days with him at the lakes if a safe opportunity should occur. But for that she stipulated that Mr. Hope must be absent.

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Walter asked her why she was more afraid of Mr. Hope than of her father.

Her eyes seemed to look inward dimly, and at first she said she didn't know. But after pondering the matter a little she said, "Because he watches me more closely than papa, and that is because—You won't tell anybody?"

"No."

"Not a soul, upon your honor?"

"Not a soul, dearest, upon my honor."

"Well, then, because he loves me more."

"Oh, come!" said Walter, incredulously.

But Mary would neither resign her opinion nor pursue a subject which puzzled and grieved her.

We have now indicated the peaceful tenor of things in Derbyshire for a period of some months. We shall have to show by-and-by that elements of discord were accumulating under the surface; but at present we must leave Derbyshire, and deal very briefly with another tissue of events, beginning years ago, and running to a date three months, at least, ahead of Colonel Clifford's recovery. The reader will have no reason to regret this apparent interruption. Our tale hitherto has been rather sluggish; but it is in narrative as it is in nature, when two streams unite their forces the current becomes broader and stronger.

Leonard Monckton was sent to Pentonville, and after some years transferred to Portland. In both places he played the game of an old hand; always kept his temper and carnied everybody, especially the chaplain and the turnkeys. These last he treated as his only masters; and if they gave him short weight in bread or meat, catch him making matters worse by appealing to the governor! Toward the end of his time at Pentonville he had some thought of suicide, but his spirits revived at Portland, where he was cheered by the conversation of other villains. Their name was legion; but as he never met one of them again, except Ben Burnley, all those miscreants are happily irrelevant. And the reader need not fear an introduction to them, unless he should find himself garroted in some dark street or suburb, or his home rifled some dark and windy night. As for Ben Burnley, he was from the North country, imprisoned for conspiracy and manslaughter in an attack upon non-union miners. Toward the end of his time he made an attack upon a warder, and got five years more. Then Monckton showed him he was a fool, and explained to him his own plan of conduct, and bade him observe how popular he was with the warders, and reaped all the favor they dared to show him.

"He treated me like a dog," said the man, sullenly.

“I saw it,” said Leonard. “And if I had been you I would have said nothing, but waited till my time was out, and then watched for him till he got his day out, and settled his hash. That is the way for your sort. As for me, killing is a poor revenge; it is too soon over. Do you think I don’t mean to be revenged on that skunk Bartley, and, above all, on that scoundrel Hope, who planted the swag in my pockets, and let me into this hole for fourteen years?” Then, with all his self-command, he burst into a torrent of curses, and his pale face was ghastly with hate, and his eyes glared with demoniac fire, for hell raged in his heart.

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Just then a warder approached, and to Burnley's surprise, who did not see him coming, Monckton said, gently, "And therefore, my poor fellow, do just consider that you have broken the law, and the warders are only doing their duty and earning their bread, and if you were a warder to-morrow, you'd have to do just what they do."

"Ay," said the warder, in passing, "you may lecture the bloke, but you will not make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

That was true, but nevertheless the smooth villain Monckton obtained a great ascendency over this rough, shock-headed ruffian Burnley, and he got into no more scrapes. He finished his two sentences, and left before Monckton. This precious pair revealed to each other certain passages in their beautiful lives. Monckton's were only half-confidences, but Burnley told Monckton he had been concerned with others in a burglary at Stockton, and also in the death of an overseer in a mine in Wales, and gave the particulars with a sort of quaking gusto, and washing his hands nervously in the tainted air all the time. To be sure the overseer had earned his fate; he had himself been guilty of a crime—he had been true to his employer.

The grateful Burnley left Portland at last, and promised faithfully to send word to a certain friend of Monckton's, in London, where he was, and what he was doing. Meantime he begged his way northward from Portland, for the southern provinces were a dead letter to him.

Monckton's wife wrote to him as often as the rules of the jail permitted, and her letters were full of affection, and of hope that their separation would be shortened. She went into all the details of her life, and it was now a creditable one. Young women are educated practically in Germany; and Lucy was not only a good scholar, and almost a linguist, but excellent at all needlework, and, better still, could cut dresses and other garments in the best possible style. After one or two inferior places, she got a situation with an English countess; and from that time she was passed as a treasure from one member of the aristocracy to another, and received high stipends, and presents of at least equal value. Being a German, she put by money, and let her husband know it. But in the seventh year of her enforced widowhood her letters began to undergo subtle changes, one after another.

First there were little exhibitions of impatience. Then there were signs of languor and a diminution of gush.

Then there were stronger protestations of affection than ever.

Then there were mixed with these protestations queries whether the truest affection was not that which provided for the interests of the beloved person.

Then in the eighth year of Monckton's imprisonment she added to remarks of the above kind certain confessions that she was worn out with anxieties, and felt her lonely condition; that youth and beauty did not last forever; that she had let slip opportunities of doing herself substantial service, and him too, if he could look at things as coolly now as he used to; and she began to think she had done wrong.

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This line once adopted was never given up, though it was accompanied once or twice with passionate expressions of regret at the vanity of long-cherished hopes. Then came a letter, or two more in which the fair writer described herself as torn this way and that way, and not knowing what to do for the best, and inveighed against Fate.

Then came a long silence.

Then came a short letter imploring him, if he loved her as she loved him, to try and forget her, except as one who would always watch over his interests, and weep for him in secret.

“Crocodile!” said Monckton, with a cold sneer.

All this showed him it was his interest not to lose his hold on her. So he always wrote to her in a beautiful strain of faith, affection, and constancy.

But this part of the comedy was cut short by the lady discontinuing the correspondence and concealing her address for years.

“Ah!” said Monckton, “she wants to cure me. That cock won’t fight, my beauty. A month before he was let loose upon society came a surprise—a letter from his wife, directing him to call at the office of a certain solicitor in Serjeant’s Inn, Fleet Street, when he would receive L50 upon his personal receipt, and a similar sum from time to time, provided he made no attempt to discover her, or in any way disturb her life. ’Oh, Leonard,’ said she, ’you ruined me once. Pray do not destroy me again. You may be sure I am not happy; but I am in peace and comfort, and I am old enough to know their value. Dear Leonard, I offer them both to you. Pray, pray do not despise them, and, whatever you do, do not offend against the law again. You see how strong it is.’”

Monckton read this with calm indifference. He did not expect a woman to give him a pension unconditionally, or without some little twaddle by way of drawback. He called on the lawyer, and sent in his name. He was received by the lawyer in person, and eyed very keenly. “I am directed to call here for L50, sir,” said he.

“Yes, Mr. Monckton. I believe the payment is conditional.”

“No, sir; not the first L50. It is the future payments that are to depend upon my conniving at my wife’s infidelity;” and with that he handed him the letter.

The lawyer perused it, and said: “You are right, sir. The L50 shall be paid to you immediately; but we must request you to consider that our client is your friend, and acts by our advice, and that it will not be either graceful or delicate to interpret her conduct to her discredit.”

“My good sir,” said Monckton, with one of his cynical sneers, “every time your client pays me L50, put on the receipt that black is white in matters of conjugal morality, and I’ll sign the whole acknowledgment.”

Finding he had such a serpent to deal with, the lawyer cut the dialogue short, and paid the money. However, as Monckton was leaving, he said: “You can write to us when you want any more, and would it be discreet of me to ask where we can address you?”

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“Why not?” said Monckton. “I have nothing to conceal. However, all I can tell you at present is that I am going to Hull to try and find a couple of rogues.”

To Hull he went, breathing avarice and vengeance. This dangerous villain was quite master of Bartley’s secret, and Hope’s. To be sure, when Hope first discovered him in Bartley’s office, he was puzzled at the sudden interference of that stranger. He had only seen Hope’s back until this, and, moreover, Hope had been shabbily dressed in black cloth hard worn, whereas he was in a new suit of tweed when he exposed Monckton’s villainy. But this was explained at the trial, and Monckton instructed his attorney to cross-examine Hope about his own great fraud; but counsel refused to do so, either because he disbelieved his client, or thought such a cross-examination would be stopped, or set the court still more against his client.

Monckton raged at this, and, of course, said he had been bought by the other side. But now he was delighted that his enemies’ secret had never been inquired into, and that he could fall on them both like a thunder-bolt.

He was at Hull next day, and rambled about the old shop, and looked in at the windows. All new faces, and on the door-plate, “Atkinson & Co.”

Then he went in, and asked for Mr. Bartley.

Name not known.

“Why, he used to be here. I was in his employ.”

No; nobody knew Mr. Bartley.

Could he see Mr. Atkinson?

Certainly. Mr. Atkinson would be there at two o’clock.

Monckton, after some preamble, asked whether he had not succeeded in this business to Mr. Robert Bartley.

No. He had bought the business from Mrs. Duplex, a widow residing in this town, and he happened to know that her husband had taken it from Whitaker, a merchant at Boston.

“Is he alive, sir?”

“I believe so, and very well known.”

Monckton went off to Whitaker, and learned from him that he had bought the business from Bartley, but it was many years ago, and he had never heard of the purchaser since that day.

Monckton returned to London baffled. What was he to do? Go to a secret-inquiry office? Advertise that if Mr. Robert Bartley, late of Hull, would write to a certain agent, he would hear of something to his advantage? He did not much fancy either of these plans. He wanted to pounce on Bartley, or Hope, or both.

Then he argued thus: "Bartley has got lots of money now, or he would not have given up business. Ten to one he lives in London, or visits it. I will try the Park."

Well, he did try the Park, both at the riding hour and the driving hour. He saw no Bartley at either time.

But one day in the Lady's Mile, as he listlessly watched the carriages defile slowly past him, with every now and then a jam, there crawled past him a smart victoria, and in it a beautiful woman with glorious dark eyes, and a lovely little boy, the very image of her. It was his wife and her son.

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Monckton started, but the lady gave no sign of recognition. She bowed, but it was to a gentleman at Monckton's side, who had raised his hat to her with marked respect.

"What a beautiful crechaar!" said a little swell to the gentleman in question. "You know her?"

"Very slightly."

"Who is she? A duchess?"

"No; a stock-broker's wife, Mrs. Braham. Why, she is a known beauty."

That was enough for Monckton. He hung back a little, and followed the carriage. He calculated that if it left the Park at Hyde Park corner, or the Marble Arch, he could take a hansom and follow it.

When the victoria got clear of the crowd at the corner, Mrs. Braham leaned forward a moment and whispered a word to her coachman. Instantly the carriage dashed at the Chesterfield Gate and into Mayfair at such a swift trot that there was no time to get a cab and keep it in sight.

Monckton lighted a cigarette. "Clever girl!" said he, satirically. "She knew me, and never winked."

The next day he went to the lawyer and said, "I have a little favor to ask you, sir."

The lawyer was on his guard directly, but said nothing.

"An interview—in this office—with Mrs. Braham."

The lawyer winced, but went on his guard again directly.

"Client of ours?"

"Yes, sir."

"Braham? Braham?" said the lawyer, affecting to search the caverns of professional memory.

"Stock-broker's wife."

"Where do they live?"

"What! don't you know? Place of *business*—Threadneedle Street. Place of *bigamy*—-Portman Square."

“I have no authority to grant a personal interview with any such person.”

“But you have no power to hinder one, and it is her interest the meeting should take place here, and the stock-broker be out of it.”

The lawyer reflected.

“Will you promise me it shall be a friendly interview? You will never go to her husband?”

“Her stock-broker, you mean. Not I. If she comes to me here when I want her.”

“Will that be often?”

“I think not. I have a better card to play than Mrs. Braham. I only want her to help me to find certain people. Shall we say twelve o’clock to-morrow?”

The lawyer called on Mrs. Braham, and after an agitated and tearful interview, persuaded her to keep the appointment.

“Consider,” said he, “what you gain by making our office the place of meeting. Establish that at once. It’s a point of defense.”

The meeting took place in the lawyer’s private room, and Mrs. Braham was so overcome that she nearly fainted. Then she was hysterical, and finally tears relieved her.

When she came to this point, Monckton, who had looked upon the whole exhibition as a mere preliminary form observed by females, said,

“Come, Lucy, don’t be silly. I am not here to spoil your little game, but to play my own. The question is, will you help me to make my fortune?”

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“Oh, that I will, if you will not break up my home.”

“Not such a fool, my dear. Catch me killing a milk-cow! You give me a percentage on your profits, and I’m dumb.”

“Then all you want is more money?”

“That is all; and I shall not want that in a month’s time.”

“I have brought L100, Leonard,” she said, timidly.

“Sensible girl. Hand it over.”

Two white hands trembled at the strings of a little bag, and took out ten crisp notes.

Leonard took them with satisfaction.

“There,” said he. “This will last me till I have found Bartley and Hope, and made my fortune.”

“Hope!” said Mrs. Braham. “Oh, pray keep clear of him! Pray don’t attack *him* again. He is such an able man!”

“I will not attack him again to be defeated. Forewarned, forearmed. Indeed, if I am to bleed Bartley, I don’t know how I can be revenged on Hope. *That is the cruel thing*. But don’t you trouble about my business, Lucy, unless,” said he, with a sneer, “you can tell me where to find them, and so save me a lot of money.”

“Well, Leonard,” said Lucy, “it can’t be so very hard to find Hope. You know where that young man lives that you—that I—”

“Oh, Walter Clifford! Yes, of course I know where *he* lives. At Clifford Hall, in Derbyshire.”

“Well, Leonard, Hope saved him from prison, and ruined you. That young man had a good heart. He would not forget such a kindness. He may not know where Mr. Bartley lives, but surely he will know where Hope is.”

“Lucy,” said Leonard, “you are not such a fool as you were. It is a chance, at all events. I’ll go down to that neighborhood directly. I’ll have a first-rate disguise, and spy about, and pick up all I can.”

“And you will never say anything or do anything to—Oh, Leonard, I’m a bad wife. I never can be a good one now to anybody. But I’m a good mother; and I thought God

had forgiven me, when he sent me my little angel. You will never ruin his poor mother, and make her darling blush for her!"

"Curse me if I do!" said Leonard, betrayed into a moment's warmth. But he was soon himself again. "There," said he, "I'll leave the little bloke my inheritance. Perhaps you don't know I'm heir to a large estate in Westmoreland; no end of land, and half a lake, *and only eleven lives between the estate and me*. I will leave my 'great expectations' to that young bloke. What's his Christian name?"

"Augustus."

"And what's his father's name?"

"Jonathan."

Leonard then left all his property, real and personal, and all that should ever accrue to him, to Augustus Braham, son of Jonathan Braham, and left Lucy Braham sole executrix and trustee.

Then he hurried into the outer office, signed this document, and got it witnessed. The clerks proposed to engross it.

"What for?" said he. "This is the strongest form. All in the same handwriting as the signature; forgery made easy are your engrossed wills."

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He took it in to Mrs. Braham, and read it to her, and gave it her. He meant it all as a joke; he read it with a sneer. But the mother's heart over-flowed. She put it in her bosom, and kissed his hand.

"Oh, Leonard," said she, "God bless you! Now I see you mean no ill to me and mine. *You don't love me enough to be angry with me*. But it all comes back to *me*. A woman can't forget her first. Now promise me one thing; don't give way to revenge or avarice. You are so wise when you are cool, but no man can give way to his passions and be wise. Why run any more risks? He is liberal to me, and I'm not extravagant. I can allow you more than I said, and wrong nobody."

Monckton interrupted her, thus: "There, old girl, you are a good sort; you always were. But not bleed that skunk Bartley, and not be revenged on that villain Hope? I'd rather die where I stand, for they have turned my blood to gall, and lighted hell in my heart this many a year of misery."

He held out his hand to her; it was cold. She grasped it in her warm, soft palm, and gave him one strange, searching look with her glorious eyes; and so they parted.

Next day, at dusk, there arrived at the Dun Cow an elderly man with a large carpet-bag and a strapped bundle of patterns—tweed, kersey, velveteen, and corduroys. He had a short gray mustache and beard, very neat; and appeared to be a commercial traveller.

In the evening he asked for brandy, old rum, lemons, powdered sugar, a kettle, and a punch-bowl. A huge one, relic of a past age, was produced. He mixed delicious punch, and begged the landlady to sit down and taste it. She complied, and pronounced it first-rate. He enticed her into conversation.

She was a rattling gossip, and told him first her own grievances. Here was the village enlarging, and yet no more custom coming to her because of the beer-house. The very mention of this obnoxious institution moved her bile directly. "A pretty gentleman," said she, "to brew his own beer and undersell a poor widow that have been here all her days and her father before her! But the Colonel won't let me be driven out altogether, no more will Mr. Walter: he do manage for the old gentleman now."

Monckton sipped and waited for the name of Hope, but it did not come. The good lady deluged him with the things that interested her. She was to have a bit of a farm added on to the Dun Cow. It was to be grass land, and not much labor wanted. She couldn't undertake that; was it likely? But for milking of cows and making butter or cheese, that she was as good at as here and there one; and if she could have the custom of the miners for her milk. "But, la, sir," said she, "I'll go bail as that there Bartley will take and set up a dairy against me, as he have a beer shop."

"Bartley?" said Monckton, inquiringly.

“Ay, sir; him as owns the mine, and the beer shop, and all, worse luck for me.”

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“Bartley? Who is he?”

“Oh, one of those chaps that rise from nothing nowadays. Came here to farm; but that was a blind, the Colonel says. Sunk a mine, he did, and built a pit village, and turns everything into brass [money]. But there, you are a stranger, sir; what is all this to you?”

“Why, it is very interesting,” said Monckton. “Mistress, I always like to hear the whole history of every place I stop at, especially from a sensible woman like you, that sees to the bottom of things. Do have another glass. Why, I should be as dull as ditch-water, now, if I had not your company.”

“La, sir, I’m sure you are welcome to my company in a civil way; and for the matter of that you are right; life is life, and there’s plenty to be learned in a public—do but open your eyes and ears.”

“Have another glass with me. I am praised for my punch.”

“You deserve it, sir. Better was never brewed.”

She sipped and sipped, and smacked her lips, till it was all gone.

This glass colored her cheeks, brightened her eyes, and even loosened her tongue, though that was pretty well oiled by nature.

“Well, sir,” said she, “you are a bird of passage, here to-day and gone to-morrow, and it don’t matter much what I tell you, so long as I don’t tell no lies. *There will be a row in this village*.”

Having delivered this formidable prophecy, the coy dame pushed her glass to her companion for more, and leaning back cozily in the old-fashioned high-backed chair, observed the effect of her thunder-bolt.

Monckton rubbed his hands. “I’m glad of it,” said he, genially; “that is to say, provided my good hostess does not suffer by it.”

“I’m much beholden to you, sir,” said the lady. “You are the civilest-spoken gentleman I have entertained this many a day. Here’s your health, and wishing you luck in your business, and many happy days well spent. My service to you, sir.”

“The same to you, ma’am.”

“Well, sir, in regard to a row between the gentlefolks—not that I call that there Bartley one—judge for yourself. You are a man of the world and a man of business, and an elderly man apparently.”

“At all events, I am older than you, madam.”

“That is as may be,” said Mrs. Dawson, dryly. “We hain’t got the parish register here, and all the better for me. So once more I say, judge for yourself.”

“Well, madam,” said Monckton, “I will try, if you will oblige me with the facts.”

“That is reasonable,” said Mrs. Dawson, loftily, but after some little consideration. “The facts I will declare, and not a lie among ’em.”

“That will be a novelty,” thought her cynical hearer, but he held his tongue, and looked respectfully attentive.

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“Colonel Clifford,” said Mrs. Dawson, “hates Bartley like poison, and Bartley him. The Colonel vows he will have him off the land and out of the bowels of the earth, and he have sent him a lawyer’s letter; for everything leaks out in this village, along of the servants’ chattering. Bartley he don’t value a lawyer’s letter no more than that. He defies the Colonel, and they’ll go at it hammer and tongs at the ’Sizes, and spend a mint of money in law. That’s one side of the question. But there’s another. Master Walter is deep in love with Miss Mary.”

“Who is she?”

“Who is she? Why, Bartley’s daughter, to be sure; not as I’d believe it if I hadn’t known her mother, for she is no more like him in her looks or her ways than a tulip is to a dandelion. She is the loveliest girl in the county, and better than she’s bonny. You don’t catch *her* drawing bridle at her papa’s beer-house, and she never passes my picture. It’s ’Oh, Mrs. Dawson, I *am* so thirsty, a glass of your good cider, please, and a little hay and water for Deersfoot.’ That’s her way, bless your silly heart! *She* ain’t dry; and Deersfoot, he’s full of beans, and his coat’s like satin; but that’s Miss Mary’s way of letting me know that she’s my customer, and nobody else’s in the town. God bless her, and send her many happy days with the man of her heart, and that is Walter Clifford, for she is just as fond of him as he is of her. I seen it all from the first day. ’Twas love at first sight, and still a-growing to this day. Them old fogies may tear each other to pieces, but they won’t part such lovers as those. There’s not a girl in the village that doesn’t run to look at them, and admire them, and wish them joy. Ay, and you mark my words, they are young, but they have got a spirit, both of them. Miss Mary, she looks you in the face like a lion and a dove all in one. They may lead her, but they won’t drive her. And Walter, he’s a Clifford from top to toe. Nothing but death will part them two. Them’s the facts, sir, without a lie, which now I’m a-waiting for judgment.”

“Mrs. Dawson,” said Monckton, solemnly, “since you do me the honor to ask my opinion, I say that out of these facts a row will certainly arise, and a deadly one.”

“It must, sir; and Will Hope will have to take a side. ’Tis no use his trying to be everybody’s friend this time, though that’s his natural character, poor chap.”

Monckton’s eyes flashed fire, but he suppressed all appearance of excitement, and asked who Mr. Hope was.

Mrs. Dawson brightened at the very name of her favorite, and said, “Who is Will Hope? Why, the cleverest man in Derbyshire, for one thing; but he is that Bartley’s right-hand man, worse luck. He is inspector of the mine and factotum. He is the handiest man in England. He invents machines, and makes fiddles and plays ’em, and mends all their clocks and watches and wheel-barrows, and charges ’em naught.

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He makes hisself too common. I often tell him so. Says I, 'Why dost let 'em all put on thee so? Serve thee right if I was to send thee my pots and pans to mend.' 'And so do,' says he, directly. 'There's no art in it, if you can make the sawder, and I can do that, by the Dick and Harry!' And one day I said to him, 'Do take a look at this fine new cow of mine as cost me twenty-five good shillings and a quart of ale. What ever is the matter with her? She looks like the skin of a cow flattened against the board.' So says he, 'Nay, she's better drawn than nine in ten; but she wants light and shade. Send her to my workshop.' 'Ay, ay,' says I; 'thy workshop is like the church-yard; we be all bound to go there one day or t'other.' Well, sir, if you believe me, when they brought her home and hung her again she almost knocked my eye out. There was three or four more women looking on, and I mind all on us skreeked a bit, and our hands went up in the air as if one string had pulled the lot; and says Bet Morgan, the carter's wife, 'Lord sake, gie me a bucket somebody, and let me milk her!' 'Nay, but thou shalt milk me,' said I, and a pint of fourpenny I gave her, then and there, for complimenting of my cow. Will Hope, he's everybody's friend. He made the Colonel a crutch with his own hands, which the Colonel can use no other now. Walter swears by him. Miss Mary dotes on him: he saved her life in the river when she was a girl. The very miners give him a good word, though he is very strict with them; and as for Bartley, it's my belief he owes all his good luck to Will Hope. And to think he was born in this village, and left it a poor lad; ay, and he came back here one day as poor as Job, seems but t'other day, with his bundle on his back and his poor little girl in his hand. I dare say I fed them both with whatever was going, poor bodies."

"What was she like?"

"A poor little wizened thing. She had beautiful golden hair, though."

"Like Miss Bartley's?"

"Something, but lighter."

"Have you ever seen her since?"

"No; and I never shall."

"Who knows?"

"Nay, sir. I asked him after her one day when he came home for good. He never answered me, and he turned away as if I had stung him. She has followed her mother, no doubt. And so now she is gone he's well-to-do; and that is the way of it, sir. God sends mouths where there is no meat, and meat where there's no mouths. But He

knows best, and sees both worlds at once. We can only see this one—that's full of trouble."

Monckton now began to yawn, for he wanted to be alone and think over the schemes that floated before him now.

"You are sleepy, sir," said Mrs. Dawson. "I'll go and see your bed is all right."

He thanked her and filled her glass. She tossed it off like a man this time, and left him to doze in his chair.

Doze, indeed! Never did a man's eyes move to and fro more restlessly. Every faculty was strung to the utmost.

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At first as all the *dramatis personae* he was in search of came out one after another from that gossip's tongue, he was amazed and delighted to find that instead of having to search for one of them in one part of England, and another in another, he had got them all ready to his hand. But soon he began to see that they were too near each other, and some of them interwoven, and all the more dangerous to attack.

He saw one thing at a glance. That it would be quite a mistake to settle a plan of action. That is sometimes a great advantage in dealing with the unguarded. But it creates a stiffness. Here all must be supple and fitted with watchful tact to the situation as it rose. Everything would have to be shot flying.

Then as to the immediate situation, Reader, did ever you see a careful setter run suddenly into the middle of a covey who were not on their feet nor close together, but a little dispersed and reposing in high cover in the middle of the day? No human face is ever so intense or human form more rigid. He knows that one bird is three yards from his nose, another the same distance from either ear, and, in short, that they are all about him, and to frighten one is to frighten all.

His tail quivers, and then turns to steel, like his limbs. His eyes glare; his tongue fears to pant; it slips out at one side of his teeth and they close on it. Then slowly, slowly, he goes down, noiseless as a cat, and crouches on the long covert, whether turnips, rape, or clover.

Even so did this designing cur crouch in the Dun Cow.

The loyal quadruped is waiting for his master, and his anxiety is disinterested. The biped cur was waiting for the first streak of dawn to slip away to some more distant and safe hiding-place and sally-port than the Dun Cow, kept by a woman who was devoted to Hope, to Walter, and to Mary, and had all her wits about her—mother-wit included.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SERPENT.

Monckton slipped away at the dawn, and was off to Derby to prepare first-rate disguises.

At Derby, going through the local papers, he found lodgings offered at a farm-house to invalids, fresh milk and eggs, home-made bread, *etc*. The place was within a few miles of Clifford Hall. Monckton thought this would suit him much better than being too near. When his disguises were ready, he hired a horse and dog-cart by the month, and paid a deposit, and drove to the place in question. He put some shadow under his eyes to look more like an invalid. He had got used to his own cadaverous tint, so that seemed insufficient.

The farmer's wife looked at him, and hesitated.

"Well, sir," said she, with a blush, "we takes 'em in to cure, not to—"

"Not to bury," said Monckton. "Don't you be alarmed. I have got no time to die; I'm too busy. Why, I have been much worse than this. I am convalescent now."

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“Ye don’t say so, sir!” said she. “Well, I see your heart is good” (the first time he had ever been told that), “and so I’ve a mind to risk it.”

Then she quickly clapped on ten shillings a week more for color, and he was installed. He washed his face, and then the woman conceived hopes of him, and expressed them in rustic fashion. “Well,” said she, “dirt is a disguise. Now I look at you, you have got more mischief to do in the world yet, I do believe.”

“A deal more, I hope,” said he.

It now occurred to him, all of a sudden, that really he was not in good health, and that he had difficulties before him which required calm nerves, and that nerves are affected by the stomach. So, not to throw a chance away, he had the sense and the resolution to devote a few days to health and unwholesome meditation.

This is a discordant world: even vices will not always pull the same way. Here was a sinister villain distracted between avarice and revenge, and sore puzzled which way to turn. Of course he could expose the real parentage of Mary Bartley, and put both Bartley and Hope to shame, and then the Cliffords would make Bartley disgorge the L20,000. But he, Monckton, would not make a shilling by that, and it would be a weak revenge on Bartley, who could now spare L20,000, and no revenge at all on Hope, for Hope was now well-to-do, and would most likely be glad to get his daughter back. Then, on the other hand, he could easily frighten Bartley into giving him L5000 to keep dark, but in that case he must forego his vengeance on Hope.

This difficulty had tormented Monckton all along; but now Mrs. Dawson had revealed another obstacle. Young Clifford and Mary in love with each other. What Mrs. Easton saw as a friend, with her good mother-wit, this man saw in a moment as an enemy, *viz*., that this new combination dwarfed the L20,000 altogether. Monckton had no idea that his unknown antagonist Nurse Easton had married the pair, but the very attachment, as the chatter-box of the Dun Cow described it, was a bitter pill to him. “Who could have foreseen this?” said he. “It’s devilish.” We did not ourselves intend our readers to feel it so, or we would not have spent so much time over it. But as regards that one adjective, Mr. Monckton is a better authority than we are. He had a document with him that, skillfully used, might make mischief for a time between these lovers. But he foresaw there could be no permanent result without the personal assistance of Mrs. Braham. That he could have commanded fourteen years ago, but now he felt how difficult it would be. He would have to threaten and torment her almost to madness before she would come down to Derbyshire and declare that this Walter Clifford was the Walter Clifford of the certificate, and that she was his discarded wife. But Monckton was none the less resolved she should come if necessary. Leaving him *varius distractum vitiis*, and weighing every scheme, with its pros and cons, and, like a panther crouching and watching before he would make his first spring, we will now bring our other characters up to the same point, and that will not take us long, for during the months we have

skipped there were not many events, and Mrs. Dawson has told the readers some of them, and the rest were only detached incidents.

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The most important in our opinion were:

1. That Colonel Clifford resumed his determination to marry Julia Clifford to Walter, and pooh-poohed Fitzroy entirely, declaring him to be five feet nothing, and therefore far below the military standard.

2. That Hope rented a cottage of Walter about three hundred yards from the mine, and not upon the land that was leased to Bartley; that there was a long detached building hard by, which Walter divided for him, and turned into an office with a large window close to the ground, and a workshop with a doorway and an aperture for a window, but no window nor door.

3. That Hope got more and more uneasy about the L20,000, and observed to Bartley that they must be robbing *somebody* of it without the excuse they once had. He, for his part, would work to disgorge his share. Bartley replied that the money would have gone to a convent if he had not saved it from so vile a fate. This said the astute Bartley because one day Hope, who had his opinions on everything, inveighed against a convent, and said no private prisons ought to exist in a free country. So Bartley's ingenious statement stunned Hope for a minute, but did not satisfy his conscience.

4. Hope went to London for a week, and Mary spent four days with her husband at a hotel near the lake; but not the one held by Mrs. Easton's sister. This change was by advice of Mrs. Easton. On this occasion Mary played the woman. She requested Walter to get her some orange blossoms, and she borrowed a diamond bracelet of Julia, and sat down to dinner with her husband in evening dress, and dazzled him with her lovely arms and bust, and her diamond bracelet and eyes that outshone it. She seemed ever so much larger as well as lovelier, and Walter gazed at her with a sort of loving awe, and she smiled archly at him, and it was the first time she had really enjoyed her own beauty, or even troubled her head much about it. They condensed a honey-moon into these four days, and came home compensated for their patience, and more devoted than ever. But whilst they were away Colonel Clifford fired his attorney at Mr. Bartley, and when Mary came home, Bartley, who had lately connived at the love affair, told Mary this, and forbade her strictly to hold any more intercourse with Walter Clifford.

This was the state of things when "the hare with many friends," and only one enemy, returned to his cottage late in the afternoon. But before night everybody knew he had come home, and next morning they were all at him in due order. No sooner was he seated in his workshop, studying the lines of a new machine he was trying to invent, than he was startled from intense thought into the attitude of Hogarth's enraged musician by cries of "Mr. Hope! Mr. Hope! Mr. Hope!" and there was a little lot of eager applicants. First a gypsy boy with long black curls and continuous genuflections, and a fiddle, and doleful complaints that he could not play it, and that it was the fiddle's fault.

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“Well, it is for once,” said Hope. “Why, you little duffer, don’t you see the bridge is too low?”

He slackened the string, removed the bridge, fitted on a higher one, tuned it, and handed it over.

“There,” said he, “play us one of the tunes of Egypt. ’The Rogue’s March,’ eh? and mizzle.”

The supple Oriental grinned and made obeisances, pretended not to know “The Rogue’s March” (to the hen-house), and went off playing “Johnny Comes Marching Home.” (Bridewell to wit.)

Then did Miss Clifford’s French maid trip forward smirking with a parasol to mend: *Desolee de vous deranger, Monsieur Hope, mais notre demoiselle est au desespoir: oh, ces parasols Anglais*!

“*Connu*,” said Hope, “*voyons ca*;” and in a minute repaired the article, and the girl spread it, and went off wriggling and mincing with it, so that there was a pronounced horse-laugh at her minauderies.

Then advanced a rough young English nurse out of a farm-house with a child that could just toddle. She had left an enormous doll with Hope for repairs, and the child had given her no peace for the last week. Luckily the doll was repaired, and handed over. The mite, in whose little bosom maternal feelings had been excited, insisted on carrying her child. The consequence was that at about the third step they rolled over one another, and to spectators at a little distance it was hard to say which was the parent and which the offspring. Them the strapping lass in charge seized roughly, and at the risk of dislocating their little limbs, tossed into the air and caught, one on each of her own robust arms, and carried them off stupidly irritated—for want of a grain of humor—-at the good-natured laugh this caused, and looking as if she would like to knock their little heads together.

Under cover of this an old man in a broad hat, and seemingly infirm, crept slowly by and looked keenly at Hope, but made no application. Only while taking stock of Hope his eyes flashed wickedly, and much too brightly for so old a man as he appeared. He did not go far; he got behind a tree, and watched the premises. Then a genuine old man and feeble came and brought Hope his clock to mend. Hope wound it up, and it went to perfection. The old man had been a stout fellow when Hope was a boy, but now he was weak, especially in the upper story. Hope saw at once that the young folk had sent him there for a joke, and he did not approve it.

“Gaffer,” said he, “this will want repairing every eight days; but don’t you come here any more; I’ll call on you every week, and repair it for auld lang syne.”

Whilst he toddled away, and Hope retired behind his lathe to study his model in peace, Monckton raged at the sight of him and his popularity.

“Ay,” said he, “you are a genius. You can model a steam-engine or mend a doll, and you outwitted me, and gave me fourteen years. But you will find me as ingenious as you at one thing, and that’s revenge.”

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And now a higher class of visitors began to find their way to the general favorite. The first was a fair young lady of surpassing beauty. She strolled pensively down the green turf, cast a hasty glance in at the workshop, and not seeing Hope, concluded he was a little tired after his journey, and had not yet arrived. She strolled slowly down then, and seated herself in a large garden chair, stuffed, that Hope had made, and placed there for Colonel Clifford. That worthy frequented the spot because he had done so for years, and because it was a sweet turfy slope; and there was a wonderful beech-tree his father had made him plant when he was five years old. It had a gigantic silvery stem, and those giant branches which die crippled in a beech wood but really belong to the isolated tree, as one Virgil discovered before we were born. Mary Bartley then lowered her parasol, and settled into the Colonel's chair under the shade *patulae fagi*—of the wide-spreading beech-tree.

She sat down and sighed. Monckton eyed her from his lurking-place, and made a shrewd guess who she was, but resolved to know.

Presently Hope caught a glimpse of her, and came forward and leaned out of the window to enjoy the sight of her. He could do that unobserved, for he was a long way behind her at a sharp angle.

He was still a widower and this his only child, and lovely as an angel; and he had seen her grow into ripe loveliness from a sick girl. He had sinned for her and saved her; he had saved her again from a more terrible death. He doted on her, and it was always a special joy to him when he could gloat on her unseen. Then he had no need to make up an artificial face and hide his adoration from her.

But soon a cloud came over his face and his paternal heart. He knew she had a lover; and she looked like a girl who was waiting pensively for him. She had not come there for him whom she knew only as her devoted friend. At this thought the poor father sighed.

Mary's quick senses caught that, and she turned her head, and her sweet face beamed.

"You *are* there, after all, Mr. Hope."

Hope was delighted. Why, it was him she had come to see, after all. He came down to her directly, radiant, and then put on a stiff manner he often had to wear, out of fidelity to Bartley, who did not deserve it.

"This is early for you to be out, Miss Bartley."

"Of course it is," said she. "But I know it is the time of day when you are kind to anybody that comes, and mend all their rubbish for them, and I could kill them for their impudence in wasting your time so. And I am as bad as the rest. For here I am wasting

your time in my turn. Yes, dear Mr. Hope, you are so kind to everybody and mend their things, I want you to be kind to me and mend—my prospects for me."

Hope's impulse was to gather into his arms and devour with kisses this sweet specimen of womanly tenderness, frank inconsistency, naivete, and archness.

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As he could not do that, he made himself extra stiff.

“Your prospects. Miss Bartley! Why, they are brilliant. Heiress to all the growing wealth and power around you.”

“Wealth and power!” said the girl. “What is the use of them, if our hearts are to be broken? Oh, Mr. Hope, papa is so unkind. He has forbidden me to speak to him.” Then, gravely, “That command comes too late.”

“I fear it does,” said Hope. “I have long suspected something.”

“Suspected?” said Mary, turning pale. “What?”

“That you and Walter Clifford—”

“Yes,” said Mary, trembling inwardly, but commanding her face.

“Are—engaged.”

Mary drew a long breath. “What makes you think so?” said she, looking down.

“Well, there is a certain familiarity—no, that is too strong a word; but there is more ease between you than there was. Ever since I came back from Belgium I have seen that the preliminaries of courtship were over, and you two looked on yourselves as one.”

“Mr. Hope,” said this good, arch girl, and left off panting, “you are a terrible man. Papa is eyes and no eyes. You frighten me; but not very much, for you would not watch me so closely if you did not love me—a little.”

“Not a little, Miss Bartley.”

“Mary, please.”

“Mary. I have seen you a sickly child; I have been anxious—who would not? I have seen you grow in health and strength, and every virtue.”

“And seen me tumble into the water and frighten you out of your senses, and there’s nothing one loves like a downright pest, especially if she loves us; and I do love you, Mr. Hope, dearly, dearly, and I promise to be a pest to you all your days. Ah, here he comes at last.” She made two eager steps to meet him, then she said, “Oh! I forgot,” and came back again and looked prodigiously demure and innocent.

Walter came on with his usual rush, crying, “Mary, how good of you!”

Mary put her fingers in her ears. “No, no, no; we are forbidden to communicate.” Then, imitating a stiff man of business—for she was a capital mimic when she chose—“any communication you may wish to honor me with must be addressed to this gentleman, Mr. Hope; he will convey it to me, and it shall meet with all the attention it deserves.”

Walter laughed, and said, “That’s ingenious.”

“Of course it is ingenuous,” said Mary, subtly. “That’s my character to a fault.”

“Well, young people,” said Hope, “I am not sure that I have time to repeat verbal communications to keen ears that heard them. And I think I can make myself more useful to you. Walter, your father has set his lawyer on to Mr. Bartley, and what is the consequence? Mr. Bartley forbids Mary to speak to you, and the next thing will be a summons, lawsuit, and a great defeat, and loss to your father and you. Mr. Bartley sent me the lawyer’s letter. He hopes to get out of a clear contract by pleading a surprise. Now you must go to the lawyer—it is no use arguing with your father in his present heat—and you must assure him there has been no surprise. Why, I called on Colonel Clifford years ago, and told him there was coal on that farm; and I almost went on my knees to him to profit by it.”

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“You don’t say that, Mr. Hope?”

“I do say it, and I shall have to swear it. You may be sure Mr. Bartley will subpoena me, if this wretched squabble gets into court.”

“But what did my father say to you?”

“He was kind and courteous to me. I was poor as a rat, and dusty with travel—on foot; and he was a fine gentleman, as he always is, when he is not in too great a passion. He told me more than one land-owner had wasted money in this county groping for coal. He would not waste his money nor dirty his fingers. But he thanked me for my friendly zeal, and rewarded me with ten shillings.”

“Oh!” cried Walter, and hid his face in his hands. As for Mary, she put her hand gently but quietly on Hope’s shoulder, as if to protect him from such insults.

“Why, children,” said Hope, pleased at their sympathy, but too manly to hunt for it, “it was more than he thought the information worth, and I assure you it was a blessed boon to me. I had spent my last shilling, and there I was trapesing across the island on a wild-goose chase with my reaping-hook and my fiddle; and my poor little Grace, that I—that I—”

Mary’s hand went a moment to his other shoulder, and she murmured through her tears, “You have got *me*.”

Then Hope was happy again, and indeed the simplest woman can find in a moment the very word that is balm of Gilead to a sorrowful man.

However, Hope turned it off and continued his theme. The jury, he said, would pounce on that ten shillings as the Colonel’s true estimate of his coal, and he would figure in the case as a dog in the manger who grudged Bartley the profits of a risky investment he had merely sneered at and not opposed, until it turned out well; and also disregarded the interests of the little community to whom the mine was a boon. “No,” said Hope; “tell your lawyer that I am Bartley’s servant, but love equity. I have proposed to Bartley to follow a wonderful seam of coal under Colonel Clifford’s park. We have no business there. So if the belligerents will hear reason I will make Bartley pay a royalty on every ton that comes to the surface from any part of the mine; and that will be L1200 a year to the Cliffords. Take this to the lawyer and tell him to unfix that hero’s bayonet, or he will charge at the double and be the death of his own money—and yours.”

Walter threw up his hands with amazement and admiration. “What a head!” said he.

“Fiddledee!” said Mary; “what a heart!”

“In a word, a phoenix,” said Hope, dryly. “Praise is sweet, especially behind one’s back. So pray go on, unless you have something better to say to each other;” and Hope retired briskly into his office. But when the lovers took him at his word, and began to strut up and down hand in hand, and murmur love’s music into each other’s ears, he could not take his eyes off them, and his thoughts were sad. She had only known that young fellow a few months, yet she loved him passionately, and he would take her away from her father before she even knew all that father had done and suffered for her. When the revelation did come she would perhaps be a wife and a mother, and then even that revelation would fall comparatively flat.

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Besides his exceptional grief, he felt the natural pang of a father at the prospect of resigning her to a husband. Hard is the lot of parents; and, above all, of a parent with one child whom he adores. Many other creatures love their young tenderly, and their young leave them. But then the infancy and youth of those creatures are so short. In a few months the young shift for themselves, forgetting and forgotten. But with our young the helpless periods of infancy and youth are so long. Parental anxiety goes through so many trials and so various, and they all strike roots into the parent's heart. Yet after twenty years of love and hope and fear comes a handsome young fellow, a charming highwayman to a parent's eye, and whisks her away after two months' courtship. Then, oh, ye young, curb for a moment your blind egotism, and feel a little for the parents who have felt so much for you! You rather like William Hope, so let him help you to pity your own parents. See his sad face as he looks at the love he is yet too unselfish to discourage. To save that tender root, a sickly child, he transplanted it from his own garden, and still tended it with loving care for many a year. Another gathers the flower. He watched and tended and trembled over the tender nestling. The young bird is trying her wings before his eyes; soon she will spread them, and fly away to a newer nest and a younger bosom.

In this case, however, the young people had their troubles too, and their pretty courtship was soon interrupted by an unwelcome and unexpected visitor, who, as a rule, avoided that part, for the very reason that Colonel Clifford frequented it. However, he came there to-day to speak to Hope. Mr. Bartley, for he it was, would have caught the lovers if he had come silently; but he was talking to a pitman as he came, and Mary's quick ears heard his voice round the corner.

"Papa!" cried she. "Oh, don't let him see us! Hide!"

"Where?"

"Anywhere—in here—quick!" and she flew into Hope's workshop, which indeed offered great facilities for hiding. However, to make sure, they crouched behind the lathe and a huge plank of beautiful mahogany Hope was very proud of.

As soon as they were hidden, Mary began to complain in a whisper. "This comes of our clandestine m—. Our very life is a falsehood; concealment is torture—and degradation."

"I don't feel it. I call this good fun."

"Oh, Walter! Good fun! For shame! Hush!"

Bartley bustled on to the green, called Hope out, and sat down in Colonel Clifford's chair. Hope came to him, and Bartley, who had in his hand some drawings of the strata

in the coal mine, handed the book to Hope, and said, “I quite agree with you. That is the seam to follow: there’s a fortune in it.”

“Then you are satisfied with me?”

“More than satisfied.”

“I have something to ask in return.”

“I am not likely to say no, my good friend,” was the cordial reply.

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“Thank you. Well, then, there is an attachment between Mary and young Clifford.”

Bartley was on his guard directly.

“Her happiness is at stake. That gives me a right to interfere, and say, ‘be kind to her.’”

“Am I not kind to her? Was any parent ever kinder? But I must be wise as well as kind. Colonel Clifford can disinherit his son.”

At this point the young people ventured to peep and listen, taking advantage of the circumstance that both Hope and Bartley were at some distance, with their backs turned to the workshop.

So they both heard Hope say,

“Withdraw your personal opposition to the match, and the other difficulty can be got over. If you want to be kind to a young woman, it is no use feeding her ambition and her avarice, for these are a man’s idols. A woman’s is love.”

Mary wafted the speaker a furtive kiss.

“To enrich that dear child after your death, thirty years hence, and break her heart in the flower of her youth, is to be unkind to her; and if you are unkind to her, our compact is broken.”

“Unkind to her,” said Bartley. “What male parent has ever been more kind, more vigilant? Sentimental weakness is another matter. My affection is more solid. Can I oblige you in anything that is business?”

“Mr. Bartley,” said Hope, “you can not divert me from the more important question: business is secondary to that dear girl’s happiness. However, I have more than once asked you to tell me who is the loser of that large sum, which, as you and I have dealt with it, has enriched you and given me a competence.”

“That’s my business,” said Bartley, sharply, “for you never fingered a shilling of it. So if the pittance I pay you for conducting my business burns your pocket, why, send it to Rothschild.”

And having made this little point, Bartley walked away to escape further comment, and Hope turned on his heel and walked into his office, and out at the back door directly, and proceeded to his duties in the mine; but he was much displeased with Bartley, and his looks showed it.

The coast lay clear. The lovers came cautiously out, and silently too, for what they had heard puzzled them not a little.

Mary came out first, and wore a very meditative look. She did not say a word till they got to some little distance from the workshop. Then she half turned her head toward Walter, who was behind her, and said, “I suppose you know we have done a contemptible thing—listening?”

“Well,” said Walter, “it wasn’t good form; but,” added he, “we could hardly help it.”

“Of course not,” said Mary. “We have been guilty of a concealment that drives us into holes and corners, and all manner of meannesses must be expected to follow. Well, we *have* listened, and I am very glad of it; for it is plain we are not the only people who have got secrets. Now tell me, please, what does it all mean?”

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“Well, Mary,” said Walter, “to tell the truth, it is all Greek to me, except about the money. I think I could give a guess where that came from.”

“There, now!” cried Mary; “that is so like you gentlemen. Money—money—money! Never mind the money part; leave that to take care of itself. Can you explain what Mr. Hope said to papa about *me*? Mr. Hope is a very superior man, and papa’s adviser *in business*. But, after all, he is in papa’s employment. Papa *pays* him. Then how comes he to care more about my happiness than papa does—and say so?”

“Why, you begged him to intercede.”

“Yes,” said Mary, “but not to threaten papa; not to say, ’If you are unkind to Mary, our compact is broken.’”

Then she pondered awhile; then she turned to Walter, and said:

“What sort of compact is that? A compact between a father and another gentleman that a father shall not be unkind to his own daughter? Did you ever hear of such a thing?”

“I can’t say I ever did.”

“Did you ever hear tell of such a thing?”

“Well, now you put it to me, I don’t think I ever did.”

“And yet you could run off about money. What’s money! This compact is a great mystery. It’s my business from this hour to fathom that mystery. Please let me think.”

Mary’s face now began to show great power and intensity; her eyes seemed to veil themselves, and to turn down their glances inward.

Walter was struck with the intensity of that fair brow, those remarkable eyes, and that beautiful face; they seemed now to be all strung up to concert pitch. He kept silent and looked at his wife with a certain reverence, for to tell the truth she had something of the Pythian priestess about her, when she concentrated her whole mind on any one thing in this remarkable manner. At last the oracle spoke:

“Mr. Hope has been deceiving me with some good intention. He pretends to be subservient to papa, but he is the master. How he comes to be master I don’t know, but so it is, Walter. If it came to a battle royal, Mr. Hope would side, not with papa, but with me.”

“That’s important, if true,” said Walter, dryly.

“It’s true,” said Mary, “and it’s important.” Then she turned suddenly round on him. “How did you feel when you ran into that workshop, and we both crouched, and hid like criminals or slaves?”

“Well,” said Walter, hanging his head, “to tell the truth, I took a comic view of the business.”

“I can’t do that,” said Mary. “I respect my husband, and can’t bear him to hide from the face of any mortal man; and I am proud of my own love, and indignant to think that I have condescended to hide it.”

“It is a shame,” said Walter, “and I hope we sha’n’t have to hide it much longer. Oh, bother, how unfortunate! here’s my father. What are we to do?”

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“I’ll tell you,” said Mary, resolutely. “You must speak to him at once, and win him over to our side. Tell him Julia is going to marry Percy Fitzroy on the first of next month, then tell him all that Mr. Hope said you were to tell the lawyer, and then tell him what you have made me believe, that you love me better than your life, and that I love you better still; and that no power *can* part us. If you can soften him, Mr. Hope shall soften papa.”

“But if he is too headstrong to be softened?” faltered Walter.

“Then,” said Mary, “you must defy my papa, and I shall defy yours.”

After a moment’s thought she said: “Walter, I shall stay here till he sees me and you together; then he won’t be able to run off about his mines, and his lawsuits, and such rubbishy things. His attention will be attracted to our love, and so you will have it out with him, whilst I retire a little way—not far—and meditate upon Mr. Hope’s strange words, and ponder over many things that have happened within my recollection.”

True to this policy, the spirited girl waited till Colonel Clifford came on the green, and then made Walter as perfect a courtesy as ever graced a minuet at the court of Louis le Grand.

Walter took off his hat to her with chivalric grace and respect. Colonel Clifford drew up in a stiff military attitude, which flavored rather of the parade or the field of battle than the court either of the great monarch or of little Cupid.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SECRET IN DANGER.

“Hum!” said the Colonel, dryly; “a petticoat!”

“Et cetera,” suggested Walter, meekly; and we think he was right, for a petticoat has never in our day been the only garment worn by females, nor even the most characteristic: fishermen wear petticoats, and don’t wear bonnets.

“Who is she, sir?” asked the grim Colonel.

“Your niece, father,” said Walter, mellifluously, “and the most beautiful girl in Derbyshire.”

The Colonel snorted, but didn’t condescend to go into the question of beauty.

“Why did my niece retire at sight of me?” was his insidious inquiry.

“Well,” said Walter, meekly, “the truth is, some mischief-making fool has been telling her that you have lost all natural affection for your dead sister’s child.”

The stout Colonel staggered for a moment, snorted, and turned it off. “You and she are very often together, it seems.”

“All the better for me,” said Walter, stoutly.

“And all the worse for me,” retorted the Colonel. And as men gravitate toward their leading grievance, he went off at a tangent, “What do you think my feelings must be, to see my son, my only son, spooning the daughter of my only enemy; of a knave who got on my land on pretense of farming it, but instead of that he burrowed under the soil like a mole, sir; and now the place is defiled with coal dust, the roads are black, the sheep are black, the daisies and buttercups are turning black. There’s a smut on your nose, Walter. I forbid you to spoon his daughter, upon pain of a father’s curse. My real niece, Julia, is a lady and an heiress, and the beauty of the county. She is the girl for you.”

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“And how about the seventh commandment?” inquired Walter, putting his hands in his pockets.

“Oh,” said the Colonel, indifferently, “you must mind your eye, like other husbands. But in our walk of life it’s the man’s fault if the woman falls out of the ranks.”

“That’s not what I mean,” said Walter.

“What do you mean, then, if you mean anything at all?”

“I mean this, father. She marries Percy Fitzroy in three weeks; so if I fix my affections on her up to the date of the wedding, shall I not be tempted to continue, and will not a foolish attachment to another man’s sweetheart end in a vicious attachment to another man’s wife?”

Once more was the Colonel staggered for a moment, and, oh—as the ladies say—is it not gratifying to find that where honest reasons go for nothing, humbug can obtain a moment’s hearing? The Colonel admitted there was something in that; but even humbug could not divert him long from his mania. “The only thing to be done,” said he, “is to cut him out between this and then. Why, he stands five feet nothing.”

“That’s the advantage he has over me,” suggested Walter; “she is five feet eight or thereabouts, so he is just the height of her heart.”

The Colonel burst out laughing. “You are no fool,” said he; “that’s the second good thing you have said these three years. I forget what the other was, but I remember it startled me at the time. You are a wit, and you will cut out that manikin or you are no son of mine.”

“Don’t say that, father,” said Walter; “and cutting out, why, that’s a naval operation, not military. I am not the son of an admiral.”

“No equivocation, sir; the forces assist one another at a pinch.”

“How can I cut him out?—there’s no room, he is tied to her apron strings.”

“Untie him, then.”

At this moment, whether because Hope attracted everybody in the course of the day, or because talking about people draws them to the place by some subtle agency, who should appear in sight but Miss Julia Clifford, and little Fitzroy wooing her so closely that really he did seem tied to her apron strings.

“There,” said Walter, “now use your eyes, father; look at this amorous pair. Do you really think it possible for a fellow to untie those two?”

“Quite possible,” said the Colonel. “Walter,” said he, sententiously, “there’s a little word in the English language which is one of the biggest. I will spell it to you, T—R—Y. Nobody knows what he can do till he gives that word a fair trial. It was far more impossible to scale the rock of Gibraltar; but our infantry did it; and there we are, with all Europe grinding their teeth at us. What’s a woman compared with Gibraltar? However, as you seem to be a bit of a muff, I’ll stand sentinel whilst you cut him out.”

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The Colonel then retired into a sort of ambuscade—at least he mingled with a small clump of three Scotch firs, and stood amongst them so rectilinear he might have passed for the fourth stump. Walter awaited the arrival of the foe, but in a spirit which has seldom conducted men to conquest and glory, for if the English infantry had deviated so far from their insular habits as to admire the Spaniards, you may be sure that Gibraltar rock at this day would be a part of the Continent, and not a detached fragment of Great Britain. In a word, Walter, at sight of the lovers, was suddenly seized with sentimental sympathy; they both seemed to him so beautiful in their way. The man was small, but his heart was not; he stuck to the woman like a man, and poured hot love into her ears, and almost lost the impediment in his speech. The woman pretended to be cooler, but she half turned her head toward him, and her half-closed eyes and heightened color showed she was drinking every word. Her very gayety, though it affected nonchalance, revealed happiness to such as can read below the surface of her sex. The Colonel's treacherous ally, after gazing at them with marked approval, and saying, "I couldn't do it better myself," which was surely a great admission for a lover to make, slipped quietly into Hope's workshop not to spoil sport—a juvenile idea which we recommend to older persons, and to such old maids as have turned sour. The great majority of old maids are match-makers, whatever cant may keep saying and writing to the contrary.

"No wonder at all," said Percy, who was evidently in the middle of some amorous speech; "you are the goddess of my idolatry."

"What ardent expressions you do use!" said Julia, smiling.

"Of c-course I do; I'm over head and ears in love."

Julia surveyed his proportions, and said, "That's not very deep."

But Percy had got used to this kind of wit, and did not mind it now. He replied with dignity: "It's as deep—as the ocean, and as imp-per-t-t-tur-bable. Confound it! there's your cousin."

"You are not jealous of him, Mr. Imperturbable, are you?" asked Julia, slyly.

"Jealous?" said Percy, changing color rather suspiciously; "certainly not. Hang him!"

Walter, finding he was discovered, and feeling himself in the way, came out at the back behind them, and said, "Never mind me, you two; far be it from me to deprive the young of their innocent amusements."

Whilst making this little speech he was going off on the points of his toes, intending to slip off to Clifford Hall, and tell his father that both cutting out and untying had proved impossible, but, to his horror, the Colonel emerged from his ambuscade and collared him. Then took place two short contemporaneous dialogues:

Julia. “I’d never marry a jealous man.”

Percy. “I never could be jealous. I’m above it. Impossible for a nature like mine to be jealous.”

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Colonel Clifford. “Well, why don’t you cut him out?”

Walter. “They seem so happy without it.”

Colonel Clifford. “You are a muff. I’ll do it for you. Forward!”

Colonel Clifford then marched down and seated himself in the chair Hope had made for him.

Julia saw him, and whispered Percy: “Ah! here’s Uncle Clifford. He is going to marry me to Walter. Never mind—you are not jealous.”

Percy turned yellow.

“Well,” said Colonel Clifford to all whom it might concern, “this certainly is the most comfortable chair in England. These fools of upholsterers never make the bottom of the chair long enough, but Mr. Hope has made this to run under a gentleman’s knees and support him. He’s a clever fellow. Julia, my dear, there’s a garden chair for you; come and sit down by me.”

Julia gave a sly look at Percy, and went to Colonel Clifford. She kissed him on the forehead to soften the coming negative, and said: “To tell you the truth, dear uncle, I have promised to go down a coal mine. See! I’m dressed accordingly.”

“Go down a coal mine!” said the Colonel, contemptuously. “What fool put that idea in your head?”

Fitzroy strutted forward like a bantam-cock. “I did, sir. Coal is a very interesting product.”

“Ay, to a cook.”

“To every English g-gentleman.”

“I disown that imputation for one.”

“Of being an English g-gentleman?”

There was a general titter at this sly hit.

“No, sir,” said the Colonel, angrily—“of taking an interest in coal.”

“Well, but,” said Percy, with a few slight hesitations, “not to t-take an interest in c-coal is not to take an interest in the n-nation, for this n-nation is g-great, not by its p-powerful fleet, nor its little b-b-bit of an army—”

A snort from the Colonel.

"—nor its raw m-militia, but by its m-m-manufactures; these depend on machines that are driven by steam-power, and the steam-engines are coal-fed, and were made in coal-fed furnaces; our machines do the work of five hundred million hands, and you see coal keeps them going. The machinery will be imitated by other nations, but those nations can not create coal-fields. Should those ever be exhausted, our ingenuity will be imitated by larger nations, our territory will remain small, and we shall be a second-rate power; so I say that every man who reads and thinks about his own c—country ought to be able to say, 'I have been d—d—down a coal mine.'"

"Well," said the Colonel, loftily, "and can't you say you have been down a coal mine? I could say that and sit here. Well, sir, you have been reading the newspapers, and learning them off by heart as if they were the Epistle and Gospel; of course *you* must go down a coal mine; but if you do, have a little mercy on the fair, and go down by yourself. In the mean while, Walter, you can take your cousin and give her a walk in the woods, and show her the primroses."

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Now Julia was surprised and pleased at Percy's good sense, and she did not care whether he got it from the newspapers or where he got it from; it was there; so she resisted, and said, coldly and firmly, "Thank you, uncle, but I don't want the primroses, and Walter does not want me. Come, Percy *dear*;" and so she marched off; but she had not gone many steps before, having a great respect for old age, she ordered Percy, in a whisper, to make some apology to her uncle.

Percy did not much like the commission. However, he went back, and said, very civilly, "This is a free country, but I am afraid I have been a little too free in expressing my opinion; let me hope you are not annoyed with me."

"I am never annoyed with a fool," said the implacable Colonel.

This was too much for any little man to stand.

"That is why you are always on such good terms with yourself," said Percy, as red as a turkey-cock.

The Colonel literally stared with amazement. Hitherto it had been for him to deliver bayonet thrusts, not to receive them.

Julia pounced on her bantam-cock, and with her left hand literally pulled him off the premises, and shook her right fist at him till she got him out of sight of the foe; then she kissed him on both cheeks, and burst out laughing; and, indeed, she was so tickled that she kept laughing at intervals, whether the immediate subject of the conversation was grave or gay. It is hard not to laugh when a very little fellow cheeks a very big one. Even Walter, though he admired as well as loved his father, hung his head, and his shoulders shook with suppressed risibility. Colonel Clifford detected him in this posture, and in his wrath gave his chair a whack with his staff that brought Master Walter to the position of a private soldier when the drill-sergeant cries "ATTENTION!"

"Did you hear that, sir?" said he.

"I did," said Walter: "cheeky little beggar. But you know, father, you were rather hard upon him before his sweetheart, and a little pot is soon hot."

"There was nothing to be hot about," said the Colonel, naively; "but that is neither here nor there. You are ten times worse than he is. He is only a prating, pedantic puppy, but you are a muff, sir, a most unmitigated muff, to stand there mum-chance and let such an article as that carry off the prize."

"Oh, father," said Walter, "why will you not see that the prize is a living woman, a woman with a will of her own, and not a French eagle, or the figure-head of a ship? Now do listen to reason."

“Not a word,” said the Colonel, marching off.

“But excuse me,” said Walter, “I have another thing far more important to speak to you about: this unhappy lawsuit.”

“That’s no business of yours, and I don’t want your opinion of it; there is no more fight in you than there is in a hen-sparrow. I decline your company and your pacific twaddle; I have no patience with a muff;” and the Colonel marched off, leaving his son planted there, as the French say.

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Walter, however, was not long alone; the interview had been watched from a distance by Mary. She now stole noiselessly on the scene, and laid her white hand upon her husband's shoulder before he was aware of her. The sight of her was heaven to him, but her first question clouded his happy face.

"Well, dear, have you propitiated him?"

Walter hung his head sorrowfully, and said hardly anything.

"He has been blustering at me all the time, and insists upon my cutting out Percy whether I can or not, and marrying Julia whether she chooses or not."

"Then we must do what I said. Indeed there is no other course. We must own the truth; concealment and deceit will not mend our folly."

"Oh, hang it, Mary, don't call it folly."

"Forgive me, dear, but it was the height of folly. Not that I mean to throw the blame on you—that would be ungenerous; but the truth is you had no business to marry me, and I had no business to marry you. Only think—me—Mary Bartley—a clandestine marriage, and then our going to the lakes again, and spending our honey-moon together just like other couples—the recklessness—the audacity! Oh, what happiness it was!"

Walter very naturally pounced upon this unguarded and naive conclusion of Mary's self-reproaches. "Yes," said he, eagerly; "let us go there again next week."

"Not next week, not next month, not next year, nor ever again until we have told all the world."

"Well, Mary," said Walter, "it's for you to command and me to obey. I said so before, and I say so now, if you are not ashamed of me, how can I be ashamed of you; you say the word, and I will tell my father at dinner-time, before Julia Clifford and John Baker, and request them to tell everybody they know, that I am married to a woman I adore, and there is nobody I care for on earth as I do for her, and nothing I value compared with her love and her esteem."

Mary put her arm tenderly around her husband's neck; and now it was with her as it is often with generous and tender-hearted women, when all opposition to their wishes is withdrawn, they begin to see the other side.

"My dearest," said Mary, "I couldn't bear you to sacrifice your prospects for me."

"Why, Mary," said Walter, "what would my love be worth if it shrank from self-sacrifice? I really think I should feel more pleasure than pain if I gave up friends, kindred, hope, everything that is supposed to make life pleasant for you."

“And so would I for you,” said Mary; “and oh, Walter, women have presentiments, and something tells me that fate has great trials in store for you or for me, perhaps for both. Yes, you are right, the true measure of love must be self-sacrifice, and if there is to be self-sacrifice, oh, let the self-sacrifice fall on me; for I can not think any man can love a woman quite so deeply as I love you—my darling.”

He had only time to draw her sweet forehead to his bosom, whilst her arm encircled his neck, when in came an ordinary love by way of contrast.

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Julia Clifford and Percy came in, walking three yards apart: Percy had untied the apron strings without Walter's assistance.

"Ah," said she, "you two are not like us. I am ashamed to interrupt you; but they would not let us go down the mine without an order from Mr. Hope. Really, I think Mr. Hope is king of this country. Not that we have wasted our time, for he has been quarrelling with me all the way there and back."

"Oh, Mr. Fitzroy!" said Mary Bartley.

"Miss Bartley," said Percy, very civilly, "I never q-q-quarrel, I merely dis-distin-guished between right and wrong. I shall make you the judge. I gave her a di-dia-mond br-bracelet which came down from my ancestors; she did me the honor to accept it, and she said it should never leave her day nor night."

"Oh," cried Julia, "that I never did. I can not afford to stop my circulation altogether; it's much too little." Then she flew at him suddenly. "Your ancestors were pigmies."

Percy drew himself up to his full height, and defied the insinuation. "They were giants, in chain armor," said he.

"What," said Julia, without a moment's hesitation, "the ladies? Or was it the knights that wore bracelets?"

Some French writer says, "The tongue of a woman is her sword," and Percy Fitzroy found it so. He could no more answer this sudden thrust than he could win the high leap at Lillie Bridge. He stood quivering as if a polished rapier had really been passed clean through him.

Mary was too kind-hearted to laugh in his face, but she could not help turning her head away and giggling a little.

At last Percy recovered himself enough to say,

"The truth is you have gone and given it to somebody else."

"Oh, you wicked—bad-hearted—you that couldn't be jealous!"

By this time Percy was himself again, and said, with some reason, that "invectives were not arguments. Produce the bracelet."

"And so I can," said Julia, stoutly. "Give me time."

"Oh," said Percy, "if it's a mere question of time, there is no more to be said. You'll find the bracelet in time, and in time I shall feel once more that confidence in you which

induced me to confide to you as to another self that precious family relic, which I value more than any other material object in the world." Then Percy, whose character seemed to have changed, retired with stiff dignity and an air of indomitable resolution.

Neither Julia nor Mary had ever seen him like that before. Julia was unaffectedly distressed.

"Oh, Mary, why did I ever lend it to you?"

Now Mary knew very well where the bracelet was, but she was ashamed to say; she stammered and said, "You know, dear, it is too small, much too small, and my arm is bigger than yours."

"There!" said Julia; "you have broken the clasp!"

Mary colored up to the eyes at her own disingenuousness, and said, hastily, "But I'll have it mended directly; I'll return it to-morrow at the latest."

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“I shall be wretched till you do,” said Julia, eagerly. “I suppose you know what I want it for now?”

“Why,” said Mary, “of course I do: to soothe his wounded feelings.”

“Soothe *his* feelings!” cried Julia, scornfully; “and how about mine? No; the only thing I want it for now is to fling it in his face. His soul is as small as his body: he’s a little, mean, suspicious, jealous fellow, and I’m very glad to have lost him.” She flounced off all on fire, looking six feet high, and got quite out of sight before she began to cry.

Then the truth came out. Mary, absorbed in conjugal bliss, had left it at the hotel by the lakes. She told Walter.

“Oh, hang it!” said Walter; “that’s unlucky; you will never see it again.”

“Oh yes, I shall,” said Mary; “they are very honest people at that inn; and I have written about it, and told them to keep it safe, unless they have an opportunity of sending it.”

Walter reflected a moment. “Take my advice, Mary,” said he. “Let me gallop off this afternoon and get it.”

“Oh yes, Walter,” said Mary. “Thank you so much. That will be the best way.”

At this moment loud and angry voices were heard coming round the corner, and Mary uttered a cry of dismay, for her discriminating ear recognized both those voices in a moment. She clutched Walter’s shoulder.

“Oh, Walter, it’s your father and mine quarrelling. How unfortunate that they should have met! What shall we do?”

“Hide in Hope’s office. The French window is open.”

“Quick, then!” cried Mary, and darted into the office in a moment. Walter dashed in after her.

When she got safe into cover she began to complain.

“This comes of concealment—we are always being driven into holes and corners.”

“I rather like them with you,” said the unabashed Walter.

It matters little what had passed out of sight between Bartley and Colonel Clifford, for what the young people heard now was quite enough to make what Sir Lucius O’Trigger calls a very pretty quarrel. Bartley, hitherto known to Mary as a very oily speaker,

shouted at the top of his voice in arrogant defiance, “You’re not a child, are you? You are old enough to read papers before you sign them.”

The Colonel shouted in reply, “I am old, sir, but I am old in honor. I did not expect that any decent tradesman would slip a clause into a farm lease conveying the minerals below the surface to a farmer. It was a fraud, sir; but there’s law for fraud. My lawyer shall be down on you to-morrow. Your chimneys disgorge smoke all over my fields. You shall disgorge your dishonest gains. I’ll have you off my land, sir; I’ll tear you out of the bowels of the earth. You are a sharper and a knave.”

At this Bartley roared at him louder still, so that both the young people winced as they crouched in the recess of the window. “You foul-mouthed slanderer, I’ll indict you for defamation, and give you twelve months in one of her Majesty’s jails.”

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“No, you won’t,” roared the Colonel; “I know the law. My comments on your character are not written and signed like your knavish lease; it’s a privileged communication—-VILLAIN! there are no witnesses—SHARPER! By Jupiter, there are, though!”

He had caught sight of a male figure just visible at the side of the window.

“Who is it? MY SON!”

“My DAUGHTER!” cried Bartley, catching sight of Mary.

“Come out, sir,” said the Colonel, no longer loudly, but trembling with emotion.

“Come here, Mary,” said Bartley, sternly.

At this moment who should open the back door of the office but William Hope!

“Walter,” said the Colonel, with the quiet sternness more formidable than all his bluster, “have not I forbidden you to court this man’s daughter?”

Said Bartley to Mary: “Haven’t I forbidden you to speak to this ruffian’s son?”

Then, being a cad who had lost his temper, he took the girl by the wrist and gave her a rough pull across him that sent her effectually away from Walter. She sank into the Colonel’s seat, and burst out crying with shame, pain, and fright.

“Brute!” said the Colonel. But the thing was not to end there. Hope strode in amongst them, with a pale cheek and a lowering brow as black as thunder; his first words were, “Do YOU CALL YOURSELF A FATHER?” Not one of them had ever seen Hope like that, and they all stood amazed, and wondered what would come next.

CHAPTER XVI.

REMINISCENCES.—THE FALSE ACCUSER.—THE SECRET EXPLODED.

The secret hung on a thread. Hope, after denouncing Bartley, as we have described, was rushing across to Mary, and what he would have said or done in the first impulse of his wrath, who can tell?

But the quick-witted Bartley took the alarm, and literally collared him. “My good friend,” said he, “you don’t know the provocation. It is the affront to her that has made me forget myself. Affronts to myself from the same quarter I have borne with patience. But now this insolent man has forbidden his son to court her, and that to her face; as if we wanted his son or him. Haven’t I forbidden the connection?”

“We are agreed for once,” said the Colonel, and carried his son off bodily, sore against his will.

“Yes,” shrieked Bartley after him; “only *I* did it like a gentleman, and did not insult the young man to his face for loving my daughter.”

“Let me hear what Mary says,” was Hope’s reply.

“Mr. Hope,” said Mary, “did you ever know papa to be hard on me before? He is vexed because he feels I am lowered. We have both been grossly insulted, and he may well be in a passion. But I am very unhappy.” And she began to cry again.

“My poor child,” said Bartley, coaxingly, “talk it all over with Mr. Hope. He may be able to comfort you, and, indeed, to advise me. For what can I do when the man calls me a sharper, a villain, and a knave, before his son and my daughter?”

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“Is it possible?” said Hope, beginning to relent a little.

“It is true,” replied Mary.

Bartley then drew Hope aside, and said, “See what confidence I place in you. Now show me my trust is not misplaced.” Then he left them together.

Hope came to Mary and said, tenderly, “What can I say or do to comfort you?”

Mary shook her head. “I asked you to mend my prospects; but you can’t do that. They are desperate. You can do nothing for me now but comfort me with your kind voice. And mend my poor wrist—ha! ha! ha! oh! oh!” (Hysterical.)

“What?” cried Hope, in sudden alarm; “is it hurt? Is it sprained?”

Mary recovered her composure. “Oh no,” said she; “only twisted a little. Papa was so rough.”

Hope went into a rage again. “Perdition!” cried he. “I’ll go and end this once for all.”

“You will do nothing of the kind,” said the quick-witted girl. “Oh, Mr. Hope, would you break my heart altogether, quarrelling with papa? Be reasonable. I tell you he couldn’t help it, that old monster insulted him so. It hurts, for all that,” said she, naively, and held him out a lovely white wrist with a red mark on it.

Hope inspected it. “Poor little wrist,” said he. “I think I can cure it.” Then he went into his office for something to bind it with.

But he had spoken those few words as one speaks to an afflicted child. There was a mellow softness and an undisguised paternity in his tones—and what more natural, the girl being in pain?

But Mary’s ear was so acute that these tones carried her out of the present situation, and seemed to stir the depths of memory. She fell into a little reverie, and asked herself had she not heard a voice like that many years ago.

She was puzzling herself a little over this when Hope returned with a long thin band of white Indian cotton, steeped in water, and, taking her hand gently, began to bind her wrist with great lightness and delicacy. And as he bound it he said, “There, the pain will soon go.”

Mary looked at him full, and said, slowly, “I believe it will.” Then, very thoughtfully, “It did—before.”

These three simple words struck Hope as rather strange.

“It did before?” said he, and stared at her. “Why, when was that?”

Mary said, in a hopeless sort of way, “I don’t know when, but long before your time.”

“Before my time, Mary? What, are you older than me?” And he smiled sweetly on her.

“One would think not. But let me ask you a question, Mr. Hope?”

“Yes, Mary.”

“Have you lived *two lives*?”

Said Hope, solemnly, “I have lived through great changes, but only one life.”

“Well, then,” said Mary, “I have lived two; or more likely it was one life, only some of it in another world—my other world, I mean.”

Hope left off binding her wrist, and said, “I don’t understand you.” But his heart began to pant.

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The words that passed between them were now so strange that both their voices sank into solemnity, and had an acute observer listened to them he would have noticed that these two mellow voices had similar beauties, and were pitched exactly in the same key, though there was, of course, an octave between them.

“Understand me? How should you? It is all so strange, so mysterious: I have never told a soul; but I will tell you. You won’t laugh at me?”

“Laugh at you? Only fools laugh at what they don’t understand. Why, Mary, I hang on every word you say with breathless interest.”

“Dear Mr. Hope! Well, then, I will tell you. Sometimes in the silent night, when the present does not glare at one, the past comes back to me dimly, and I seem to have lived two lives: one long, one short—too short. My long life in a comfortable house, with servants and carriages and all that. My short life in different places; not comfortable places, but large places; all was free and open, and there was always a kind voice in my ear—like yours; and a tender touch—like yours.”

Hope was restraining himself with difficulty, and here he could not help uttering a faint exclamation.

To cover it he took her wrist again, and bending his head over it, he said, almost in a whisper, “And the face?”

Mary’s eyes turned inward, and she seemed to scan the past.

“The face?” said she—“the face I can not recall. But one thing I do remember clearly. This is not the first time my wrist—yes—and it was my right wrist too—has been bound up so tenderly. He did it for me in that other world, just as you do in this one.”

Hope now thrilled all over at this most unexpected revelation. But though he glowed with delight and curiosity, he put on a calm voice and manner, and begged her to tell him everything else she could remember that had happened in that other life.

Finding him so serious, so sympathetic, and so interested, put this remarkable girl on her mettle. She began to think very hard, and show that intense power of attention she had always in reserve for great occasions.

“Then you must not touch me nor speak to me,” said she. “The past is such a mist.”

He obeyed, and left off binding her wrist; and now he literally hung upon her words.

Then she took one step away from him; her bright eyes veiled themselves, and seemed to see nothing external, but looked into the recesses of the brain. Her forehead, her

hand, her very body, thought, and we must try, though it is almost hopeless, to convey some faint idea of her manner and her words.

“Let—me—see.”

Then she paused.

“I remember—WHITE SWANS.”

A pause.

“Were they swans?”

“Or ships?”

“They floated down the river to the sea.”

She paused.

“And the kind voice beside me said, ‘Darling!’ Papa never calls me ‘darling.’”

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“Yes, yes,” whispered Hope, almost panting.

“‘Darling, we must go with them to some other land, for we are poor.’” She paused and thought hard. “Poor we must have been; very poor. I can see that now that I am rich.” She paused and thought hard. “But all was peace and love. There were two of us, yet we seemed one.”

Then in a moment Mary left the past, her eyes resigned the film of thought, and shone with the lustre of her great heart, and she burst at once into that simple eloquence which no hearer of hers from John Baker to William Hope ever resisted. “Ah! sweet memories, treasures of the past, why are you so dim and wavering, and this hard world so clear and glaring it seems cut out of stone? Oh, if I had a fairy’s wand, I’d say, ’Vanish fine house and servants—vanish wealth and luxury and strife; and you come back to me, sweet hours of peace—and poverty—and love.’”

Her arms were stretched out with a grace and ardor that could embellish even eloquence, when a choking sob struck her ear. She turned her head swiftly, and there was William Hope, his hands working, his face convulsed, and the tears running down his cheeks like the very rain.

It was no wonder. Think of it! The child he adored, yet had parted with to save her from dire poverty, remembered that sad condition to ask for it back again, because of his love that made it sweet to her after all these years of comfort. And of late he had been jealous, and saw, or thought, he had no great place in her heart, and never should have.

Ah, it is a rarity to shed tears of joy! The thing is familiarly spoken of, but the truth is that many pass through this world of tears and never shed one such tear. The few who have shed them can congratulate William Hope for this blissful moment after all he had done and suffered.

But the sweet girl who so surprised that manly heart, and drew those heavenly tears, had not the key. She was shocked, surprised, distressed. She burst out crying directly from blind womanly sympathy; and then she took herself to task. “Oh, Mr. Hope! what have I done? Ah! I have touched some chord of memory. Wicked, selfish girl, to distress you with my dreams.”

“Distress me!” cried Hope. “These tears you have drawn from me are pearls of memory and drops of balm to my sore, tried heart. I, too, have lived and struggled in a by-gone world. I had a lovely child; she made me rich in my poverty, and happy in my homelessness. She left me—”

“Poor Mr. Hope!”

“Then I went abroad, drudged in foreign mines, came home and saw my child again in you. I need no fairy’s wand to revive the past; you are my fairy—your sweet words recall those by-gone scenes; and wealth, ambition, all I live for now, vanish into smoke. The years themselves roll back, and all is once more peace—and poverty—and love.”

“Dear Mr. Hope!” said Mary, and put her forehead upon his shoulder.

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After a while she said, timidly, “Dear Mr. Hope, now I feel I can trust you with anything.” Then she looked down in charming confusion. “My reminiscences—they are certainly a great mystery. But I have another secret to confide to you, if I am permitted.”

“Is the consent of some other person necessary?”

“Not exactly necessary, Mr. Hope.”

“But advisable.”

Mary nodded her head.

“Then take your time,” said Hope. He took out his watch, and said: “I want to go to the mine. My right-hand man reports that a ruffian has been caught lighting his pipe in the most dangerous part after due warning. I must stop that game at once, or we shall have a fatal accident. But I will be back in half an hour. You can rest in my office if you are here first. It is nice and cool.”

Hope hurried away on his errand, and Mary was still looking after him, when she heard horses’ feet, and up came Walter Clifford, escaped from his father. He slipped off his horse directly at sight of Mary, and they came together like steel and magnet.

“Oh, Walter,” said Mary, “we are not so unfortunate as we were just now. We have a powerful friend. Where are you going in such hurry?”

“That is a good joke. Why, did you not order me to the lakes?”

“Oh yes, for Julia’s bracelet. I forgot all about that.”

“Very likely; but it is not my business to forget your orders.”

“Dear Walter! But, dearest, things of more importance have happened since then. We have been insulted. Oh, how we have been insulted!”

“That we have,” said Walter.

“And nobody knows the truth.”

“Not yet.”

“And our secret oppresses me—torments me—degrades me.”

“Pray don’t say that.”

“Forgive me. I can’t help saying it, I feel it so bitterly. Now, dear, I will walk a little way with you, and tell you what I want you to do this very day; and you will be a darling, as you always are, and consent.”

Then Mary told how Mr. Hope had just shown her singular affection; next she reminded him of the high tone Mr. Hope had taken with her father in their hearing. “Why,” said she, “there is some mysterious compact about me between papa and him. I don’t think I shall ever have the courage to ask him about that compact, for then I must confess that I listened; but it is clear we can depend upon Mr. Hope, and trust him. So now, dear, I want you to indulge your little wife, and let me take Mr. Hope into our confidence.”

To Mary’s surprise and disappointment, Walter’s countenance fell.

“I don’t know,” said he, after a pause. “Unfortunately it’s not Mr. Bartley only that’s against us.”

“Well, but, dear,” said Mary, “the more people there are against us, the more we need one powerful friend and champion. Now you know Mr. Hope is a man that everybody loves and respects, even your father.”

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Walter just said, gloomily, “I see objections, for all that; but do as you please.”

Mary’s tender heart and loving nature couldn’t accept an unwilling assent. She turned her eyes on Walter a little reproachfully. “That’s the way to make me do what you please.”

“I don’t intend it so,” said Walter. “When a husband and wife love each other as we do, they must give in to each other.”

“That’s not what we said at the altar.”

“Oh, the marriage service is rather one-sided. I promised very different things to get you to marry me, and I mean to stand by them. If you are impatient at all of this secrecy, tell Mr. Hope.”

“I can’t now,” said Mary, a little bitterly.

“Why not, since I consent?”

“An unwilling consent is no consent.”

“Mary, you are too tyrannical. How can I downright like a thing I don’t like? I yield my will to yours; there’s a certain satisfaction in that. I really can say no more.”

“Then say no more,” said Mary, almost severely.

“At all events give me a kiss at parting.”

Mary gave him that directly, but it was not a warm one.

He galloped away upon his errand, and as she paced slowly back toward Mr. Hope’s office she was a good deal put out. What should she say to Mr. Hope now? She could not defy Walter’s evident wishes, and make a clean breast of the matter. Then she asked herself what was Walter’s objection; she couldn’t conceive why he was afraid to trust Mr. Hope. It was a perfect puzzle to her.

Indeed this was a most unfortunate dialogue between her and Walter, for it set her mind speculating and guessing at Walter’s mind, and thinking all manner of things just at the moment when an enemy, smooth as the old serpent, was watching for an opportunity to make mischief and poison her mind. Leonard Monckton, who had long been hanging about, waiting to catch her alone, met her returning from Walter Clifford, and took off his hat very respectfully to her, and said:

“Miss Bartley, I think.”

Mary lifted her eyes, and saw an elderly man with a pale face and dark eyebrows and a cast of countenance quite unlike that of any of her friends. His face repelled her directly, and she said, very coldly:

“Yes, sir; but I have not the pleasure of knowing you.”

And she quietly passed on.

Monckton affected not to see that she was declining to communicate with him. He walked on quietly, and said:

“And I have not seen you since you were a child, but I had the honor of knowing your mother.”

“You knew my mother, sir?”

“Knew her and respected her.”

“What was she like, sir?”

“She was tall and rather dark, not like you.”

“So I have heard,” said Mary. “Well, sir,” said she, for his voice was ingratiating, and had modified the effect of his criminal countenance, “as you knew my mother, you are welcome to me.”

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The artist in deceit gave a little sigh, and said, “That’s more than I dare hope. For I am here upon a most unpleasant commission; but for my respect for your mother I would not have undertaken it, for really my acquaintance with the other lady is but slight.”

Mary looked a little surprised at this rigmarole, and said, “But this commission, what is it?”

“Miss Bartley,” said he, solemnly, yet gravely, “I have been requested to warn you against a gentleman who is deceiving you.”

“Who is that?” said Mary, on her guard directly.

“It is a Mr. Walter Clifford.”

“Walter Clifford!” said Mary. “You are a slanderer; he is incapable of deceit.”

The rogue pretended to brighten up.

“Well, I hope so,” said he, “and I told the lady as much; he comes from a most honorable stock. So then he has *told* you about Lucy Monckton?”

“Lucy Monckton!” cried Mary. “No; who is she?”

“Miss Bartley,” said the villain, very gravely and solemnly, “she is his wife.”

“His wife, sir?” cried Mary, contemptuously—“his wife? You must be mad. I’ll hear no more against him behind his back.” Then, threatening her tormentor: “He will be home again this evening; he has only ridden to the Lake Hotel; you shall repeat this to his face, if you dare.”

“It will be my painful duty,” said the serpent, meekly.

“His wife!” said Mary, scornfully, but her lips trembled.

“His wife,” replied Monckton, calmly; “a respectable woman whom, it seems, he has deserted these fourteen years. My acquaintance with her is slight, but she is in a good position, and, indeed, wealthy, and has never troubled him. However, she heard somehow he was courting you, and as I often visit Derby upon business, she requested me to come over here and warn you in time.”

“And do you think,” said Mary, scornfully, “I shall believe this from a stranger?”

“Hardly,” said Monckton, with every appearance of candor. “Mrs. Walter Clifford directed me to show you his marriage certificate and hers.”

“The marriage certificate!” cried Mary, turning pale.

“Yes,” said Monckton; “they were married at the Registry Office on the 11th June, 1868,” and he put his hand in his breast pocket to search for the certificate. He took this opportunity to say, “You must not fancy that there is any jealousy or ill feeling after fourteen years’ desertion, but she felt it her duty as a woman—”

“The certificate!” said Mary—“the certificate!”

He showed her the certificate; she read the fatal words, “Walter Clifford.” The rest swam before her eyes, and to her the world seemed at an end. She heard, as in a dream, the smooth voice of the false accuser, saying, with a world of fictitious sympathy, “I wish I had never undertaken this business. Mrs. Walter Clifford doesn’t want to distress you; she only felt it her duty to save you. Don’t give way. There is no great harm done, unless you were to be deluded into marrying him.”

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“And what then?” inquired Mary, trembling.

Monckton appeared to be agitated at this question.

“Oh, don’t speak of it,” said he. “You would be ruined for life, and he would get seven years’ penal servitude; and that is a sentence few gentlemen survive in the present day when prisons are slaughter-houses. There, I have discharged the most disagreeable office I ever undertook in my life; but at all events you are warned in time.”

Then he bowed most respectfully to her, and retired, exhaling his pent-up venom in a diabolical grin.

She, poor victim, stood there stupefied, pierced with a poisoned arrow, and almost in a state of collapse; then she lifted her hands and eyes for help, and saw Hope’s study in front of her. Everything swam confusedly before her; she did not know for certain whether he was there or not; she cried to that true friend for help.

“Mr. Hope—I am lost—I am in the deep waters of despair—save me *once more*, save me!” Thus speaking she tottered into the office, and sank all limp and powerless into a chair, unable to move or speak, but still not insensible, and soon her brow sank upon the table, and her hands spread themselves feebly out before her.

It was all villainous spite on Monckton’s part. He did not for a moment suppose that his lie could long outlive Walter Clifford’s return; but he was getting desperate, and longing to stab them all. Unfortunately fate befriended the villain’s malice, and the husband and wife did not meet again till that diabolical poison had done its work.

Monckton retired, put off his old man’s disguise behind the fir-trees, and went toward another of his hiding-places, an enormous oak-tree which stood in the hedge of Hope’s cottage garden. The subtle villain had made this hollow tree an observatory, and a sort of sally-port, whence he could play the fiend.

The people at the hotel were, as Mary told Julia Clifford, very honest people.

They showed Percy Fitzroy’s bracelet to one or two persons, and found it was of great value. This made them uneasy, lest something should happen to it under their charge; so the woman sent her husband to the neighborhood of Clifford Hall to try and find out if there was a lady of that name who had left it. The husband was a simple fellow, very unfit to discharge so delicate a commission. He went at first, as a matter of course, to the public-house; they directed him to the Hall, but he missed it, and encountered a gentleman, whose quick eye fell upon the bracelet, for the foolish man had shown it to so many people that now he was carrying it in his hand, and it blazed in the meridian sun. This gentleman said, “What have you got there?”

“Well, sir,” said the man, “it was left at our hotel by a young couple from these parts. Handsome couple they were, sir, and spending their honey-moon.”

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“Let me see it,” said Mr. Bartley, for he was the gentleman. He had come back in some anxiety to see whether Hope had pacified Mary, or whether he must exert himself to make matters smooth with her again. Whilst he was examining the bracelet, who should appear but Percy Fitzroy, the owner. Not that he came after the bracelet; on the contrary, that impetuous young gentleman had discovered during the last two hours that he valued Miss Clifford’s love a great deal more than all the bracelets in the world, for all that he was delighted at the unexpected sight of his property.

“Why, that’s mine,” said he. “It’s an heirloom. I lent it to Miss Julia Clifford, and when I asked her for it to-day she could not produce it.”

“Oho!” said Mr. Bartley. “What, do the ladies of the house of Clifford go in for clandestine marriages?”

“Certainly not, sir,” said Fitzroy. “Don’t you know the difference between a wedding ring and a bracelet?” Then he turned to the man, “Here is a sovereign for your trouble, my man. Now give me my bracelet.”

To his surprise the hotel-keeper put it behind his back instead of giving it to him.

“Nay,” said he, shaking his head knowingly, “you are not the gentleman that spent the honey-moon with the lady as owns it. My mistress said I was not to give it into no hands but hers.”

This staggered Percy dreadfully, and he looked from one to another to assist him in solving the mystery.

Bartley came to the assistance of his understanding, but with no regard to the feelings of his heart. “It’s clear enough what it means, sir; your sweetheart is playing you false.”

That went through the true-lover’s heart like a knife, and poor little Percy leaned in despair against Hope’s workshop window transfixed by the poisoned arrow of jealousy.

At this moment the voice of Colonel Clifford was heard, loud and ringing as usual. Julia Clifford had decoyed him there in hopes of falling in with Percy and making it up; and to deceive the good Colonel as to her intentions she had been running him down all the way; so the Colonel was heard to say, in a voice for all the village to hear, “Jealous is he, and suspicious? Then you take my advice and give him up at once. You will easily find a better man and a bigger.” After delivering this, like the word of command upon parade, the Colonel was crossing the turf, a yard or two higher up than Hope’s workshop, when the spirit of revenge moved Bartley to retort upon his insulter.

“Hy, Colonel Clifford!”

The Colonel instantly halted, and marched down with Julia on his arm, like a game-cock when another rooster crows defiance.

“And what can you have to say to me, sir?” was his haughty inquiry.

“To take you down a peg. You rode the high horse pretty hard to-day. The spotless honor of the Cliffords, eh?”

Then it was fixed bayonets and no quarter.

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“Have the Cliffords ever dabbled in trade or trickery? Coal merchants, coal heavers, and coal whippers may defile our fields with coal dust and smoke, but they can not defile our honor.”

“The men are brave as lions, and the women as chaste as snow?” sneered Bartley.

“I don’t know about lions and snow. I have often seen a lion turn tail, and the snow is black slush wherever you are. But the Cliffords, being gentlemen, are brave, and being ladies, are chaste.”

“Oh, indeed!” hissed Bartley. “Then how comes it that your niece there—whose name is *Miss* Clifford, I believe—spent what this good man calls a honey-moon, with a young gentleman, at this good man’s inn?”

Here the good man in question made a faint endeavor to interpose, but the gentlefolks by their impetuosity completely suppressed him.

“It’s a falsehood!” cried Julia, haughtily.

“You scurrilous cad!” roared the Colonel, and shook his staff at him, and seemed on the point of charging him.

But Bartley was not to be put down this time. He snatched the bracelet from the man, and held it up in triumph.

“And left this bracelet there to prove it was no falsehood.”

Then Julia got frightened at the evidence and the terrible nature of the accusation. “Oh!” cried she, in great distress, “can any one here believe that I am a creature so lost? I have not seen the bracelet these two months. I lent it—to—ah, here she is! Mary, save me from shame; you know I am innocent.”

Mary, who was standing at the window in Hope’s study, came slowly forward, pale as death with her own trouble, to do an act of womanly justice. “Miss Clifford,” said she, languidly, as one to whom all human events were comparatively indifferent—“Miss Clifford lent the bracelet to me, and I left it at that man’s inn.” This she said right in the middle of them all.

The hotel-keeper took the bracelet from the unresisting hand of Bartley, touched his hat, and gave it to her.

“There, mistress,” said he. “I could have told them you was the lady, but they would not let a poor fellow get a word in edgeways.” He retired with an obeisance.

Mary handed the bracelet to Julia, and then remained passive.

A dead silence fell upon them all, and a sort of horror crept over Mary Bartley at what must follow; but come what might, no power should induce her to say the word that should send Walter Clifford to jail for seven years.

Bartley came to her; she trembled, and her hands worked.

“What are you saying, you fool?” he whispered. “The lady that left the bracelet was there with a gentleman.”

Mary winced.

Then Bartley said, sternly, “Who was your companion?”

“I must not say.”

“You will say one thing,” said Bartley, “or I shall have no mercy on you. Are you secretly married?”

Then a single word flashed across Mary’s almost distracted mind—SELF-SACRIFICE. She held her tongue.

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“Can’t you speak? Are you a wife?” He now began to speak so loud in his anger that everybody heard it.

Mary crouched a little and worked her hands convulsively under the torture, but she answered with such a doggedness that evidently she would have let herself be cut to pieces sooner than said more.

“I—don’t—know.”

“You don’t know?” roared Bartley.

Mary paused, and then, with iron doggedness, “I—don’t—know.”

This apparent insult to his common-sense drove Bartley almost mad. “You have given these cursed Cliffords a triumph over me,” he cried; “you have brought shame to my door; but it shall never pass the threshold.” Here the Colonel uttered a contemptuous snort. This drove Bartley wild altogether; he rushed at the Colonel, and shook his fist in his face. “You stand there sneering at my humiliation; now see the example I can make.” Then he was down upon Mary in a moment, and literally yelled at her in his fury. “Go to your paramour, girl; go where you will. You never enter my door again.” And he turned his back furiously upon her.

This terrible denunciation overpowered poor Mary’s resolution; she clung to him in terror. “Oh, mercy, mercy, papa! I’ll explain to *you*, have pity on your child!”

Bartley flung her so roughly from him that she nearly fell, “You are my child no more.”

But at that moment in strode William Hope, looking seven feet high, and his eyes blazing. “Liar and hypocrite,” he roared, “*she never was your child*!” Then, changing to a tone of exquisite love, and stretching out both his hands to Mary, “SHE IS MINE!”

Mary, being now between the two men, turned swiftly first to one, then to the other, and with woman’s infallible eye knew her own flesh and blood in that half-moment. She uttered a cry of love and rapture that went through every heart that heard it; and she flung herself in a moment upon her father’s bosom.

He whirled her round like a feather on to his right arm, then faced both her enemies, Clifford and Bartley, with haughty defiance, head thrown back, and eyes that flashed black lightning in defense of his child.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOVERS’ QUARRELS.

It was a living picture. The father protecting his child like an eagle; Bartley cooled in a moment, and hanging his head apart, gloomy and alarmed at the mad blunder rage had betrayed him into; Colonel Clifford amazed and puzzled, and beginning to see the consequences of all this; Julia clasping her hands in rapture and thrilling interest at so romantic an incident; Fitzroy beaming with delight at his sweetheart being cleared; and, to complete the picture, the villainous face of Leonard Monckton, disguised as an old man, showed itself for a moment sinister and gloomy; for now all hope of pecuniary advantage to him was gone, and nothing but revenge was on the cards, and he could not see his way clear to that.

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But Hope was no posture-maker; he turned the next moment and said a word or two to all present.

“Yes, this is Grace Hope, my daughter. We were very poor, and her life was in danger; I saw nothing else but that; my love was stronger than my conscience; I gave her to that man upon a condition which he has now broken. He saved her life and was kind to her. I thanked him; I thank him still, and I did my best to repay him. But now he has trusted to appearances, and not to her; he has belied and outraged her publicly. But I am as proud of her as ever, and don’t believe appearances against her character and her angel face and—”

“No more do I,” cried Julia Clifford, eagerly. “I know her. She’s purity itself, and a better woman than I shall ever be.”

“Thank you, Miss Clifford,” said Hope, in a broken voice; “God bless you. Come, Grace, and share my humble home. At all events, it will shelter you from insult.”

And so the pair went lovingly away, Grace clinging to her father, comforted for the moment, but unable to speak, and entered Hope’s little cottage. It was but a stone’s-throw from where they stood.

This broke up the party.

“And my house is yours,” said Colonel Clifford to Julia. “I did not believe appearances against a Clifford.” With these words he took two steps toward his niece and held out his arm. She moved toward him. Percy came forward radiant to congratulate her. She drew up with a look of furious scorn that made him recoil, and she marched proudly away with her uncle. He bestowed one parting glance of contempt upon the discomfited Bartley, and marched his niece proudly off, more determined than ever that she should be his daughter. But for once he was wise enough not to press that topic: he let her indignation work alone. Moreover, though he was a little wrong-headed and not a little pig-headed, he was a noble-minded man, and nothing noble passed him unobserved or unappreciated.

“*That* Bartley’s daughter!” said he to Julia. “Ay, when roses spring from dunghills, and eagles are born of sparrow-hawks. Brave girl!—brave girl!”

“Oh, uncle,” said Julia, “I am so glad you appreciate her!”

“Appreciate her!” said the Colonel; “what should I be worth if I did not? Why, these are the women that win Waterloo in the persons of their sons. That girl could never breed a coward nor a cheat.” Then his incisive voice mellowed suddenly. “Poor young thing,” said he, with manly emotion, “I saw her come out of that room pale as death to do another woman justice. She’s no fool, though that ruffian called her one. She knew

what she was doing, yet for all her woman's heart she faced disgrace as unflinchingly as if it was, only death. It was a great action, a noble action, a just action, and a manly action, but done like a very woman. Where the two sexes meet like that in one brave deed it's grand. I declare it warms an old soldier's heart, and makes him thank God there are a few creatures in the world that do humanity honor."

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As the Colonel was a man that stuck to a topic when he got upon it, this was the main of his talk all the way to Clifford Hall. He even remarked to his niece that, so far as his observations of the sex extended, great love of justice was not the leading feature of the female mind; other virtues he ventured to think were more prominent.

“So everybody says,” was Julia’s admission.

“Everybody is right for once,” said the Colonel.

They entered the house together, and Miss Clifford went up to her room; there she put on a new bonnet and a lovely shawl, recently imported from Paris. Who could this be for? She sauntered upon the lawn till she found herself somehow near the outward boundary, where there was a gate leading into the Park. As she walked to and fro by this gate she observed, out of the tail of her eye of course, the figure of a devoted lover creeping toward her. Whether this took her by surprise, or whether the lovely creature was playing the part of a beautiful striped spider waiting for her fly, the reader must judge for himself.

Percy came to the gate; she walked past him twice, coming and going with her eyes fixed upon vacancy. She passed him a third time. He murmured in a pleading voice,

“Julia!”

She neither saw nor heard, so attractive had the distant horizon become.

Percy opened the gate and came inside, and stood before her the next time she passed. She started with *surprise*.

“What do you want here?” said she.

“To speak to you.”

“How dare you speak to me after your vile suspicions?”

“Well, but, Julia—”

“How dare you call me Julia?”

“Well, Miss Clifford, won’t you even hear me?”

“Not a word. It’s through you poor dear Mary and I have both been insulted by that wretch of a father of hers.”

“Which father?”

“I said wretch. To whom does that term apply except to Mr. Bartley, and” (with sudden vigor) “to you.”

“Then you think I am as bad as old Bartley,” said Percy, firing up.

“No, I don’t.”

“Ah,” said Percy, glad to find there was a limit.

But Julia explained: “I think you are a great deal worse. You pretend to love me, and yet without the slightest reason you doubt me.”

“What did I doubt? I thought you had parted with my bracelet to another person, and so you had. I never doubted your honor.”

“Oh yes, you did; I saw your face.”

“I am not r—r—responsible for my face.”

“Yes, you are; you had no business to look broken-hearted, and miserable, and distrustful, and abominable. It was your business, face and all, to distrust appearances, and not me.”

“Ap—pear—ances were so strong that not to look m—miserable would have been to seem indifferent; there is no love where there is no jealousy.”

“Oh,” said Julia, “he has let that out at last, after denying it a hundred times. Now I say there is no true love without respect and confidence, and this doesn’t exist where there is jealousy, and all about a trumpery bracelet.”

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“Anything but tr—ump—ump—umpery; it came down from my ancestors.”

“You never had any; your behavior shows that.”

“I tell you it is an heirloom. It was given to my mother by—”

“Oh, we know all about that,” said Julia. “’This bracelet did an Egyptian to my mother give.’ But you are not going to play Othello with me.”

“I shouldn’t have a very gentle Desdemona.”

“No, you wouldn’t, candidly. No man shall ever bully and insult me, and then wake me out of my first sleep to smother me because my maid has lost one of his handkerchiefs at the wash.”

He burst out laughing at this, and tried to inveigle her into good-humor.

“Say no more about it,” said he, “and I’ll forgive you.”

“Forgive me, you little wretch!” cried Julia. “Why, haven’t you the sense to see that it is serious this time, and my patience is exhausted, and that our engagement is broken off, and I never mean to see you again—except when you come to my wedding?”

“Your wedding!” cried Percy, turning pale. “With whom?”

“That’s my business; you leave that to me, sir. Hold out your hand—both hands; here is the ancestral bracelet—it shall pinch me no longer, neither my wrist nor my heart; here’s the brooch you gave me—I won’t be pinned to it any longer, nor to you neither; and there is your bunch of charms; and there is your bundle of love-letters—stupid ones they are;” and she crammed all the aforesaid treasures into his hands one after the other. So this was what she went to her room for.

Percy looked down on his handful ruefully. “My very letters! There was no jealousy in them; they were full of earnest love.”

“Fuller of bad spelling,” said the relentless girl. Then she went into details: “You spell abominable with two m’s—and that’s abominable; you spell ridiculous with a k—and that’s ridicklous. So after this don’t you presume to speak to me, for I shall never speak to you again.”

“Very well, then,” said Percy. “I, too, will be silent forever.”

“Oh, I dare say,” said Julia; “a chatter-box like you.”

“Even chatter-boxes are silent in the grave,” suggested Percy; “and if we are to part like this forever to-day, to-morrow I shall be no more.”

“Well, you could not be much less,” said Julia, but with a certain shame-faced change of tone that perhaps, if Percy had been more experienced, might have given him a ray of hope.

“Well,” said he, “I know one lady that would not treat these presents with quite so much contempt.”

“Oh, I have seen her,” said Julia, spitefully. “She has been setting her cap at you for some time; it’s Miss Susan Beckley—a fine conquest—great, fat, red-haired thing.”

“Auburn.”

“Yes, all-burn, scarlet, carrots, *flamme d’enfer*. Well, go and give her my leavings, yourself and your ancestral—paste.”

“Well,” said Percy, gloomily, “I might do worse. You never really loved me; you were always like an enemy looking out for faults. You kept postponing our union for something to happen to break it off. But I won’t be any woman’s slave; I’ll use one to drive out the other. None of you shall trample on me.” Then he burst forth into singing. Nobody stammers when he sings.

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“Shall I, wasting in despair,
Sigh because a woman’s fair?
Shall my cheeks grow pale with care
Because another’s rosy are?
If she be not kind to me,
What care I how fair she be?”

This resolute little gentleman passed through the gate as he concluded the verse, waved his hand jauntily by way of everlasting adieu, and went off whistling the refrain with great spirit, and both hands in his pockets.

“You impudent!” cried Julia, almost choking; then, authoritatively, “Percy—Mr. Fitzroy;” then, coaxingly, “Percy *dear*.”

Percy heard, and congratulated himself upon his spirit. “That’s the way to treat them,” said he to himself.

“Well?” said he, with an air of indifference, and going slowly back to the gate. “What is it now?” said he, a little arrogantly.

She soon let him know. Directly he was quite within reach she gave him a slap in the face that sounded like one plank falling upon another, and marched off with an air of royal dignity, as if she had done the most graceful and lady-like thing in all the world.

How happy are those choice spirits who can always preserve their dignity!

Percy retired red as fire, and one of his cheeks retained that high color for the rest of the day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

APOLOGIES.

We must now describe the place to which Hope conducted his daughter, and please do not skip our little description. It is true that some of our gifted contemporaries paint Italian scenery at prodigious length *a propos de bottes*, and others show in many pages that the rocks and the sea are picturesque objects, even when irrelevant. True that others gild the evening clouds and the western horizon merely to please the horizon and the clouds. But we hold with Pope that

“The proper study of mankind is man,”

and that authors’ pictures are bores, except as narrow frames to big incidents. The true model, we think, for a writer is found in the opening lines of “Marmion,” where the castle

at even-tide, its yellow lustre, its drooping banner, its mail-clad warders reflecting the western blaze, the tramp of the sentinel, and his low-hummed song, are flung on paper with the broad and telling touch of Rubens, not from an irrelevant admiration of old castles and the setting sun, but because the human figures of the story are riding up to that sun-gilt castle to make it a scene of great words and deeds.

Even so, though on a much humbler scale, we describe Hope's cottage and garden, merely because it was for a moment or two the scene of a remarkable incident never yet presented in history or fiction.

This cottage, then, was in reality something between a villa and a cottage; it resembled a villa in this, that the rooms were lofty, and the windows were casements glazed with plate glass and very large. Walter Clifford had built it for a curate, who proved a bird of passage, and the said Walter had a horror of low rooms, for he said, "I always feel as if the ceiling was going to flatten me to the floor." Owing to this the bedroom windows, which looked westward on the garden, were a great height from the ground, and the building had a Gothic character.

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Still there was much to justify the term cottage. The door, which looked southward on the road, was at the side of the building, and opened, not into a hall, but into the one large sitting-room, which was thirty feet long and twenty-five feet broad, and instead of a plaster ceiling there were massive joists, which Hope had gilded and painted till they were a sight to behold. Another cottage feature: the walls were literally clothed with verdure and color; in front, huge creeping geraniums, jasmine, and Virginia creepers hid the brick-work; and the western walls, to use the words of a greater painter than ourselves, were

"Quite overcanopied with lush woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine."

In the next place, the building stood in a genuine cottage garden. It was close to the road. The southern boundary was plain oak paling, made of upright pieces which Hope had varnished so that the color was now a fine amber; the rest of the boundary was a quick-set hedge, in the western division of which stood an enormous oak-tree, hollow at the back. And the garden was fair with humble flowers—pinks, sweet-williams, crimson nasturtiums, double daisies, lilies, and tulips; but flower beds shared the garden with friendly cabbages, potatoes, onions, carrots, and asparagus.

To this humble but pleasant abode Hope conducted his daughter, and insisted upon her lying down on the sofa in the sitting-room. Then he ordered the woman who kept the house for him to prepare the spare bedroom, which looked into the garden, and to cut some of the sweet-smelling flowers. He himself had much to say to his daughter, and, above all, to demand her explanation of the awkward circumstances that had been just revealed. But she had received a great shock, and, like most manly men, he had a great consideration for the weakness of women, and his paternal heart said, "Let her have an hour or two of absolute repose before I subject her to any trial whatever." So he opened the window to give her air, enjoining her most strictly not to move, and even to go to sleep if she could; and then he put on his shooting coat, with large inside pocket, to go and buy her a little wine—a thing he never touched himself—and what other humble delicacies the village afforded. He walked briskly away from his door without the least idea that all his movements were watched from a hiding-place upon his own premises, no other than the great oak-tree, hollow and open at the back, in which Leonard Monckton had bored two peep-holes, and was now ensconced there watching him.

Hope had not gone many yards from his own door when he was confronted by one of those ruffians who, by their way of putting it, are the eternal butt of iniquitous people and iniquitous things, namely, honest men, curse them! and the law, confound it! This was no other than that Ben Burnley, who, being a miner, had stuck half-way between Devonshire and Durham, and had been some months in Bartley's mine. He opened on Hope in a loud voice, and dialect which we despair of conveying with absolute accuracy.

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“Mr. Hope, sir, they won’t let me go down t’ mine.”

“No; you’re discharged.”

“Who by?”

“By me.”

“What for?”

“For smoking in the mine, in spite of three warnings.”

“Me smoking in t’ mine! Who telt you yon lie?”

“You were seen to pick the lock of your Davylamp, and that put the mine in danger. Then you were seen to light your pipe at the bare light, and that put it in worse peril.”

“That’s a lie. What mak’s yer believe my skin’s nowt to me? It’s all one as it is to them liars that would rob me of my bread out of clean spite.”

“It’s the truth, and proved by four honest witnesses. There are a hundred and fifty men and twenty ponies in that mine, and their lives must not be sacrificed by one two-legged brute that won’t hear reason. You are discharged and paid; so be good enough to quit the premises and find work elsewhere; and Lord help your employer, whoever he is!”

Hope would waste no more time over this fellow. He turned his back, and went off briskly on his more important errand.

Burnley shook his fist at him, and discharged a volley of horrible curses after him. Whilst he was thus raging after the man that had done his duty he heard a satirical chuckle. He turned his head, and, behold! there was the sneering face of his fellow jail-bird Monckton. Burnley started.

“Yes, mate,” said Monckton, “it is me. And what sort of a pal are you, that couldn’t send me a word to Portland that you had dropped on to this rascal Hope? You knew I was after him. You might have saved me the trouble, you selfish brute.”

Burnley submitted at once to the ascendency of Monckton; he hung his head, and muttered, “I am no scholard to write to folk.”

“You grudged a joey to a bloke to write for you. Now I suppose you expect me to be a good pal to you again, all the same?”

“Why not?” said Burnley. “He is poison to you as well as to me. He gave you twelve years’ penal; you told me so at Portland; let’s be revenged on him.”

“What else do you think I am here for, you fool? But empty revenge, that’s child’s play. The question is, can you do what you are told?”

“Ay, if I see a chance of revenge. Why, I always did what you told me.”

“Very well, then; there’s nothing ripe yet.”

“Yer don’t mean I am to wait a year for my revenge.”

“You will have to wait an opportunity. Revenge is like other luxuries, there’s a time for it. Do you think I am such a fool as to go in for blindfold revenge, and get lagged or stretched? Not for Joseph, nor for you, either, Benjamin. I’ll tell you what, though, I think this will be a busy day; it must be a busy day. That old fox Bartley has found out his blunder before now, and he’ll try something on; then the Cliffords, they won’t go to sleep on it.”

“I don’t know what yer talking about,” says Burnley.

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“Remain in your ignorance, Ben. The best instrument is a blind instrument; you shall have your revenge soon or late.”

“Let it be soon, then.”

“In the meantime,” said Monckton, “have you got any money?”

“Got my wages.”

“That will do for you to-day. Go to the public-house and get half-drunk.”

“Half-drunk?”

“Half-drunk! Don’t I speak plain?”

“Miners,” said Burnley, candidly, “never get half-drunk in t’ county Durham; they are that the best part of their time.”

“Then you get half-drunk, neither more nor less, or I’ll discharge you as Hope has done, and that will be the worst discharge of the two for you. When you are half-drunk come here directly, and hang about this place. No; you had better be under that tree in the middle of the field there, and pretend to be sleeping off your liquor. Come, mizzle!”

When he had packed off Burnley, he got back into his hiding-place, and only just in time, for Hope came back again upon the wings of love, and Grace, whose elastic nature had revived, saw him coming, and came out to meet him. Hope scolded her urgently: why had she got off the sofa when repose was so necessary for her?

“You are mistaken, dear father,” said she. “I am wonderfully strong and healthy; I never fainted away in my life, and my mind will not let me rest at present—I have been longing so for my father.”

“Ah, precious word!” murmured Hope. “Keep saying that word to me, darling. Oh, the years that I have pined for it!”

“Dear father, we will make up for all those years. Oh, papa, let us not part again, never, never, not even for a day.”

“My child, we never will. What am I saying? I shall have to give you back to one who has a stronger claim than I—to your husband.”

“My husband?” said Mary, turning pale.

“Yes,” said Hope; “for you know you have a husband. Oh, I heard a few words there before I interfered; but it is not to me you’ll say ’*I don’t know*.’ That was good enough for

Bartley and a lot of strangers. Come, Grace dear, take my arm; have no concealments from me. Trust to a father's infinite love, even if you have been imprudent or betrayed; but that's a thing I shall never believe except from your lips. Take a turn with me, my child, since you can not lie down and rest; a little air, and gentle movement on your father's arm, and close to your father's heart, will be the next best thing for you." Then they walked to and fro like lovers.

"Why, Grace, my child," said he, "of course I understand it all. No doubt you promised to keep your marriage secret, or had some powerful reason for withholding it from strangers; and, indeed, why should you reveal such a secret to insolence or to mere curiosity. But you will tell the truth to me, your father and your best friend; you will tell me you are a wife."

"Father," said Mary, trembling, and her eyes roved as if she was looking out for the means of flight.

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Hope saw this look, and it made him sick at heart, for he had lived too long, and observed too keenly, not to know that innocence and purity are dangers, and are more often protected by the safeguards of society than by themselves.

“Oh, my child,” said he, “anything is better than this suspense; why do you not answer me? Why do you torture me? Are you Walter Clifford’s wife?”

Mary began to pant and sob. “Oh papa, have patience with me. You do not know the danger. Wait till he comes back. I dare not; I can not.”

“Then, by Heaven, he shall!”

He dropped her arm, and his countenance became terrible. She clung to him directly.

“No, no; wait till I have seen him. He will be back this very evening. Do not judge hastily; and oh, papa, as you love your child, do not act rashly.”

“I shall act firmly,” was Hope’s firm reply. “You have come from a sham father to a real one, and you will be protected as well as loved. This lover has forbidden you to confide in your father (he did not know that I was your father, but that makes no difference); it looks very ugly, and if he has wronged you he shall do you justice, or I will have his life.”

“Oh, papa,” screamed Mary, “his life? Why, mine is bound up with it.”

“I fear so,” said Hope. “But what’s our life to us without our honor, especially to a woman? He is the true Cain that destroys a pure virgin.”

Then he put both his hands on her shoulder, and said, “Look at me, Grace.” She looked at him full with eyes as brave as a lion’s and as gentle as a gazelle’s.

In a moment his senses enlightened him beyond the power of circumstances to deceive. “It’s a lie,” said he; “men are always lying and circumstances deceiving; there is no blush of shame upon these cheeks, no sin nor frailty in these pure eyes. You are his wife?”

“I am!” cried Grace, unable to resist any longer.

“Thank God!” cried Hope, and father and daughter were locked that moment in a tender embrace.

“Yes, papa, you shall know all, and then I shall have to fall on my knees and ask you not to punish one I love—for—a fault committed years ago. You will have pity on us both. Walter and I were married at the altar, and I am his wife in the eyes of Heaven. But, oh, papa, I fear I am not his lawful wife.”

“Not his lawful wife, child! Why, what nonsense!”

“I would to Heaven it was; but this morning I learned for the first time that he had been married before. Oh, it was years ago; but she is alive.”

“Impossible! He could not be so base.”

“Papa,” said Mary, very gravely, “I have seen the certificate.”

“The certificate!” said Hope, in dismay. “What certificate?”

“Of the Registry Office. It was shown me by a gentleman she sent expressly to warn me; she had no idea that Walter and I were married, but she had heard somehow of our courtship. I try to thank her, and I tried, and always will, to save him from a prison and his family from disgrace.”

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“And sacrifice yourself?” cried Hope, in agony.

“I love him,” said Mary, “and you must spare him.”

“I will have justice for my child.”

Grace was in such terror lest her father should punish Walter that she begged him to consider whether in sacrificing herself she really had not been unintentionally wise. What could she gain by publishing that she had married another woman’s husband “I have lost my husband,” said she “but I have found my father. Oh take me away and let me rest my broken heart upon yours far from all who know me. Every wound seems to be cured in this world, and if time won’t cure this my wound, even with my father’s help, the grave *will*.”

“Oh, misery!” cried Hope; “do I hear such words as these from my child just entering upon life and all its joys?”

“Hush, papa,” said Grace; “there is that man.”

That man was Mr. Bartley. He looked very much distressed, and proceeded at once to express his penitence.

CHAPTER XIX.

A WOMAN OUTWITS TWO MEN.

“Oh, Mary, what can I say? I was simply mad, stung into fury by that foul-mouthed ruffian. Mary, I am deeply sorry, and thoroughly ashamed of my violence and my cruelty, and I implore you to think of the very many happy years we have spent together without an angry word—not that you ever deserved one. Let us silence all comments; return to me as the head of my house and the heiress of my fortune; you will bind Mr. Hope to me still more strongly, he shall be my partner, and he will not be so selfish as to ruin your future.”

“Ay,” said Hope, “that’s the same specious argument you tempted me with twelve years ago. But she was a helpless child then; she is a woman now, and can decide for herself. As for me, I will not be your partner. I have a small royalty on your coal, and that is enough for me; but Grace shall do as she pleases. My child, will you go to the brilliant future that his wealth can secure you, or share my modest independence, which will need all my love to brighten it. Think before you answer; your own future life depends upon yourself.”

With this he turned his back and walked for some distance very stoutly, then leaned upon the palings with his back toward Grace; but even a back can speak, and the young

lady looked at him and her eyes filled; then she turned them toward Bartley, and those clear eyes dried as if the fire in the heart had scorched them.

“In the first place, sir,” said she, with a cold and cutting voice, very unusual to her, “my name is not Mary, it is Grace; and, be assured of this, if there was not another roof in all the world to shelter me, if I was helpless, friendless and fatherless, I would die in the nearest ditch rather than set my foot in the house from which I was thrust out with shame and insult such as no lady ever yet forgave. But, thank Heaven, I am not at your mercy at all.

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He to whom nature has drawn me all these years is my father—Oh, papa, come to me; is it for *you* to stand aloof? It is into your hands, with all the trust and love you have earned so well from your poor Grace, I give my love, my veneration, and my heart and soul forever." Then she flung herself panting on his bosom, and he cried over her. The next moment he led her to the house, where he made her promise to repose now after this fresh trial; and, indeed, he would have followed her, but Bartley implored him so piteously, for the sake of old times, not to refuse him one word more, that he relented so far as to come out to him, though he felt it was a waste of time.

He said, "Mr. Bartley, it's no use; nothing can undo this morning's work: our paths lie apart. From something Walter Clifford let fall one day, I suspect he is the person you robbed, and induced me to rob, of a large fortune."

"Well, what is he to you? Have pity upon me; be silent, and name your own price."

"Wrong Walter Clifford with my eyes open? He is the last man in the world that I would wrong in money matters. I have got a stern account against him, and I will begin it by speaking the truth and giving him back his own."

Here the interview was interrupted by an honest miner, one Jim Perkins. He came in hurriedly, and, like people of that class, thrust everybody else's business out of his way. "You are wanted at the mine, Mr. Hope. The shoring of the old works is giving way, and there's a deal of water collecting in another part."

"I'll come at once," said Hope; "the men's lives must not be endangered. Have the cage ready." Jim walked away.

Hope turned to Bartley.

"Pray understand, Mr. Bartley, that this is my last visit to your mine."

"One moment, Hope," cried Bartley in despair; "we have been friends so long, surely you owe me something."

"I do."

"Well, then, I'll make you rich for life if you will but let Mary return to me and only just be silent; speak neither for me nor against me; surely that is not much for an old friend to ask. What is your answer?"

"That I will speak the truth, and keep my conscience and my child."

This answer literally crushed Bartley. His very knees knocked together; he leaned against the palings sick at heart. He saw that Colonel Clifford would extort not only Walter's legacy, but what the lawyers call the mesne profits, that is to say, the interest and the various proceeds from the fraud during fourteen years.

Whilst he was in this condition of bodily collapse and mental horror a cold, cynical voice dropped icicles, so to speak, into his ear.

"In a fix, governor, eh? The girl won't come back, and Hope won't hold his tongue."

Bartley looked round in amazement, and saw the cadaverous face and diabolical sneer of Leonard Monckton. Fourteen years and evil passions had furrowed that bloodless cheek; but there was no mistaking the man. It was a surprise to Bartley to see him there and be spoken to by a knave who had tried to rob him; but he was too full of his immediate trouble to think much of minor things.

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“What do you know about it?” said he, roughly.

“I’ll tell you,” said Monckton, coolly.

He then walked in a most leisurely way to the gate that led into the meadow whose eastern boundary was Hope’s quick-set hedge, and he came in the same leisurely way up to Mr. Bartley, and leaned his back, with his hands behind him, with perfect effrontery, against the palings.

“I know all,” said he. “I overheard you in your office fourteen years ago, when you changed children with Hope.”

Bartley uttered an exclamation of dismay.

“And I’ve been hovering about here all day, and watched the little game, and now I am fly, and no mistake.”

Bartley threw up his hands in dismay. “Then it’s all over; I am doubly ruined. I can not hope to silence you both.”

“Don’t speak so loud, governor.”

“Why not?” said Bartley, “others will, if I don’t.” He lowered his voice for all that, and wondered what was coming.

“Listen to me,” said Monckton, exchanging his cynical manner for a quiet and weighty one.

Bartley began to wonder, and look at him with a sort of awe. The words now dropped out of Monckton’s thin lips as if they were chips of granite, so full of meaning was every syllable, and Bartley felt it.

“It’s not so bad as it looks. There are only two men that know you are a felon.”

Bartley winced visibly.

“Now one of those men is to be bought”—Bartley lifted his head with a faint gleam of hope at that—“and the other—has gone—down a coal-mine.”

“What good will that do me?”

The villain paused, and looked Bartley in the face.

“That depends. Suppose you were to offer me what you offered Hope, and suppose Hope—was never—to come up—again?”

“No such luck,” said Bartley, shaking his head sorrowfully.

“Luck,” said Monckton, contemptuously; “we make our own luck. Do you see that vagabond lying under the tree, that’s Ben Burnley.”

“Ah!” said Bartley, “the ruffian Hope discharged.”

“The same, and a man that is burning to be revenged on him: *he’s* your luck, Mr. Bartley; I know the man, and what he has done in a mine before to-day.”

Then he drew near to Bartley’s ear, and hissed into it these fearful words:

“Send him down the mine, promise him five hundred pounds—if William Hope—never comes up again—and William Hope never will.”

Bartley drew back aghast. “Assassination!” he cried, and by a generous impulse of horror he half fled from the tempter; but Monckton followed him up and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

“Hush,” said he, “you are getting too near that window; and it is open. Let me see there’s nobody inside.”

He looked in. There was nobody. Grace was upstairs, but it did so happen that she came into the room soon after.

“Nothing of the kind. Accident. Accidents will happen in mines, and talking of luck, this mine was declared dangerous this very day.”

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“No, no,” groaned Bartley, trembling in every limb, “it’s a horrible crime; I dare not risk it.”

“It is but a risk. The alternative is certain. You will be indicted for fraud by the Cliffords.”

Bartley groaned.

“They’ll live in your home, they’ll revel in your money, while you wear a cropped head—-and a convict dress—in a stone cell at Portland.”

“No, never!” screamed Bartley. “Man, man; you are tempting me to my perdition!”

“I am saving you. Just consider—where is the risk? It is only an accident, and who will suspect you? Men don’t ruin their own mines. Here, just let me call him.”

Bartley made a faint gesture to forbid it, but Monckton pretended to take that as an assent.

“Hy, Ben,” he cried, “come here.”

“No, no,” cried Bartley, “I’ll have nothing to do with him.”

“Well,” said Monckton, “then don’t, but hear what he has got to say; he’ll tell you how easily accidents happen in a mine.”

Then Burnley came in, but stood at some distance. Bartley turned his back upon them both, and edged away from them a little; but Monckton stood between the two men, determined to bring them together.

“Ben,” said he, “Mr. Bartley takes you on again at my request, no thanks to Mr. Hope.”

“No, curse him; I know that.”

“Talking of that, Ben, how was it that you got rid of that troublesome overseer in the Welsh colliery?”

Ben started, and looked aghast for a moment, but soon recovered himself and told his tale of blood with a strange mixture of satisfaction and awe, washing his hands in the air nervously all the time.

“Well, you see, sir, we put some gun-cotton in a small canister, with a fuse cut to last fowr minutes, and hid it in one of the old workings the men had left; then they telt t’ overseer they thowt t’ water was coming in by quickly. He got there just in time; and what with t’ explosion, fire-damp, and fallen coal, we never saw t’ over-seer again.”

“Dear me,” said Monckton, “and Mr. Hope has gone down the mine expressly to inspect old workings. Is it not a strange coincidence? Now if such an accident was to befall Mr. Hope, it’s my belief Mr. Bartley would give you five hundred pounds.”

Bartley made no reply, the perspiration was pouring down his face, and he looked a picture of abject guilt and terror.

Monckton looked at him, and decided for him. He went softly, like a cat, to Ben Burnley and said, “If an accident does occur, and that man never comes up again, you are to have five hundred pounds.”

“Five hundred pounds!” shouted Ben. “I do t’ job. Nay, *nay*, but,” said he, and his countenance fell, “they will not let me go down the mine.”

The diabolical agent went cat-like to Bartley.

“Please give me a written order to let this man go to work again in the mine.”

Bartley trembled and hesitated, but at last took out his pocket-book and wrote on a leaf,

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“Take Burnley on again.

“R. BARTLEY.”

Whilst writing it his hand shook, and when it was written he would not tear it out. He panted and quivered and was as pale as ashes, and said, “No, no, it’s a death-warrant; I can not;” and his trembling hand tried to convey the note-book back to his pocket, but it fell from his shaking fingers, and Monckton took it up and quietly tore the leaf out, and took it across to Burnley, in spite of a feeble gesture the struggling wretch made to detain him. He gave Ben the paper, and whispered, “Be off before he changes his mind.”

“You’ll hear of an accident in the mine before the day is over,” said Burnley, and he went off without a grain of remorse under the double stimulus of revenge and lucre.

“He’ll do it,” cried Monckton, triumphantly, “and Hope will end his days in the Bartley mine.”

* * * * *

These words were hardly out of his lips when Grace Hope walked out of the house, pale, and with her eyes gleaming, and walked rapidly past them. She had nothing on her head but a white handkerchief that was tied under her chin. Her appearance and her manner struck the conspirators with terror. Bartley stood aghast; but the more resolute villain seized her as she passed him. She was not a bit frightened at that, but utterly amazed. It was a public road.

“How dare you touch me, you villain!” she cried. “Let me go. Ah, I shall know you again, with your face like a corpse and your villainous eyes. Let me go, or I’ll have you hung.”

“Where are you going?” said Bartley, trembling.

“To my father.”

“He is not your father; it is a conspiracy. You must come home with me.”

“Never!” cried Mary, and by a sudden and violent effort she flung Monckton off.

But Bartley, mad with terror, seized her that moment, and that gave Monckton time to recover and seize her again by the arm.

“You are not of age,” cried Bartley; “you are under my authority, and you shall come home with me.”

“No! no!” cried Mary. “Help! help! murder! help!”

She screamed, and struggled so violently that with all their efforts they could hardly hold her. Then the devil Monckton began to cry louder still, “She’s mad! she’s mad! help to secure a mad woman.” This terrified Grace Hope. She had read of the villainies that had been done under cover of that accusation, which indeed has too often prevented honest men from interfering with deeds of lawless violence. But she had all her wits about her, woman’s wit included. She let them drag her past the cottage door. Then she cried out with delight, “Ah! here is my father.” They followed the direction of her eye, and relaxed their grasp. Instantly she drew her hands vigorously downward, got clear of them, gave them each a furious push that sent them flying forward, then darted back through the open door, closed it, and bolted it inside just as Monckton, recovering himself, quickly dashed furiously against it—in vain.

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The quick-witted villain saw the pressing danger in a moment. “To the back door or we are lost!” he yelled. Bartley dashed round to that door with a cry of dismay.

But Grace was before him just half a minute. She ran through the house.

Alas! the infernal door was secure. The woman had locked it when she went out. Grace came flying back to the front, and drew the bolt softly. But as she did so she heard a hammering, and found the door was fast. Unluckily, Hope’s tool-basket was on the window-ledge, and Monckton drove a heavy nail obliquely through the bottom of the door, and it was immovable. Then Mary slipped with cat-like step to the window, and had her hand on the sill to vault clean out into the road; she was perfectly capable, it being one of her calisthenic exercises. But here again her watchful enemy encountered her. He raised his hammer as if to strike her hand—though perhaps he might not have gone that length—but she was a woman, and drew back at that cruel gesture. Instantly he closed the outside shutters; he didn’t trouble about the window, but these outside shutters he proceeded to nail up; and, as the trap was now complete, he took his time, and by a natural reaction from his fears, he permitted himself to exult a little.

“Thank you, Mr. Hope, for the use of your tools.” (Rat-tat.) “There, my little bird, you’re caged.” (Rat-tat-tat.) “Did you really think—(rat-tat)—two men—(rat-tat-tat)—were to be beaten by one woman?”

The prisoner thus secured, he drew aside with justifiable pride to admire his work. This action enabled him to see the side of the cottage he had secured so cleverly in front and behind, and there was Grace Hope coming down from her bedroom window; she had tied two crimson curtains together by a useful knot, which is called at sea a fisherman’s bend, fastened one end to the bed or something, and she was coming down this extemporized rope, hand over hand alternately, with as much ease and grace as if she were walking down marble steps. Monckton flung his arm and body wildly over the paling and grabbed her with his finger ends, she gave a spang with her heels against the wall, and took a bold leap away from him into a tulip-bed ten feet distant at least: he yelled to Bartley, “To the garden;” and not losing a moment, flung his leg over the paling to catch her, with Bartley’s help, in this new trap. Mary dashed off without a moment’s hesitation at the quick-set hedge; she did not run up to it and hesitate like a woman, for it was not to be wriggled through; she went at it with the momentum and impetus of a race-horse, and through it as if it was made of blotting-paper, leaving a wonderfully small hole, but some shreds of her dress, and across the meadow at a pace that neither Bartley nor Monckton, men past their prime, could hope to rival even if she had not got the start. They gazed aghast at one another; at the premises so suddenly emptied as if by magic; at the crimson curtain floating like a banner, and glowing beautifully amongst the green creepers; and at that flying figure, with her hair that glittered in the sun, and streamed horizontal in the wind with her velocity, flying to the mine to save William Hope, and give these baffled conspirators a life of penal servitude.

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CHAPTER XX.

CALAMITY.

The baffled conspirators saw Grace Hope bound over a stile like a deer and dash up to the mine; then there was a hurried colloquy, and some men were seen to start from the mine and run toward Hope's cottage. What actually took place was this: She arrived panting, and begged to be sent down the mine at once; the deputy said, "You cannot, miss, without an order from Mr. Hope."

"I am his daughter, sir," said she; "he has claimed me from Mr. Bartley this day."

At that word the man took off his hat to her.

"Let me down this instant; there's a plot to fire the mine, and destroy my dear father."

"A plot to fire the mine!" said the man, all aghast. "Why, who by? Hy! cage ready there!"

"One Burnley, but he's bribed by a stranger. Send me down to warn my father; but you run and seize that villain; you can not mistake him. He wears a light suit of tweed, all one color. He has very black eyebrows, and a face like a corpse, and a large gold ring on the little finger of his right hand. You will find him somewhere near my father's cottage. Neither you nor I have a moment to lose."

Then the deputy called three more men, and made for Hope's cottage, while Grace went down in the cage.

Bartley fled in mortal terror to his own house, and began to pack up his things to leave the country. Monckton withdrew to the clump of fir-trees, and from that thin shelter watched the mine, intending to levant as soon as he should see Hope come up safe and sound; but, when he saw three or four men start from the mine and run across to him, he took the alarm and sought the thicker shelter of a copse hard by. It was a very thick cover, good for temporary concealment; but he soon found it was so narrow that he couldn't emerge from it on either side without being seen at once, and his quick wit told him that Grace had denounced him, and probably described him accurately to the miners; he was in mortal terror, but not unprepared for this sort of danger. The first thing he did was to whip off his entire tweed suit and turn it inside out; he had had it made on purpose; it was a thin tweed, doubled with black kerseymere, so that this change was a downright transformation. Then he substituted a black tie for a colored one, whipped out a little mirror and his hare's-foot, *etc*., browned and colored his cheek, put on an admirable gray wig, whiskers, mustache, and beard, and partly whitened his eyebrows, and hobbled feebly out of the little wood an infirm old man. Presently he caught sight of his gold ring. "Ah!" said he, "she is a sharp girl; perhaps she noticed that

in the struggle?" He took it off and was going to put it in his pocket, but thought better of that, and chucked it into a ditch. Then he made for the village. The pursuers hunted about the house and, of course, didn't find him; but presently one of them saw him crossing a meadow not far off, so they ran toward him and hailed him.

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“Hy! mister!”

He went feebly on, and did not seem to hear; then they hailed him again and ran toward him; then he turned and stopped, and seeing men running toward him, took out a large pair of round spectacles, and put them on to look at them. By this artifice that which in reality completed his disguise seemed but a natural movement in an old man to see better who it was that wanted him.

“What be you doing here?” said the man.

“Well, my good man,” said Monckton, affecting surprise, “I have been visiting an old friend, and now I’m going home again. I hope I am not trespassing. Is not this the way to the village? They told me it was.”

“That’s right enough,” said the deputy, “but by the way you come you just have seen him.”

“No, sir,” said Monckton, “I haven’t seen anybody except one gentleman, that came through that wood there as I passed it.”

“What was he like, sir?”

“Well, I didn’t take particular notice, and he passed me all in a hurry.”

“That would be the man,” said the deputy. “Had he a very pale face?”

“Not that I remarked; he seemed rather heated with running.”

“How was he dressed, sir?”

“Oh, like many of the young people, all of one pattern.”

“Light or dark?”

“Light, I think.”

“Was it a tweed suit?”

“I almost think it was. What had he been doing—anything wrong? He seemed to me to be rather scared-like.”

“Which way did he go, sir?”

“I think he made for that great house, sir.”

“Come on,” said the deputy, and he followed this treacherous indication, hot in pursuit.

Monckton lost no time. He took off twenty years, and reached the Dun Cow as an old acquaintance. He hired the one vehicle the establishment possessed, and was off like a shot to Derby; thence he dispatched a note to his lodgings to say he was suddenly called to town, but should be back in a week. Not that he ever intended to show his face in that neighborhood again.

Nevertheless events occasioned that stopped both his flight and Bartley's, and yet broke up their unholy alliance.

It was Hope's final inspection of the Bartley mine, and he took things in order. Months ago a second shaft had been sunk by his wise instructions, and but for Bartley's parsimony would have been now completed. Hope now ascertained how many feet it was short, and noted this down for Bartley.

Then, still inspecting, he went to the other extremity of the mine, and reached a sort of hall or amphitheatre much higher than the passages. This was a centre with diverging passages on one side, but closed on the other. Two of these passages led by oblique routes to those old works, the shoring of which had been reported unsafe.

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This amphitheatre was now a busy scene, empty trucks being pushed off, full trucks being pushed on, all the men carrying lighted lanterns, that wavered and glinted like "wills of the wisp." Presently a bell rung, and a portion of the men, to whom this was a signal, left off work and began to put on their jackets and to await the descent of the cage to take them up in parties. At this moment Hope met, to his surprise, a figure that looked like Ben Burnley. He put up his lamp to see if he was right, and Ben Burnley it was. The ruffian had the audacity to put up his lamp, as if to scrutinize the person who examined him.

"Did I not discharge you?" said Hope.

"Ay, lad," said Ben; "but your master put me on again." With that he showed Bartley's order and signature.

Hope bit his lips, but merely said, "He will rue it." Burnley sidled away; but Hope cried to one or two men who were about,

"Keep a sharp lookout on him, my men, your lives are not safe whilst he's in the mine."

Burnley leaned insolently against a truck and gave the men nothing to observe; the next minute in bustled the honest miner at whose instance Hope had come down the mine, and begged him to come and visit the shoring at once.

Hope asked if there were any other men there; the miner replied in the negative.

"Very well, then," said Hope, "I'll just take one look at the water here, and I'll be at the shoring in five minutes."

Unfortunately this unwary statement let Burnley know exactly what to do; he had already concealed in the wood-work a canister of dynamite, and a fuse to it to last about five minutes. He now wriggled away under cover of Hope's dialogue and lighted the fuse, then he came flying back to get safe out of the mine, and leave Hope in his death-trap.

But in the meantime Grace Hope came down in the cage, and caught sight of her father and came screaming to him, "Father, father!"

"You here, my child!"

"There's a plot to murder you! A man called Burnley is to cause an explosion at the old works just as you visit them."

"An explosion!" cried Hope, "and fire-damp about. One explosion will cause fifty—ring the bell—here men! danger!"

Then there was a rush of men.

“Ben Burnley is firing the mine.”

There was a yell of fury; but a distant explosion turned it to one of dismay. Hope caught his daughter up in his arms and put her into a cavity.

“Fly, men, to the other part of the mine,” he cried.

There was a louder explosion. In ran Burnley terrified at his own work, and flying to escape. Hope sprang out upon him. “No you don’t—living or dead, you are the last to leave this mine.”

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Burnley struggled furiously, but Hope dashed him down at his feet. Just as a far more awful explosion than all took place, one side of that amphitheatre fell in and the very earth heaved. The corner part of the shaft fell in upon the cage and many poor miners who were hoping to escape by it; but those escaped for the present who obeyed Hope's order and fled to another part of the mine, and when the stifling vapors drifted away there stood Hope pale as death, but strong as iron, with the assassin at his feet, and poor Grace crouching and quivering in her recess. Their fate now awaited these three, a speedy death by choke-damp, or a slow death by starvation, or a rescue from the outside under circumstances of unparalleled difficulty, since there was but one shaft completed, and that was now closed by a mountain of debris.

CHAPTER XXI.

BURIED ALIVE.

The explosions so tremendously loud below were but muffled sounds at the pit's mouth; but, alas! these muffled sounds, and one flash of lurid flame that shot up into the air, told the tale of horror to every experienced pitman and his wife, and the cry of a whole village went up to heaven.

The calamity spread like wildfire. It soon found its way to Clifford Hall, and the deputy ran himself with the news to Mr. Bartley. Bartley received it at first with a stony glare, and trembled all over; then the deputy, lowering his voice, said, "Sir, the worst of it is, there is foul play in it. There is good authority to say that Ben Burnley fired the mine to destroy his betters, and he has done it; for Mr. Hope and Miss Hope that is, Miss Bartley that was, are both there." He added, in a broken voice, "And if they are not buried or stifled, it will be hard work to save them. The mine is a ruin."

Bartley delivered a wild scream, and dashed out of the house at once; he did not even take his hat, but the deputy, more self-possessed, took one out of the hall and followed him.

Bartley hurried to the mine, and found that several stout fellows had gone down with their pickaxes and other tools to clear the shaft, but that it must be terribly slow work, so few men could work at a time in that narrow space. Bartley telegraphed to Derby for a more powerful steam-engine and experienced engineers, and set another gang to open the new shaft to the bottom, and see if any sufferers could be saved that way. Whatever he did was wise, but his manner was frenzied. None of his people thought he had so much feeling, and more than one of the quaking women gave him a kind word; he made no reply, he did not even seem to hear. He wandered about the mine all night wringing his hands, and at last he was taken home almost by force.

Humanity overpowered prejudice, and Colonel Clifford came to the mine to see if he could be of any use to the sufferers. He got hold of the deputy and learned from him what Bartley was doing. He said he thought that was the best course, as there would be division of labor; but, said he, “I am an old campaigner, and I know that men can not fight without food, and this work will be a fight. How will you house the new-comers?”

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“There are forty-seven men missing, and the new men can sleep in their cottages.”

“That’s so,” said the Colonel, “but there are the wives and the children. I shall send sleeping tents and eating tents, and provisions enough to feed a battalion. Forty-seven lives,” said he, pityingly.

“Ay, sir,” said the deputy, “and such lives, some of them; for Mr. Hope and Miss Mary Bartley—leastways that is not her name now, she’s Mr. Hope’s daughter.”

“Why, what has she to do with it?”

“I am sorry to say, sir, she is down the mine.”

“God forbid!” said the Colonel; “that noble girl dead, or in mortal danger.”

“She is, sir,” and, lowering his voice, “by foul play;” then seeing the Colonel greatly shocked and moved, he said, “and I ought not to keep it from you. You are our nearest magistrate; the young lady told me at the pit mouth she is Mr. Hope’s daughter.”

“And so she is.”

“And she said there was a plot to destroy her father in the mine by exploding the old workings he was going to visit. One Ben Burnley was to do it; a blackguard that has a spite against Mr. Hope for discharging him. But there was money behind him and a villain that she described to us—black eyebrows, a face like a corpse, and dressed in a suit of tweed one color. We hoped that she might have been mistaken, or she might have warned Mr. Hope in time; but now it is to be seen that there was no mistake, and she had not time to warn him. The deed is done; and a darker deed was never done, even in the dark.”

Colonel Clifford groaned: after a while he said, “Seize that Ben Burnley at once, or he will soon leave this place behind him.”

“No, he won’t,” said the deputy. “He is in the mine, that is one comfort; and if he comes out alive his life won’t be worth much, with the law on one side of the blackguard and Judge Lynch on t’other.”

“The first thing,” said the Colonel, “is to save these precious lives. God help us and them.”

He then went to the Railway, and wired certain leading tradesmen in Derby for provisions, salt and fresh, on a large scale, and for new tents. He had some old ones stored away in his own house. He also secured abundance of knives, forks, plates, buckets, pitchers, and jugs, and, in short, he opened a commissariat. He inquired for his son Walter, and why he was so late. He could learn nothing but that Walter had

mounted a hunter and left word with Baker that he should not be home till eight o'clock. "John," said the Colonel, solemnly, "I am in great trouble, and Walter is in worse, I fear. Let nobody speak to him about this accident at the mine till he has seen me."

* * * * *

Walter Clifford rode to the Lake Hotel to inquire after the bracelet. The landlady told him she had sent her husband over with it that day.

"Confound it," said Walter; "why, he won't know who to take it to."

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“Oh, it’s all right, sir,” said she. “My Sam won’t give it to the wrong person, you may be sure.”

“How do I know that?” said Walter; “and, pray, who did you tell him to give it to?”

“Why, to the lady as was here with you.”

“And how the deuce is he to find her? He does not know her name. It’s a great pity you could not keep it till I came.”

“Well, sir, you was so long a-coming.”

“That’s true,” said Walter; “let us make the best of it. I shall feed my horse, and get home as quickly as I can.”

However, he knew he would be late, and thought he had better go straight home. He sent a telegram to Mary Bartley: “Landlord gone to you with bracelet;” and this he signed with the name of the landlady, but no address. He was afraid to say more, though he would have liked to put his wife upon her guard; but he trusted to her natural shrewdness. He mounted his horse and went straight home, but he was late for dinner, and that vexed him a little, for it was a matter Colonel Clifford was particular about. He dashed up to his bedroom and began to dress all in a hurry.

John Baker came to him wearing a very extraordinary look, and after some hesitation said, “I would not change my clothes if I were you, Mr. Walter.”

“Oh,” said Walter, “I am too late, you know; in for a penny, in for a pound.”

“But, sir,” said old John, “the Colonel wants to speak to you in the drawing-room.”

Now Walter was excited with the events of the day, irritated by the affront his father had put upon him and Mary, strung up by hard riding, *etc*. He burst out, “Well, I shall not go to him; I have had enough of this—badgered and bullied, and my sweetheart affronted—and now I suppose I am to be lectured again; you say I am not well, and bring my dinner up here.”

“No, Mr. Walter,” said the old man, gravely, “I must not do that. Sir, don’t you think as you are to be scolded, or the angel you love affronted; all that is over forever. There has been many a strange thing happened since you rode out of our stable last, but I wish you would go to the Colonel and let him tell you all; however, I suppose I may tell you so much as this, that your sweetheart is not Mary Bartley at all; she is Mr. Hope’s daughter.”

“What!” cried Walter, in utter amazement.

“There is no doubt about it, sir,” said the old man, “and I believe it is all out about you and her, but that would not matter, for the Colonel he takes it quite different from what you might think. He swears by her now. I don’t know really how that came about, sir, for I was not there, but when I was dressing the Colonel he said to me, ’John, she’s the grandest girl in England, and an honor to her sex, and there is not a drop of Bartley’s blood in her.’”

“Oh, he has found that out,” said Walter. “Then I’ll go to him like a bird, dear old fellow. So that is what he wanted to tell me.”

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“No,” said John Baker, gravely.

“No,” said Walter; “what then?”

“It’s trouble.”

“Trouble,” said Walter, puzzled.

“Ay, my poor young master,” said Baker, tenderly—“sore trouble, such trouble as a father’s heart won’t let me, or any man break to you, while he lives to do it. I know my master. Ever since that fellow Bartley came here we have seen the worst of him; now we shall see the best of him. Go to him, dear Master Walter. Don’t waste time in talking to old John Baker. Go to your father and your friend.”

Walter Clifford cast a look of wonder and alarm on the old man, and went down at once to the drawing-room. His father was standing by the fire. He came forward to him with both hands, and said,

“My son!”

“Father,” said Walter, in a whisper, “what is it?”

“Have you heard nothing?”

“Nothing but good news, father—that you approve my choice.”

“Ah, John told you that!”

“Yes, sir.”

“And did he tell you anything else?”

“No sir, only that some great misfortune is upon me, and that I have my father’s sympathy.”

“You have,” said the Colonel, “and would to God I had known the truth before. She is not Bartley’s daughter at all; she is Hope’s daughter. Her virtue shines in her face; she is noble, she is self-denying, she is just, she is brave; and no doubt she can account for her being at the Lake Hotel in company with some man or other. Whatever that lady says will be the truth. That’s not the trouble, Walter; all that has become small by comparison. But shall we ever see her sweet face again or hear her voice?”

“Father,” said Walter, trembling, “you terrify me. This sudden change in your voice that I never heard falter before; some great calamity must have happened. Tell me the worst at once.”

“Walter,” said the old man, “stand firm; do not despair, for there is hope.”

“Thank God for that, father! now tell me all.”

“Walter, there has been an explosion in the mine—a fearful explosion; the shaft has fallen in; there is no getting access to the mine, and all the poor souls confined there are in mortal peril. Those who are best acquainted with the mine do not think that many of them have been destroyed by the ruin, but they tell me these explosions let loose poisonous gases, and so now those poor souls are all exposed to three deadly perils—-choke-damp, fire-damp, and starvation.”

“It’s pitiable,” said Walter, “but surely this is a calamity to Bartley, and to the poor miners, but not to any one that I love, and that you have learnt to respect.”

“My son,” said the Colonel, solemnly, “the mine was fired by foul play.”

“Is it possible?”

“It is believed that some rival owner, or else some personal enemy of William Hope, bribed a villain to fire some part of the mine that Hope was inspecting.”

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“Great heavens!” said Walter, “can such villains exist? Poor, poor Mr. Hope: who would think he had an enemy in the world?”

“Alas!” said the Colonel, “that is not all. His daughter, it seems, over-heard the villain bribing the ruffian to commit this foul and terrible act, and she flew to the mine directly. She dispatched some miners to seize that hellish villain, and she went down the mine to save her father.”

“Ah!” said Walter, trembling all over.

“She has never been seen since.”

The Colonel’s head sank for a moment on his breast.

Walter groaned and turned pale.

“She came too late to save him; she came in time to share his fate.”

Walter sank into a chair, and a deadly pallor overspread his face, his forehead, and his very lips.

The Colonel rushed to the door and called for help, and in a moment John Baker and Mrs. Milton and Julia Clifford were round poor Walter’s chair with brandy and ether and salts, and every stimulant. He did not faint away; strong men very seldom do at any mere mental shock.

The color came slowly back to his cheeks and his pale lips, and his eyes began to fill with horror. The weeping women, and even the stout Colonel, viewed with anxiety his return to the full consciousness of his calamity. “Be brave,” cried Colonel Clifford; “be a soldier’s son; don’t despair; fight: nothing has been neglected. Even Bartley is playing the man; he has got another engine coming up, and another body of workmen to open the new shaft as well as the old one.”

“God bless him!” said Walter.

“And I have an experienced engineer on the road, and the things civilians always forget —tents and provisions of all sorts. We will set an army to work sooner than your sweetheart, poor girl, shall lose her life by any fault of ours.”

“My sweetheart,” cried Walter, starting suddenly from his chair. “There, don’t cling to me, women. No man shall head that army but I. My sweetheart! God help me—SHE’S MY WIFE.”

CHAPTER XXII.

REMORSE.

In a work of this kind not only the external incidents should be noticed, but also what may be called the mental events. We have seen a calamity produce a great revulsion in the feelings of Colonel Clifford; but as for Robert Bartley his very character was shaken to the foundation by his crime and its terrible consequences. He was now like a man who had glided down a soft sunny slope, and was suddenly arrested at the brink of a fathomless precipice. Bartley was cunning, selfish, avaricious, unscrupulous in reality, so long as he could appear respectable, but he was not violent, nor physically reckless, still less cruel. A deed of blood shocked him as much as it would shock an honest man. Yet now through following his natural bent too far, and yielding to the influence of a remorseless villain, he found his own hands stained with blood—the blood of a man who, after all, had been his best friend, and had led him to fortune; and the blood of an innocent girl who had not only been his pecuniary benefactress for a time, but had warmed and lighted his house with her beauty and affection.

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Busy men, whose views are all external, are even more apt than others to miss the knowledge of their own minds. This man, to whom everything was business, had taken for granted he did not actually love Grace Hope. Why, she was another man's child. But now he had lost her forever, he found he had mistaken his own feelings. He looked round his gloomy horizon and realized too late that he did love her; it was not a great and penetrating love like William Hope's; he was incapable of such a sentiment; but what affection he had to bestow, he had given to this sweet creature. His house was dark without her; he was desolate and alone, and, horrible to think of, the instrument of her assassination. This thought drove him to frenzy, and his frenzy took two forms, furious excitement and gloomy despair; this was now his life by night and day, for sleep deserted him. At the mine his measures were all wise, but his manner very wild; the very miners whispered amongst themselves that he was going mad. At home, on the contrary, he was gloomy, with sullen despair. He was in this latter condition the evening after the explosion, when a visitor was announced. Thinking it was some one from the mine, he said, faintly, "Admit him," and then his despondent head dropped on his breast; indeed, he was in a sort of lethargy, worn out with his labors, his remorse and his sleeplessness.

In that condition his ear was suddenly jarred by a hard, metallic voice, whose tone was somehow opposed to all the voices with which goodness and humanity have ever spoken.

"Well, governor, here's a slice of luck."

Bartley shivered. "Is that the devil speaking to me?" he muttered, without looking up.

"No," said Monckton, jauntily, "only one of his servants, and your best friend."

"My friend," said Bartley, turning his chair and looking at him with a sort of dull wonder.

"Ay," said Monckton, "your friend; the man that found you brains and resolution, and took you out of the hole, and put Hope and his daughter in it instead; no, not his daughter, she did that for us, she was so clever."

"Yes," said Bartley, wildly, "it was you who made me an assassin. But for you, I should only have been a knave; now I am a murderer—thanks to you."

"Come, governor," said Monckton, "no use looking at one side of the picture. You tried other things first. You made him liberal offers, you know; but he would have war to the knife, and he has got it. He is buried at the bottom of that shaft."

"God forbid!"

"And you are all right."

“I am in hell,” shrieked Bartley.

“Well, come out of it,” said Monckton, “and let’s talk sense. I—I read the news at Derby, just as I was starting for London. I have been as near the mine as I thought safe. They seem to be very busy clearing out both shafts—two steam-engines, constant relays of workmen. Who has got the job in hand?”

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“I have,” said Bartley.

“Well, that’s clever of you to throw dust in their eyes, and put our little game off your own shoulders. You want to save appearances? You know you can not save William Hope.”

“I can save him, and I will save him. God will have mercy on a penitent assassin, as he once had upon a penitent thief.”

Monckton stared at him and smiled.

“Who has been talking to you—the parson?”

“My own conscience. I abhor myself as much as I do you, you black villain.”

“Ah!” said Monckton, with a wicked glance, “that’s how a man patters before he splits upon his pals, to save his own skin. Now, look here, old man, before you split on me ask yourself who had the greatest interest in this job. You silenced a dangerous enemy, but what have I gained? you ought to square with me first, as you promised. If you split upon me before that, you will put yourself in the hole and leave me out of it.”

“Villain and fool!” said Bartley, “these trifles do not trouble me now. If Hope and my dear Mary are found dead in that mine, I’ll tell how they came by their death, and I’ll die by my own hand.”

Monckton said nothing, but looked at him keenly, and began at last to feel uneasy.

“A shaft is but a narrow thing,” Bartley rejoined; “why should they be buried alive? let’s get to them before they are starved to death. We may save them yet.”

“Why, you fool, they’ll denounce us!”

“What do I care? I would save them both to-night if I was to stand in the dock to-morrow.”

“And swing on the gallows next week, or end your days in a prison.”

“I’d take my chance,” said Bartley, desperately. “I’ll undo my crime if I can. No punishment can equal the agony I am in now, thanks to you, you villain.”

Then turning on him suddenly, and showing him the white of his eyes like a maniac, or a dangerous mastiff, he hissed out, “You think nothing of the lives of better men; perhaps you don’t value your own?”

“Oh, I beg your pardon,” said Monckton. “That’s a very different thing.”

“Oh, you do value your own foul life?”

“At any amount of money,” said Monckton.

“Then why do you risk it?”

“Excuse me, governor, that’s a thing I make a point of not doing. I risk my instruments, not my head, Ben Burnley to wit.”

“You are risking it now,” said Bartley, looking still more strangely at him.

“How so, pray?” said Monckton, getting a little uneasy, for this was not the Bartley he had known till then.

Bartley took the poker in his hand and proceeded to poke the fire; but somehow he did not look at the fire. He looked askant at Monckton, and he showed the white of his eyes more and more. Monckton kept his eye upon him and put his hand upon the handle of the door.

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“I’ll tell you,” said Bartley—“by coming here to tempt, provoke, and insult the wretch whose soul you destroyed, by forcing me to assassinate the best man and the sweetest girl in England, when there were vipers and villains about whom it’s a good action to sweep off God’s earth. Villain! I’ll teach you to come like a fool and madden a madman. I was only a rogue, you have made me a man of blood. All the worse for you. I have murdered *them*, I’ll execute *you*,” and with these words he bounded on him like a panther.

Monckton tore the doors open, and dashed out, but a furious blow fell before he was quite clear of the doorway. With such force was it delivered that the blunt metal cut into the edge of the door like a sword; the jamb was smashed, and even Monckton, who received but one-fourth of the blow, fell upon his hands and knees into the hall and was stunned for a moment, but fearing worse, staggered out of the hall door, which, luckily for him, was open, and darting into a little grove of shrubs, that was close by, grovelled there in silence, bleeding like a pig, and waiting for his chance to escape entirely; but the quaking reptile ran no further risk.

Bartley never followed him beyond his own room; he had been goaded into a maniacal impulse, and he returned to his gloomy sullenness.

* * * * *

Walter’s declaration, made so suddenly before four persons, startled them greatly for a moment—but only for a moment. Julia was the first to speak.

“We might have known it,” she said, “Mary Bartley is a young lady incapable of misconduct; she is prudence, virtue, delicacy, and purity in person; the man she was with at that place was sure to be her husband, and who should that be but Walter, whom she loved?”

Then the servants looked anxiously at their master to see how he took this startling revelation. Well, the Colonel stood firm as if he was at the head of a column in the field. He was not the man to retreat from any position, he said, “All we have to do is to save her; then my house and arms are open to my son’s wife.”

“God bless you, father!” cried Walter, in a broken voice; “and God bless you, dear cousin. Yes, it’s no time for words.” And he was gone in a moment.

“Now Milton,” said the Colonel, “he won’t sleep here till the work is done, and he won’t sleep at all if we don’t get a bed for him near the mine. You order the break out, and go to the Dun Cow and do what you can for him.”

“That I will, sir; I’ll take his own sheets and bedding with me. I won’t trust that woman—-she talks too much; and, if you please, sir, I’ll stay there a day or two myself, for maybe I

shall coax him to eat a morsel of my cooking, and to lie down a bit, when he would not listen to a stranger."

"You're a faithful creature," said the Colonel, rather aggressively, not choosing to break down, "so are you, John; and it is at these moments we find out our friends in the house; and, confound you, I forbid you both to snivel," said he, still louder. Then, more gravely, "How do we know? many a stormy day ends well; this calamity may bring happiness and peace to a divided house."

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Colonel Clifford prophesied right. Walter took the lead of a working gang and worked night and day, resting two hours only in the twenty-four, and even that with great reluctance. Outside the scene was one of bustle and animation. Little white tents, for the strange workmen to sleep in, dotted the green, and two snowy refreshment tents were pitched outside the Dun Cow. That establishment had large brick ovens and boilers, and the landlady, and the women she had got to help her, kept the tables always groaning under solid fare that never once flagged, being under the charge of that old campaigner, Colonel Clifford. The landlady tried to look sad at the occasion which called forth her energy and talents; but she was a woman of business, and her complacency oozed through her. Ah, it was not so at the pit mouth; the poor wives whose husbands were entombed below, alive or dead, hovered and fluttered about the two shafts with their aprons to their eyes, and eager with their questions. Deadly were their fears, their hopes fainter and fainter, as day after day went by, and both gangs, working in so narrow a space, made little progress, compared with their own desires, and the prayers of those who trembled for the result. It was a race and a struggle of two gallant parties, and a short description of it will be given; but as no new incidents happened for six days we shall preserve the chronological order of events, and now relate a daring project which was revived in that interval.

Monckton and Bartley were now enemies. Sin had united, crime and remorse had disunited them. Monckton registered a vow of future vengeance upon his late associate, but in the meantime, taking a survey of the present circumstances, he fell back upon a dark project he had conceived years ago on the very day when he was arrested for theft in Bartley's office.

Perhaps our readers, their memory disturbed by such a number of various matters as we have since presented to them, may have forgotten that project, but what is about to follow will tend to revive their recollection. Monckton then wired to Mrs. Braham's lawyer demanding an immediate interview with that lady; he specified the hour.

The lawyer went to her directly, the matter being delicate. He found her in great distress, and before he could open his communication she told him her trouble. She said that her husband, she feared, was going out of his mind; he groaned all night and never slept, and in the daytime never spoke.

There had been just then some surprising falls and rises in foreign securities, and the shrewd lawyer divined at once that the stock-broker had been doing business on his own account, and got pinched; so he said, "My dear madam, I suspect it is business on the Exchange; he will get over that, but there is something that is immediately pressing," and he then gave her Monckton's message.

Now her nerves were already excited, and this made matters worse. She cried and trembled, and became hysterical, and vowed she would never go near Leonard Monckton again; he had never loved her, had never been a friend to her as Jonathan

Braham had. “No,” said she; “if he wants money, take and sell my jewels; but I shall stay with my husband in his trouble.”

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“He is not your husband,” said the lawyer, quietly; “and this man is your husband, and things have come to my knowledge lately which it would be imprudent at present to disclose either to him or you; but we are old friends. You can not doubt that I have your interest at heart.”

“No, I don’t doubt that,” said Lucy, hastily, and held out her hand to him.

“Well, then,” said he, “be persuaded and meet the man.”

“No, I will not do that,” said she. “I am not a good woman, I know; but it is not for want of the wish. I will not play double any more.” And from that nothing he could say could move her.

The lawyer returned to his place, and when Monckton called next day he told him he was sorry to say Mr. Braham was ill and in trouble, and the lady couldn’t meet him. She would make any reasonable sacrifice for his convenience except that.

“And I,” said Monckton, “insist upon that, and nothing else.”

The lawyer endeavored to soften him, and hinted that he would advance money himself sooner than his client should be tormented.

But Monckton was inflexible. He said, “It is about a matter that she can not communicate to you, nor can I. However, I am obliged to you for your information. She won’t leave her stock-broker, eh? Well, then I know where to find her;” and he took up his hat to go.

“No, pray don’t do that,” said Mr. Middleton, earnestly. “Let me try her again. She has had time to sleep over it.”

“Try her,” said Monckton, sternly, “and if you are her friend, take her husband’s side in this one thing; it’s the last time I shall trouble her.”

“I am her friend,” said the lawyer. “And if you must know, I rather wish her to meet you and get it over. Will you come here again at five o’clock?”

“All right,” said Monckton.

Monckton was struck with lawyer Middleton’s manner, and went away puzzling over it.

“What’s *his* little game, I wonder?” said he.

The lawyer went post-haste to his client’s house. He found her in tears. She handed him an open letter.

Braham was utterly ruined, and besides that had done something or other he did not care to name; he was off to America, leaving her what money she could find in the house and the furniture, which he advised her to sell at once before others claimed it; in short, the man was wild with fear, and at present thought but little of anybody but himself.

Then the lawyer set himself to comfort her as well as he could, and renewed his request that she would give Monckton a meeting.

“Yes,” said she, wearily—“it is no use trying to resist *him*; he can come here.”

The lawyer demurred to that. “No,” said he, “keep your own counsel, don’t let him know you are deserted and ruined; make a favor of coming, but *come*: and a word in your ear—he can do more for you than Braham can, or will ever do again. So don’t you thwart him if you can help.”

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She was quick enough to see there was something weighty behind, and she consented. He took her back with him; only she was such a long time removing the traces of tears, and choosing the bonnet she thought she should look best in, that she made him twenty minutes late and rather cross. It is a way women have of souring that honeycomb, a man.

When the trio met at the office the husband was pale, the wife dull and sullen.

“It’s the last time I shall trouble you, Lucy,” said Monckton.

“As you please, Leonard.”

“And I want you to make my fortune.”

“You have only to tell me how.” (Quite incredulously.)

“You must accompany me to Derbyshire, or else meet me at Derby, whichever you please. Oh, don’t be alarmed. I don’t ask you to travel with me as man and wife.”

“It doesn’t much matter, I suppose,” said Lucy, doggedly.

“Well, you are accommodating; I’ll be considerate.”

“No doubt you will,” said Lucy; then turning her glorious eyes full upon him, “WHAT’S THE CRIME?”

“The crime!” said Monckton, looking all about the room to find it. “What crime?”

“The crime I’m wanted for; all your schemes are criminal, you know.”

“Well, you’re complimentary. It’s not a crime this time; it’s only a confession.”

“Ah! What am I to confess—bigamy?”

“The idea! No. You are to confess—in a distant part of England, what you can deny in London next day—that on a certain day you married a gentleman called Walter Clifford.”

“I’ll say that on the eleventh day of June, 1868, I married a gentleman who was called Walter Clifford.”

This was Lucy’s reply, and given very doggedly.

“Bravo! and will you stand to it if the real Walter Clifford says it is a lie?”

Lucy reflected. “No, I will not.”

“Well, well, we shall have time to talk about that: when can you start?”

“Give me three days.”

“All right.”

“You won’t keep me there long after I have done this wicked thing?”

“No, no. I will send you home with flying colors, and you shall have your share of the plunder.”

“I’d rather go into service again and work my fingers to the bone.”

“Since you have such a contempt for money, perhaps you’ll stand fifty pounds?”

“I have no money with me, but I’ll ask Mr. Middleton to advance me some.”

She opened the door, and asked one of the clerks if she could see the principal for a moment. He came to her directly. She then said to him, “He wants fifty pounds; could you let me have it for him?”

“Oh,” said the lawyer, cheerfully, “I shall be happy to lend Mr. Monckton fifty or a hundred pounds upon his own note of hand.”

They both stared at him a little; but a blank note of hand was immediately produced, drawn and signed at six months’ date for L52 10s., and the lawyer gave Monckton his check for L50. Husband and wife then parted for a time. Monckton telegraphed to his lodgings to say that his sister would come down with him for country air, and would require good accommodation, but would pay liberally.

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In most mining accidents the shafts are clear, and the debris that has to be picked through to get to the entombed miners is attacked with this advantage, that a great number of men have room to use their arms and pickaxes, and the stuff has not to be sent up to the surface. But in this horrible accident both gangs of workers were confined to a small area and small cages, and the stuff had to be sent up to the surface.

Bartley, who seemed to live only to rescue the sufferers by his own fault, provided miles of rope, and had small cages knocked together, so that the debris was continually coming up from both the shafts, and one great source of delay was averted. But the other fatal cause of delay remained, and so daylight came and went, and the stars appeared and disappeared with incredible rapidity to poor Walter and the other gallant workers, before they got within thirty feet of the pit: those who worked in the old shafts, having looser stuff to deal with, gained an advance of about seven feet upon the other working party, and this being reported to Walter he went down the other shaft to inspire the men by words and example. He had not been down two hours when one of the miners cried, “Hold hard, they are working up to us,” and work was instantly suspended for a moment. Then sure enough the sounds of pickaxes working below were just audible.

There was a roar of exultation from the rescuing party, and a man was sent up with his feet in a bucket, and clinging to a rope, to spread the joyful tidings; but the work was not intermitted for more than a moment, and in a few hours it became necessary to send the cage down and suspend the work to avoid another accident. The thin remaining crust gave way, the way was clear, lamps were sent down, and the saving party were soon in the mine, with a sight before them never to be forgotten.

The few men who stood erect with picks in their hands were men of rare endurance; and even they began to fall, exhausted with fatigue and hunger. Five times their number lay dotted about the mine, prostrated by privation, and some others, alas! were dead. None of the poor fellows were in a condition to give a rational answer, though Walter implored them to say where Hope was and his daughter. These poor pale wretches, the shadows of their former selves, were sent up in the cages with all expedition, and received by Bartley, who seemed to forget nothing, for he had refreshment tents ready at the pit mouth.

Meantime, Walter and others, whose hearts were with him, ran wildly through the works, and groped on their knees with their lamps to find Hope and his daughter, but they were not to be found, and nine miners beside them were missing, including Ben Burnley. Then Walter came wildly up to the surface, wringing his hands with agony, and crying, “they are lost! they are lost!”

“No,” cried Bartley, “they must not be lost; they shall not be lost. One man has come to himself. I gave him port-wine and brandy.” Then he dragged the young man into the

tent. There was stout Jim Davies propped up and held, but with a great tumbler of brandy and port in his hand.

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“Now, my man,” said, or rather screamed, Bartley, “tell him where Hope is, and Mary—-that I—Oh, God! oh, God!”

“Master,” said Jim, faintly, “I was in the hall with Mr. Hope and the lady when the first explosion came. Most of us ran past the old shaft and got clear. A few was caught by the falling shaft, for I looked back and saw it. But I never saw Master Hope among them. If he was, he is buried under the shaft; but I do really think that he was that taken up with his girl, and that darned villain that fired the mine, as he’s like to be in the hall either alive or dead.”

He could say no more, but fell into a sort of doze, the result of the powerful stimulant on his enfeebled frame and empty stomach. Then Bartley, with trembling hands, brought out a map of the mine and showed Walter where the second party had got to.

“See,” said he, “they are within twenty feet of the bottom, and the hall is twenty-three feet high. Hope measured it. Give up working downward, pick into the sides of that hall, for in that hall I see them at night; sometimes they are alive, sometimes they are dead, sometimes they are dying. I shall go mad, I shall go mad!”

With this he went raging about, giving the wildest orders, with the looks and tones of a madman. In a minute he had a cage ready for Walter, and twenty fresh-lit lamps, and down went Walter with more men and pickaxes. As soon as he got out of the cage he cried, wildly, “Stop that, men, and do as I do.”

He took a sweep with his pick, and delivered a horizontal blow at the clay on that side of the shaft Bartley had told him to attack. His pickaxe stuck in it, and he extricated it with difficulty.

“Nay, master,” cried a miner who had fallen in love with him, “drive thy pick at t’ coal.”

Walter then observed that above the clay there was a narrow seam of coal; he heaved his pick again, but instead of striking it half downward, as he ought to have done, he delivered a tremendous horizontal blow that made the coal ring like a church bell, and jarred his own stout arms so terribly that the pick fell out of his numbed hand.

Then the man who had advised him saw that he was disabled for a time, and stepped into his place.

But in that short interval an incident occurred so strange and thrilling that the stout miners uttered treble cries, like women, and then one mighty “Hah!” burst like a diapason from their manly bosoms.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BURIED ALIVE.—THE THREE DEADLY PERILS.

Seven miners were buried under the ruins of the shaft; but although masses of coal and clay fell into the hall from the side nearest to the explosions, and blocked up some of the passages, nobody was crushed to death there; only the smoke was so stifling that it seemed impossible to live.

That smoke was lighter than the air; its thick pall lifted by degrees and revealed three figures.

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Grace Hope, by happy instinct, had sunk upon the ground to breathe in that stifling smoke. Hope, who had collared Ben Burnley, had sunk to the ground with him, but still clutched the assassin. These were the three left alive in the hall, and this was their first struggle for life.

As soon as it was possible to speak Hope took up his lamp, which had fallen, and holding it up high, he cried, “Grace, my child, where are you?” She came to him directly; he took her in his arms and thanked God for this great preservation.

Then he gave Burnley a kick, and ordered him to the right hand of the hall. “You’ll keep to that side,” he said, “and think of what you have done; your victims will keep this side, and comfort each other till honest men undo your work, you villain.”

Burnley crouched, and wriggled away like a whipped hound, and flung himself down in bitter despair.

“Oh, papa,” said Grace, “we have escaped a great danger, but shall we ever see the light of day?”

“Of course we shall, child; be sure that great efforts will be made to save us. Miners have their faults, but leaving other men to perish is not one of them; there are no greater heroes in the world than those rough fellows, with all their faults. What you and I must do at once is to search for provisions and lamps and tools; if there are no poisonous gases set free, it is a mere question of time. My poor child has a hard life before her; but only live, and we shall be rescued.”

These brave words comforted Grace, as they were intended to do, and she accompanied her father down the one passage which was left open after the explosion. Fortunately this led to a new working, and before he had gone many yards Hope found a lamp that had been dropped by some miner who had rushed into the hall as the first warning came. Hope extinguished the light, and gave it to Grace.

“That will be twenty-four hours’ light to us,” said he; “but, oh, what I want to find is food. There must be some left behind.”

“Papa,” said Grace, “I think I saw a miner throw a bag into an empty truck when the first alarm was given.”

“Back! back! my child!” cried Hope, “before that villain finds it!”

He did not wait for her but ran back, and he found Ben Burnley in the neighborhood of that very truck: but Burnley sneaked off at his approach. Hope, looking into the truck, found treasures—a dozen new sacks, a heavy hammer, a small bag of nails, a can of tea, and a bag with a loaf in it, and several broken pieces of bread. He put his lamp out

directly, for he had lucifer-matches in his pocket, and he hid the bag of bread; then he lighted his lamp again and fastened it up by a nail in the centre of the hall.

“There,” said he to Burnley, “that’s to light us both equally; when it goes out you must hang up yours in its place.”

“That’s fair,” said Burnley, humbly.

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There were two trucks on Hope's side of the hall—the empty one in question, and one that was full of coal. Both stood about two yards from Hope's side of the hall. Hope turned the empty truck and brought it parallel to the other; then he nailed two sacks together, and fastened them to the coal truck and the debris; then he laid sacks upon the ground for Grace to lie on, and he kept two sacks for himself, and two in reserve, and he took two and threw them to Ben Burnley.

"I give you two, and I keep two myself," said he. "But my daughter shall have a room to herself even here; and if you molest her I'll brain you with this hammer."

"I don't want to molest her," said Burnley. "It ain't my fault she's here."

Then there was a gloomy silence, and well there might be. The one lamp, twinkling faintly against the wall, did but make darkness visible, and revealed the horror of this dismal scene. The weary hours began to crawl away, marked only by Hope's watch, for in this living tomb summer was winter, and day was night.

The horrors of entombment in a mine have, we think, been described better than any other calamity which befalls living men. Inspired by this subject novelists have gone beyond themselves, journalists have gone beyond themselves; and, without any affectation, we say we do not think we could go through the dismal scene before us in its general details without falling below many gifted contemporaries, and adding bulk without value to their descriptions. The true characteristic feature of *this* sad scene was not, we think, the alternations of hope and despair, nor the gradual sinking of frames exhausted by hunger and thirst, but the circumstance that here an assassin and his victims were involved in one terrible calamity; and as one day succeeded to another, and the hoped for rescue came not, the hatred of the assassin and his victims was sometimes at odds with the fellowship that sprang out of a joint calamity. About twelve hours after the explosion Burnley detected Hope and his daughter eating, and moistening their lips with the tea and a spoonful of brandy that Hope had poured into it out of his flask to keep it from turning sour.

"What, haven't you a morsel for me?" said the ruffian, in a piteous voice.

Hope gave a sort of snarl of contempt, but still he flung a crust to him as he would to a dog.

Then, after some slight hesitation, Grace rose quietly and took the smaller can, and tilled it with tea, and took it across to him.

"There," said she, "and may God forgive you."

He took it and stared at her.

“It ain’t my fault that you are here,” said he; but she put up her hand as much as to say, “No idle words.”

* * * * *

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Two whole days had now elapsed. The food, though economized, was all gone. Burnley's lamp was flickering, and utter darkness was about to be added to the horrors which were now beginning to chill the hopes with which these poor souls had entered on their dire probation. Hope took the alarm, seized the expiring lamp, trimmed it, and carried it down the one passage that was open. This time he did not confine his researches to the part where he could stand upright, but went on his hands and knees down the newest working. At the end of it he gave a shout of triumph, and in a few minutes returned to his daughter exhausted, and blackened all over with coal; but the lamp was now burning brightly in his hand, and round his neck was tied a can of oil.

"Oh, my poor father," said Grace, "is that all you have discovered?"

"Thank God for it," said Hope. "You little know what it would be to pass two more days here without light, as well as without food."

* * * * *

The next day was terrible. The violent pangs of hunger began to gnaw like vultures, and the thirst was still more intolerable; the pangs of hunger intermitted for hours at a time, and then returned to intermit again: they exhausted but did not infuriate; but the rage of thirst became incessant and maddening. Ben Burnley suffered the most from this, and the wretch came to Hope for consolation.

"Where's the sense of biding here," said he, "to be burned to deeth wi' drought? Let's flood the mine, and drink or be drooned."

"How can I flood the mine?" said Hope.

"Yow know best, maister," said the man. "Why, how many tons of water did ye draw from yon tank every day?"

"We conduct about five tons into a pit, and we send about five tons up to the surface daily."

"Then how much water will there be in the tank now?"

Hope looked at his watch and said, "There was a good deal of water in the tank when you blew up the mine; there must be about thirty tons in it now."

"Well, then," said Burnley, "you that knows everything, help me brust the wall o' tank; it's thin enow."

Hope reflected.

“If we let in the whole body of water,” said he, “it would shatter us to pieces, and crush us against the wall of our prison and drown us before it ran away through the obstructed passages into the new workings. Fortunately, we have no pickaxe, and can not be tempted to self-slaughter.”

This silenced Burnley for the day, and he remained sullenly apart; still the idea never left his mind. The next day, toward evening, he asked Hope to light his own lamp, and come and look at the wall of the tank.

“Not without me,” whispered Grace. “I see him cast looks of hatred at you.”

They went together, and Burnley bade Hope observe that the water was trickling through in places, a drop at a time; it could not penetrate the coaly veins, nor the streaks of clay, but it oozed through the porous strata, certain strips of blackish earth in particular, and it trickled down, a drop at a time. Hope looked at this feature with anxiety, for he was a man of science, and knew by the fate of banked reservoirs, great and small, the strange explosive power of a little water driven through strata by a great body pressing behind it.

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“You’ll see, it will brust itsen,” said Burnley, exultantly, “and the sooner the better for me; for I’ll never get alive out on t’ mine; yow blowed me to the men, and they’ll break every bone in my skin.”

Hope did not answer this directly.

“There, don’t go to meet trouble, my man,” said he. “Give me the can, Grace. Now, Burnley, hold this can, and catch every drop till it is full.”

“Why, it will take hauf a day to fill it,” objected Burnley, “and it will be hauf mud when all is done.”

“I’ll filter it,” said Hope. “You do as you are bid.”

He darted to a part of the mine where he had seen a piece of charred timber; he dragged it in with him, and asked Grace for a pocket-handkerchief; she gave him a clean cambric one. He took his pocket-knife and soon scraped off a little heap of charcoal; and then he sewed the handkerchief into a bag—for the handy man always carried a needle and thread.

Slowly, slowly the muddy water trickled into the little can, and then the bag being placed over the larger can, slowly, slowly the muddy water trickled through Hope’s filter, and dropped clear and drinkable into the larger can. In that dead life of theirs, with no incidents but torments and terrors, the hours passed swiftly in this experiment. Hope sat upon a great lump of coal, his daughter kneeled in front of him, gazing at him with love, confidence, reverence; and Burnley kneeled in front of him too, but at a greater distance, with wolfish eyes full of thirst and nothing else.

At last the little can was two-thirds full of clear water. Hope took the large iron spoon which he had found along with the tea, and gave a full spoonful to his daughter. “My child,” said he, “let it trickle very slowly over your tongue and down your throat; it is the throat and the adjacent organs which suffer most from thirst.” He then took a spoonful himself, not to drink after an assassin. He then gave a spoonful to Burnley with the same instructions, and rose from his seat and gave the can to Grace, and said, “The rest of this pittance must not be touched for six hours at least.”

Burnley, instead of complying with the wise advice given him, tossed the liquid down his throat with a gesture, and then dashing down the spoon, said, “I’ll have the rest on’t if I die for it,” and made a furious rush at Grace Hope.

She screamed faintly, and Hope met him full in that incautious rush, and felled him like a log with a single blow. Burnley lay there with his heels tapping the ground for a little while, then he got on his hands and knees, and crawled away to the farthest corner of his own place, and sat brooding.

That night when Grace retired to rest Hope lay down at her feet, with his hammer in his hand, and when one slept the other watched, for they feared an attack. Toward the morning of the next day Grace's quick senses heard a mysterious noise in Burnley's quarter; she woke her father. Directly he went to the place, and he found Burnley at work on his knees tearing away with his hands and nails at the ruins of the shaft. Apparently fury supplied the place of strength, for he had raised quite a large heap behind him, and he had laid bare the feet up to the knees of a dead miner. Hope reported this in a hushed voice to Grace, and said, solemnly, "Poor wretch, he's going mad, I fear."

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“Oh no,” said Grace, “that would be too horrible. Whatever should we do?”

“Keep him to his own side, that is all,” said Hope.

“But,” objected Grace in dismay, “if he is mad, he won’t listen, and he will come here and attack me.”

“If he does,” said Hope, simply, “I must kill him, that’s all.”

Burnley, however, in point of fact, kept more and more aloof for many hours; he never left his work till he laid bare the whole body of that miner, and found a pickaxe in his dead hand. This he hid, and reserved it for deadly uses; he was not clear in his mind whether to brain Hope with it, and so be revenged on him for having shut him up in that mine, or whether to peck a hole in the tank and destroy all three by a quicker death than thirst or starvation. The savage had another and more horrible reason for keeping out of sight; maddened by thirst he had recourse to that last extremity better men have been driven to; he made a cut with his clasp-knife in the breast of the dead miner, and tried to swallow jellied blood.

This horrible relief never lasts long, and the penalty follows in a few hours; but in the meantime the savage obtained relief, and even vigor, from this ghastly source, and seeing Hope and his daughter lying comparatively weak and exhausted, he came and sat down at a little distance in front of them: that was partly done to divert Hope from examining his shambles and his unnatural work.

“Maister,” said he, “how long have we been here?”

“Six days and more,” said Hope.

“Six days,” said Grace, faintly, for her powers were now quite exhausted—“and no signs of help, no hope of rescue.”

“Do not say so, Grace. Rescue in time is certain, and, therefore, while we live there is hope.”

“Ay,” said Burnley, “for you tew but not for me. Yow telt the men that I fired t’ mine, and if one of those men gets free they’ll all tear me limb from jacket. Why should I leave one grave to walk into another? But for yow I should have been away six days agone.”

“Man,” said Hope, “can not you see that my hand was but the instrument? it was the hand of Heaven that kept you back. Cease to blame your victims, and begin to see things as they are and to repent. Even if you escape, could the white faces ever fade from your sight, or the dying shrieks ever leave your ear, of the brave men you so foully murdered? Repent, monster, repent!”

Burnley was not touched, but he was scared by Hope's solemnity, and went to his own corner muttering, and as he crouched there there came over his dull brain what in due course follows the horrible meal he had made—a feverish frenzy.

In the meantime Grace, who had been lying half insensible, raised her head slowly and said, in a low voice, "Water, water!"

"Oh, my girl," said Hope, in despair, "I'll go and get enough to moisten your lips; but the last scrap of food has gone, the last drop of oil is burning away, and in an hour we shall be in darkness and despair."

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“No, no, father,” said Grace, “not while there is water there, beautiful water.”

“But you can not drink *that* unfiltered; it is foul, it is poisonous.”

“Not that, papa,” said Grace, “far beyond that—look! See that clear river sparkling in the sunlight; how bright and beautiful it shines! Look at the waving trees upon the other side, the green meadows and the bright blue sky, and there—there—there—are the great white swans. No, no. I forgot, they are not swans, they are ships sailing to the bright land you told me of, where there is no suffering and no sorrow.”

Then Hope, to his horror, began to see that this must be the very hallucination of which he had read, a sweet illusion of green fields and crystal water, which often precedes actual death by thirst and starvation. He trembled, he prayed secretly to God to spare her, and not to kill his new-found child, his darling, in his arms.

By-and-by Grace spoke again, but this time her senses were clear; “How dark it’s grown!” she said. “Ah, we are back again in that awful mine.” Then, with the patient fortitude of a woman when once she thinks the will of the Almighty is declared, she laid her hand upon his shoulder, and she said, soothingly, “Dear father, bow to Heaven’s will;” then she held up both her feeble arms to him—“kiss me, father—FOR WE ARE TO DIE!”

With these firm and patient words, she laid her sweet head upon the ground, and hoped and feared no more.

But the man could not bow like the woman. He kissed her as she bade him, and laid her gently down; but after that he sprang wildly to his feet in a frenzy, and raged aloud, as his daughter could no longer hear him. “No, no,” he cried, “this thing can not be, they have had seven days to get to us.

“Ah, but there are mountains and rocks of earth and coal piled up between us. We are buried alive in the bowels of the earth.

“Well, and shouldn’t I have blasted a hundred rocks, and picked through mountains, to save a hundred lives, or to save one such life as this, no matter whose child she was?

“Ah! you poor scum, you came to me whenever you wanted me, and you never came in vain. But now that I want you, you smoke your pipes, and walk calmly over this living tomb I lie in.

“Well, call yourselves men, and let your friends perish; I am a man, and I can die.”

Then he threw himself wildly on his knees over his insensible daughter.

“But my child! Oh God! look down upon my child! Do, pray, see the horror of it. The horror and the hellish injustice! She has but just found her father. She is just beginning life; it’s not her time to die! Why, you know, she only came here to save her father. Heaven’s blessing is the right of pious children; it’s promised in God’s Word. They are to live long upon earth, not to be cut off like criminals.”

Then he rose wildly, and raged about the place, flinging his arms on high, so that even Burnley, though his own reason was shaken, cowered away from the fury of a stronger mind.

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“Men and angels cry out against it!” he screamed, in madness and despair. “Can this thing be? Can Heaven and earth look calmly on and see this horror? Are men all ingratitude? IS GOD ALL APATHY?”

A blow like a hammer striking a church bell tinkled outside the wall, and seemed to come from a great distance.

To him who, like the rugged Elijah, had expostulated so boldly with his Maker, and his Maker, who is not to be irritated, forgave him, that blow seemed at first to ring from heaven. He stood still, and trembled like a leaf; he listened; the sound was not repeated.

“Ah,” said he, “it was an illusion like hers.”

* * * * *

But for all that he seized his hammer, and darted to the back of the hall, and mounting on a huge fragment of coal struck the seam high above his head. He gave two blows at longish intervals, and then three blows in quick succession.

Grace heard, and began to raise herself on her hands in wonder.

Outside the wall came two leisurely blows that seemed a mile off, though they were not ten feet, and then three blows in quick succession.

“My signal echoed,” yelled Hope. “Do you hear, child, my signal answered? Thank God! thank God! thank God!”

He fell on his knees and cried like a child. The next minute, burning with hope and joy, he was by Grace’s side, with his arms round her.

“You can’t give way now. Fight on a few minutes more. Death, I defy you; I am a father; I tear my child from your clutches.” With this he raised her in his arms with surprising vigor. It was Grace’s turn to shake off all weakness, under the great excitement of the brain.

“Yes, I’ll live,” she cried, “I’ll live for you. Oh, the gallant men! Hear, hear the pickaxes at work; an army is coming to our rescue, father; the God you doubted sends them, and some hero leads them.”

The words had scarcely left her lips when Hope set her down in fresh alarm. An enemy’s pickaxe was at work to destroy them; Burnley was picking furiously at the weak part of the tank, shrieking, “They will tear me to pieces; there is no hope in this world nor the next for me.”

“Madman,” cried Hope—“he’ll let the water in before they can save us.” He rushed at Burnley and seized him; but his frenzy was gone, and Burnley’s was upon him; after a short struggle Burnley flung him off with prodigious power. Hope flew at him again, but incautiously, and the savage lowering his head, drove it with such fury into Hope’s chest that he sent him to a distance, and laid him flat on his back utterly breathless. Grace flew to him and raised him.

He was not a man to lose his wits. “To the truck,” he gasped, “or we are lost.”

“I’ll flood the mine! I’ll flood the mine!” yelled Burnley.

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Hope made his daughter mount a large fragment of coal we have already mentioned, and from that she sprang to the truck, and with her excitement and with her athletic power she raised herself into the full truck, and even helped her father in after her. But just as she got him on to the truck, and while he was still only on his knees, that section of the wall we have called the tank rent and gaped under Burnley's pickaxe, and presently exploded about six feet from the ground, and a huge volume of water drove masses of earth and coal before it, and came roaring like a solid body straight at the coal truck, and drove it against the opposite wall, smashed the nearest side in, and would have thrown Grace off it like a feather, but Hope, kneeling and clinging to the side, held her like a vise.

Grace screamed violently. Immediately there was a roar of exultation outside from the hitherto silent workers; for that scream told that the *woman* was alive, too: the wife of the brave fellow who had won all their hearts and melted away the icy barrier of class.

Three gigantic waves struck the truck and made it quiver.

The first came half-way up; the second came full two-thirds; the third dashed the senseless body of Ben Burnley, with bleeding head and broken bones, against the very edge of the truck, then surged back with him into a whirling vortex.

Grace screamed continuously; she gave herself up now for lost; and the louder she screamed, the louder and the nearer the saving party shouted and hurrahed.

"No, do not fear," cried Hope; "you shall not die. Love is stronger than death."

The words were scarce out of his mouth when the point of a steel pick came clean through the stuff; another followed above it; then another, then another, and then another. Holes were made; then gaps, then larger gaps, then a mass of coal fell in; furious picks—a portion of the mine knocked away—and there stood in a red blaze of lamps held up, the gallant band roaring, shouting, working, led by a stalwart giant with bare arms, begrimed and bleeding, face smoked, hair and eyebrows black with coal-dust, and eyes flaming like red coals. He sprang with one fearless bound down to the coal-truck, and caught up his wife in his arms, and held her to his panting bosom. Ropes, ladder, everything—and they were saved; while the corpse of the assassin whirled round and round in the subsiding eddies of the black water, and as that water ran away into the mine, lay, coated with mud, at the feet of those who had saved his innocent victims.

CHAPTER XXIV.

STRANGE COMPLICATIONS.

Exert all the powers of your mind, and conceive, if you can, what that mother felt whose only son sickened, and, after racking her heart with hopes and fears, died before her eyes, and was placed in his coffin and carried to his rest. Yet One in the likeness of a man bade the bearers stand still, then, with a touch, made the coffin open, the dead come back, blooming with youth and health, and handed him to his mother.

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That picture no mortal mind can realize; but the effort will take you so far as this: you may imagine what Walter Clifford felt when, almost at the climax of despair, he received from that living tomb the good and beautiful creature who was the light of his eyes and the darling of his heart.

How he gloated on her! How he murmured words of comfort and joy over her as the cage carried her and Hope and him up again into the blessed sunshine! And there, what a burst of exultation and honest rapture received them!

Everybody was there. The news of Hope's signal had been wired to the surface. An old original telegraph had been set up by Colonel Clifford, and its arms set flying to tell him. That old campaigner was there, with his spring break and mattresses, and an able physician. Bartley was there, pale and old, and trembling, and crying. He fell on his knees before Hope and Grace. She drew back from him with repulsion; but he cried out, "No matter! no matter! They are saved! they are saved!"

Walter carried her to his father, and left Bartley kneeling. Then he dashed back for Hope, who did not move, and found him on his knees insensible. A piece of coal, driven by one of the men's picks, had struck him on the temple. The gallant fellow had tried to hide his hurt with his handkerchief, but the handkerchief was soaked with blood, and the man, exhausted by hunger, violent emotions, and this last blow, felt neither his trouble nor his joy. He was lifted with tender pity into the break, and the blood stanched, and stimulants applied by the doctor. But Grace would have his head on her bosom, and her hand in Walter's. Fortunately, the doctor was no other than that physician who had attended Colonel Clifford in his dangerous attack of internal gout. We say fortunately, for patients who have endured extremities of hunger have to be treated with very great skill and caution. Gentle stimulants and mucilages must precede solid food, and but a little of anything be taken at a time. Doctor Garner began his treatment in the very break. The first spoonful of egg and brandy told upon Grace Hope. Her deportment had been strange. She had seemed confused at times, and now and then she would cast a look of infinite tenderness upon Walter, and then again she would knit her brow and seem utterly puzzled.

But now she gave Walter a look that brought him nearer to her, and she said, with a heavenly smile, "You love me best; better than the other." Then she began to cry over her father.

"Better than the other," said Walter, aloud. "What other?"

"Be quiet," said the doctor. "Do you really think her stomach can be empty for six days, and her head be none the worse? Come, my dear, another spoonful. Good girl! Now et me look at you, Mr. Walter."

“Why, what is the matter with *him*?” said the Colonel. “I never saw him look better in all my life.”

“Indeed! Red spots on his cheek-bones, ditto on his temples, and his eyes glaring.”

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“Excitement and happiness,” said Walter.

The doctor took no notice of him. “He has been outraging nature,” said he, “and she will have her revenge. We are not out of the wood yet, Colonel Clifford, and you had better put them all three under my command.”

“I do, my good friend; I do,” said Colonel Clifford, eagerly. “It is your department, and I don’t believe in two commanders.”

They drew up at the great door of Clifford Hall. It seemed to open of itself, and there were all the servants drawn up in two lines.

They all showed eager sympathy, but only John Baker and Mrs. Milton ventured to express it. “God bless you all!” said Colonel Clifford. “But it is our turn now. They are all in the doctor’s hands. My whole household obey him to the letter. It is my order. Doctor Garner, this is Mrs. Milton, my housekeeper. You will find her a good lieutenant.”

“Mrs. Milton,” said the doctor, sharply, “warm baths in three rooms, and to bed with this lot. Carry Mr. Hope up; he is my first patient. Bring me eggs, milk, brandy, new port-wine. Cook!”

“Sir?”

“Hammer three chickens to pieces with your rolling-pin, then mince them; then chuck them into a big pot with cold water, stew them an hour, and then boil them to a jelly, strain, and serve. Meantime, send up three slices of mutton half raw; we will do a little chewing, not much.”

The patients submitted like lambs, only Walter grumbled a little, but at last confessed to a headache and sudden weariness.

Julia Clifford took special charge of Grace Hope, the doctor of William Hope, and Colonel Clifford sat by Walter, congratulating, soothing, and encouraging him, until he began to doze.

* * * * *

Doctor Garner’s estimate of his patients proved correct. The next day Walter was in a raging fever.

Hope remained in a pitiable state of weakness, and Grace, who in theory was the weaker vessel, began to assist Julia in nursing them both. To be sure, she was all whip-cord and steel beneath her delicate skin, and had always been active and temperate. And then she was much the youngest, and the constitutions of such women are anything but weak. Still, it was a most elastic recovery from a great shock.

But the more her body recovered its strength, and her brain its clearness, the more was her mind agitated and distressed.

Her first horrible anxiety was for Walter's life. The doctor showed no fear, but that might be his way.

It was a raging fever, with all the varieties that make fever terrible to behold. He was never left without two attendants; and as Hope was in no danger now, though pitiably weak and slowly convalescent, Grace was often one of Walter's nurses. So was Julia Clifford. He sometimes recognized them for a little while, and filled their loving hearts with hope. But the next moment he was off into

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the world of illusions, and sometimes could not see them. Often he asked for Grace most piteously when she was looking at him through her tears, and trying hard to win him to her with her voice. On these occasions he always called her Mary. One unlucky day that Grace and Julia were his only attendants he became very restless and wild, said he had committed a great crime, and the scaffold was being prepared for him. “Hark!” said he; “don’t you hear the workmen? Curse their hammers; their eternal tip-tapping goes through my brain. The scaffold! What would the old man say? A Clifford hung! Never! I’ll save him and myself from that.”

Then he sprang out of bed and made a rush at the window. It was open, unluckily, and he had actually got his knee through when Grace darted to him and seized him, screaming to Julia to help her. Julia did her best, especially in the way of screaming. Grace’s muscle and resolution impeded the attempt no more; slowly, gradually, he got both knees upon the window-sill. But the delay was everything. In came a professional nurse. She flung her arms round Walter’s waist and just hung back with all her weight. As she was heavy, though not corpulent, his more active strength became quite valueless; weight and position defeated him hopelessly; and at last he sank exhausted into the nurse’s arms, and she and Grace carried him to bed like a child.

Of course, when it was all over, half a dozen people came to the rescue. The woman told what had happened, the doctor administered a soothing draught, the patient became very quiet, then perspired a little, then went to sleep, and the cheerful doctor declared that he would be all the better for what he called this little outbreak. But Grace sat there quivering for hours, and Colonel Clifford installed two new nurses that very evening. They were pensioners of his—soldiers who had been invalided from wounds, but had long recovered, and were neither of them much above forty. They had some experience, and proved admirable nurses—quiet, silent, vigilant as sentinels.

That burst of delirium was the climax. Walter began to get better after that. But a long period of convalescence was before him; and the doctor warned them that convalescence has its very serious dangers, and that they must be very careful, and, above all, not irritate nor even excite him.

All this time torments of another kind had been overpowered but never suppressed in poor Grace’s mind; and these now became greater as Walter’s danger grew less and less.

What would be the end of all this? Here she was installed, to her amazement, in Clifford Hall, as Walter’s wife, and treated, all of a sudden, with marked affection and respect by Colonel Clifford, who had hitherto seemed to abhor her. But it was all an illusion; the whole house of cards must come tumbling down some day.

Some days before the event last described Hope had said to her,

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“My child, this is no place for you and me.”

“No more it is, papa,” said Grace. “I know that too well.”

“Then why did you let them bring us here?”

“Papa,” said Grace, “I forgot all about *that*.”

“Forgot it!”

“It seems incredible, does it not? But what I saw and felt thrust what I had only heard out of my mind. Oh, papa! you were insensible, poor dear; but if you had only seen Walter Clifford when he saved us! I took him for some giant miner. He seemed ever so much bigger than the gentleman I loved—ay, and I shall love him to my dying day, whether or not he has—But when he sprang to my side, and took me with his bare, bleeding arms to his heart, that panted so, I thought his heart would burst, and mine, too, could I feel another woman between us. All that might be true, but it was unreal. That he loved me, and had saved me, *that* was real. And when we sat together in the carriage, your poor bleeding head upon my bosom, and his hand grasping mine, and his sweet eyes beaming with love and joy, what could I realize except my father’s danger and my husband’s mighty love? I was all present anxiety and present bliss. His sin and my alarms seemed hundreds of miles off, and doubtful. And even since I have been here, see how greater and nearer things have overpowered me. Your deadly weakness—you, who were strong, poor dear—oh, let me kiss you, dear darling—till you had saved your child; Walter’s terrible danger. Oh, my dear father, spare me. How can a poor, weak woman think of such different woes, and realize and suffer them all at once? Spare me, dear father, spare me! Let me see you stronger; let me see *him* safe, and then let us think of that other cruel thing, and what we ought to say to Colonel Clifford, and what we ought to do, and where we are to go.”

“My poor child,” said Hope, faintly, with tears in his eyes, “I say no more. Take your own time.”

Grace did not abuse this respite. So soon as the doctor declared Walter out of immediate danger, and indeed safe, if cautiously treated, she returned of her own accord to the miserable subject that had been thrust aside.

After some discussion, they both agreed that they must now confide their grief to Colonel Clifford, and must quit his home, and make him master of the situation, and sole depository of the terrible secret for a time.

Hope wished to make the revelation, and spare his daughter that pain. She assented readily and thankfully.

This was a woman’s first impulse—to put a man forward.

But by-and-by she had one of her fits of hard thinking, and saw that such a revelation ought not to be made by one straightforward man to another, but with all a woman's soothing ways. Besides, she had already discovered that the Colonel had a great esteem and growing affection for her; and, in short, she felt that if the blow could be softened by anybody, it was by her.

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Her father objected that she would encounter a terrible trial, from which he could save her; but she entreated him, and he yielded to her entreaty, though against his judgment.

When this was settled, nothing remained but to execute it.

Then the woman came uppermost, and Grace procrastinated for one insufficient reason and another.

However, at last she resolved that the very next day she would ask John Baker to get her a private interview with Colonel Clifford in his study.

This resolution had not been long formed when that very John Baker tapped at Mr. Hope's door, and brought her a note from Colonel Clifford asking her if she could favor him with a visit in his study.

Grace said, "Yes, Mr. Baker, I will come directly."

As soon as Baker was gone she began to bemoan her weak procrastination, and begged her father's pardon for her presumption in taking the matter out of his hands. "You would not have put it off a day. Now, see what I have done by my cowardice."

Hope did not see what she had done, and the quick-witted young lady jumping at once at a conclusion, opened her eyes and said,

"Why, don't you see? Some other person has told him what it was so important he should hear first from me. Ah! it is the same gentleman that came and warned me. He has heard that we are actually married, for it is the talk of the place, and he told me she would punish him if he neglected her warning. Oh, what shall I do?"

"You go too fast, Grace, dear. Don't run before trouble like that. Come, go to Colonel Clifford, and you will find it is nothing of the kind."

Grace shook her head grandly. Experience had given her faith in her own instincts, as people call them—though they are subtle reasonings the steps of which are not put forward—and she went down to the study.

"Grace, my dear," said the Colonel, "I think I shall have a fit of the gout."

"Oh no," said Grace. "We have trouble enough."

"It gets less every day, my dear; that is one comfort. But what I meant was that our poor invalids eclipse me entirely in your good graces. That is because you are a true woman, and an honor to your sex. But I should like to see a little more of you. Well, all in good time. I didn't send for you to tell you that. Sit down, my girl; it is a matter of business."

Grace sat down, keenly on her guard, though she did not show it in the least. Colonel Clifford resumed,

“You may be sure that nothing has been near my heart for some time but your danger and my dear son’s. Still, I owe something to other sufferers, and the poor widows whose husbands have perished in that mine have cried to me for vengeance on the person who bribed that Burnley. I am a magistrate, too, and duty must never be neglected. I have got detectives about, and I have offered five hundred guineas reward for the discovery of the villain. One Jem Davies

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described him to me, and I put the description on the placard and in the papers. But now I learn that Davies's description is all second-hand. He had it from you. Now, I must tell you that a description at second-hand always misses some part or other. As a magistrate, I never encourage Jack to tell me what Jill says when I can get hold of Jill. You are Jill, my dear, so now please verify Jack's description or correct it. However, the best way will be to give me your own description before I read you his."

"I will," said Grace, very much relieved. "Well, then, he was a man not over forty, thin, and with bony fingers; an enormous gold ring on the little finger of his right hand. He wore a suit of tweed, all one color, rather tight, and a vulgar neck-handkerchief, almost crimson. He had a face like a corpse, and very thin lips. But the most remarkable things were his eyes and his eyebrows. His eyes were never still, and his brows were very black, and not shaped like other people's; they were neither straight, like Julia Clifford's, for instance, nor arched like Walter's; that is to say, they were arched, but all on one side. Each brow began quite high up on the temple, and then came down in a slanting drop to the bridge of the nose, and lower than the bridge. There, if you will give me a pencil I will draw you one of his eyebrows in a minute."

She drew the eyebrow with masterly ease and rapidity.

"Why, that is the eyebrow of Mephistopheles."

"And so it is," said Grace, naively. "No wonder it did not seem human to me."

"I am sorry to say it is human. You can see it in every convict jail. But," said he, "how came this villain to sit to you for his portrait?"

"He did not, sir. But when he was struggling with me to keep me from rescuing my father—"

"What! did the ruffian lay hands on you?"

"That he did, and so did Mr. Bartley. But the villain was the leader of it all; and while he was struggling with me—"

"You were taking stock of him? Well, they talk of a Jew's eye; give me a woman's. My dear, the second-hand description is not worth a button. I must write fresh notices from yours, and, above all, instruct the detectives. You have given me information that will lead to that man's capture. As for the gold ring and the tweed suit, they disappeared into space when my placard went up, you may be sure of that, and a felon can paint his face. But his eyes and eyebrows will do him. They are the mark of a jail-bird. I am a visiting justice, and have often noticed the peculiarity. Draw me his eyebrows, and we

will photograph them in Derby; and my detectives shall send copies to Scotland Yard and all the convict prisons. We'll have him."

The Colonel paused suddenly in his triumphant prediction, and said, "But what was that you let fall about Bartley? He was no party to this foul crime. Why, he has worked night and day to save you and Hope. Indeed, you both owe your lives to him."

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“Indeed!”

“Yes. He set the men on to save you within ten minutes of the explosion. He bought rope by the mile, and great iron buckets to carry up the debris that was heaped up between you and the working party. He raved about the pit day and night lamenting his daughter and his friend; and why I say he saved you, ’twas he who advised Walter. I had this from Walter himself before his fever came on. He advised and implored him not to attempt to clear the whole shaft, but to pick sideways into the mine twenty feet from the ground. He told Walter that he never really slept at night, and in his dreams saw you in a part of the mine he calls the hall. Now, Walter says that but for this advice they would have been two days more getting to you.”

“We should have been dead,” said Grace, gravely. Then she reflected.

“Colonel Clifford,” said she, “I listened to that villain and Mr. Bartley planning my father’s destruction. Certainly every word Mr. Bartley *said* was against it. He spoke of it with horror. Yet, somehow or other, that wretched man obtained from him an order to send the man Burnley down the mine, and what will you think when I tell you that he assisted the villain to hinder me from going to the mine?” Then she told him the whole scene, and how they shut her up in the house, and she had to go down a curtain and burst through a quick-set hedge. But all the time she was thinking of Walter’s bigamy and how she was to reveal it; and she related her exploits in such a cold, languid manner that it was hardly possible to believe them.

Colonel Clifford could not help saying, “My dear, you have had a great shock; and you have dreamt all this. Certainly you are a fine girl, and broad-shouldered. I admire that in man or woman—but you are so delicate, so refined, so gentle.”

Grace blushed and said, languidly, “For all that, I am an athlete.”

“An athlete, child?”

“Yes, sir. Mr. Bartley took care of that. He would never let me wear a corset, and for years he made me do calisthenics under a master.”

“Calisthenics?”

“That is a fine word for gymnastics.” Then, with a double dose of languor, “I can go up a loose rope forty feet, so it was nothing to me to come down one. The hedge was the worst thing; but my father was in danger, and my blood was up.” She turned suddenly on the Colonel with a flash of animation, “You used to keep race-horses, Walter told me.” The Colonel stared at this sudden turn.

“That I did,” said he, “and a pretty penny they cost me.”

“Well, sir, is not a race-horse a poor mincing thing until her blood gets up galloping?”

“By Jove! you are right,” said he, “she steps like a cat upon hot bricks. But the comparison is not needed. Whatever statement Mrs. Walter Clifford makes to me seriously is gospel to me, who already know enough of her to respect her lightest word. Pray grant me this much, that Bartley is a true penitent, for I have proof of it in this drawer. I’ll show it you.”

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“No, no, please not,” said Grace, in no little agitation. “Let me take your word for that, as you have taken mine. Oh, sir, he is nothing to me compared with what I thought you wished to say to me. But it is I who must find the courage to say things that will wound you and me still more. Colonel Clifford, pray do not be angry with me till you know all, but indeed your house is not the place for my father or for me.”

“Why not, madam,” said the Colonel, stiffly, “since you are my daughter-in-law?”

She did not reply.

“Ah!” said he, coloring high and rising from his chair. He began to walk the room in some agitation. “You are right,” said he; “I once affronted you cruelly, unpardonably. Still, pray consider that you passed for Bartley’s daughter; that was my objection to you, and then I did not know your character. But when I saw you come out pale and resolved to sacrifice yourself to justice and another woman, that converted me at once. Ask Julia what I said about you.”

“I must interrupt you,” said Grace. “I can not let such a man as you excuse yourself to a girl of eighteen who has nothing but reverence for you, and would love you if she dared.”

“Then all I can say is that you are very mysterious, my dear, and I wish you would speak out.”

“I shall speak out soon enough,” said Grace, solemnly, “now I have begun. Colonel Clifford, you have nothing to reproach yourself with. No more have I, for that matter. Yet we must both suffer.” She hesitated a moment, and then said, firmly, “You do me the honor to approve my conduct in that dreadful situation. Did you hear all that passed? did you take notice of all I said?”

“I did,” said Colonel Clifford. “I shall never forget that scene, nor the distress, nor the fortitude of her I am proud to call my daughter.”

Grace put her hands before her face at these kind words, and he saw the tears trickle between her white fingers. He began to wonder, and to feel uneasy. But the brave girl shook off her tears, and manned herself, if we may use such an expression.

“Then, sir,” said she, slowly and emphatically, though quietly, “did you not think it strange that I should say to my father, ’I don’t know?’ He asked me before you all, ‘Are you a wife?’ Twice I said to my father—to him I thought was my father—’I don’t know.’ Can you account for that, sir?”

The Colonel replied, “I was so unable to account for it that I took Julia Clifford’s opinion on it directly, as we were going home.”

“And what did she say?”

“Oh, she said it was plain enough. The fellow had forbidden you to own the marriage, and you were an obedient wife; and, like women in general, strong against other people, but weak against one.”

“So that is a woman’s reading of a woman,” said Grace. “She will sacrifice her honor, and her father’s respect, and court the world’s contempt, and sully herself for life, to suit the convenience of a husband for a few hours. My love is great, but it is not slavish or silly. Do you think, sir, that I doubted for one moment Walter Clifford would own me when he came home and heard what I had suffered? Did I think him so unworthy of my love as to leave me under that stigma? Hardly. Then why should I blacken Mrs. Walter Clifford for an afternoon, just to be unblackened at night?”

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“This is good sense,” said the Colonel, “and the thing is a mystery. Can you solve it?”

“You may be sure I can—and woe is me—I must.”

She hung her head, and her hands worked convulsively.

“Sir,” said she, after a pause, “suppose I could not tell the truth to all those people without subjecting the man I loved—and I love him now dearer than ever—to a terrible punishment for a mere folly done years ago, which now has become something much worse than folly—but how? Through his unhappy love for me!”

“These are dark words,” said the Colonel. “How am I to understand them?”

“Dark as they are,” said Grace, “do they not explain my conduct in that bitter trial better than Julia Clifford’s guesses do, better than anything that has occurred since?”

“Mrs. Walter Clifford,” said the Colonel, with a certain awe, “I see there is something very grave here, and that it affects my son. I begin to know you. You waited till he was out of danger; but now you do me the honor to confide something to me which the world will not drag out of you. So be it; I am a man and a soldier. I have faced cavalry, and I can face the truth. What is it?”

“Colonel Clifford,” said Grace, trembling like a leaf, “the truth will cut you to the heart, and will most likely kill me. Now that I have gone so far, you may well say, ‘Tell it me;’ but the words once past my lips can never be recalled. Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?”

The struggle overpowered her, and almost for the first time in her life she turned half faint and yet hysterical; and such was her condition that the brave Colonel was downright alarmed, and rang hastily for his people. He committed her to the charge of Mrs. Milton. It seemed cruel to demand any further explanation from her just then; so brave a girl, who had gone so far with him, would be sure to tell him sooner or later. Meantime he sat sombre and agitated, oppressed by a strange sense of awe and mystery, and vague misgiving. While he brooded thus, a footman brought him in a card upon a salver: “The Reverend Alleyn Meredith.” “Do I know this gentleman?” said the Colonel.

“I think not, sir,” said the footman.

“What is he like?”

“Like a beneficed clergyman, sir.”

Colonel Clifford was not in the humor for company; but it was not his habit to say not at home when he was at home; and being a magistrate, he never knew when a stranger

sent in his card, that it might not be his duty to see him; so he told the footman to say, “that he was in point of fact engaged, but was at this gentleman’s service for a few minutes.”

The footman retired, and promptly ushered in a clergyman who seemed the model of an archdeacon or a wealthy rector. Sleek and plump, without corpulence, neat boots, clothes black and glossy, waistcoat up to the throat, neat black gloves, a snowy tie, a face shaven like an egg, hair and eyebrows grizzled, cheeks rubicund, but not empurpled, as one who drank only his pint of port, but drank it seven days in the week.

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Nevertheless, between you and us, this sleek, rosy personage, archdeacon or rural dean down to the ground was Leonard Monckton, padded to the nine, and tinted as artistically as any canvas in the world.

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The first visit Monckton had paid to this neighborhood was to the mine. He knew that was a dangerous visit, so he came at night as a decrepit old man. He very soon saw two things which discouraged farther visits. One was a placard describing his crime in a few words, and also his person and clothes, and offering 500 guineas reward. As his pallor was specified, he retired for a minute behind a tent, and emerged the color of mahogany; he then pursued his observations, and in due course fell in with the second warning. This was the body of a man lying upon the slack at the pit mouth; the slack not having been added to for many days was glowing very hot, and fired the night. The body he recognized immediately, for the white face stared at him; it was Ben Burnley undergoing cremation. To this the vindictive miners had condemned him; they had sat on his body and passed a resolution, and sworn he should not have Christian burial, so they managed to hide his corpse till the slack got low, and then they brought him up at night and chucked him like a dog on to the smouldering coal; one-half of him was charred away when Monckton found him, but his face was yet untouched. Two sturdy miners walked to and fro as sentinels, armed with hammers, and firmly resolved that neither law nor gospel should interfere with this horrible example.

Even Monckton, the man of iron nerves, started back with a cry of dismay at the sight and the smell.

One of the miners broke into a hoarse, uneasy laugh. “Yow needn’t to skirl, old man.” he cried. “Yon’s not a man; he’s nobbut a murderer. He’s fired t’ mine and made widows and orphans by t’ score,” “Ay,” said the other, “but there’s a worse villain behoind, that found t’ brass for t’ job and tempted this one. We’ll catch him yet; ah, then we’ll not trouble judge, nor jury, nor hangman neether.”

“The wretches!” said Monckton. “What! fire a mine! No punishment is enough for them.” With this sentiment he retired, and never went near the mine again. He wired for a pal of his and established him at the Dun Cow. These two were in constant communication. Monckton’s friend was a very clever gossip, and knew how to question without seeming curious, and the gossiping landlady helped him. So, between them, Monckton heard that Walter was down with a fever and not expected to live, and that Hope was confined to his bed and believed to be sinking. Encouraged by this state of things, Monckton made many artful preparations, and resolved to levy a contribution upon Colonel Clifford.

At this period of his manoeuvres fortune certainly befriended him wonderfully; he found Colonel Clifford alone, and likely to be alone; and, at the same time, prepared by Grace

Clifford's half revelation, and violent agitation, to believe the artful tale this villain came to tell him.

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CHAPTER XXV.

RETRIBUTION.

Monckton, during his long imprisonment at Dartmoor, came under many chaplains, and he was popular with them all; because when they inquired into the state of his soul he represented it as humble, penitent, and purified. Two of these gentlemen were High-Church, and he noticed their peculiarities: one was a certain half-musical monotony in speaking which might be called by a severe critic sing-song. Perhaps they thought the intoning of the service in a cathedral could be transferred with advantage to conversation.

So now, to be strictly in character, this personage not only dressed High-Church, but threw a sweet musical monotony into the communication he made to Colonel Clifford.

And if the reader will compare this his method of speaking with the matter of his discourse, he will be sensible of a singular contrast.

After the first introduction, Monckton intoned very gently that he had a communication to make on the part of a lady which was painful to him, and would be painful to Colonel Clifford; but, at all events, it was confidential, and if the Colonel thought proper, would go no further.

“I think, sir, you have a son whose name is Walter?”

“I have a son, and his name is Walter,” said the Colonel, stiffly.

“I think, sir,” said musical Monckton, “that he left your house about fourteen years ago, and you lost sight of him for a time?”

“That is so, sir.”

“He entered the service of a Mr. Robert Bartley as a merchant’s clerk.”

“I doubt that, sir.”

“I fear, sir,” sighed Monckton, musically, “that is not the only thing he did which has been withheld from you. He married a lady called Lucy Muller.”

“Who told you that?” cried the Colonel. “It’s a lie!”

“I am afraid not,” said the meek and tuneful ecclesiastic. “I am acquainted with the lady, a most respectable person, and she has shown me the certificate of marriage.”

“The certificate of marriage!” cried the Colonel, all aghast.

“Yes, sir, and this is not the first time I have given this information in confidence. Mrs. Walter Clifford, who is a kind-hearted woman, and has long ceased to suffer bitterly from her husband’s desertion, requested me to warn a young lady, whose name was Miss Mary Bartley, of this fact. I did so, and showed her the certificate. She was very much distressed, and no wonder, for she was reported to be engaged to Mr. Walter Clifford; but I explained to Miss Bartley that there was no jealousy, hostility, or bitterness in the matter; the only object was to save her from being betrayed into an illegal act, and one that would bring ruin upon herself, and a severe penalty upon Mr. Walter Clifford.”

Colonel Clifford turned very pale, but he merely said, in a hoarse voice, “Go on, sir.”

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“Well, sir,” said Monckton, “I thought the matter was at an end, and, having discharged a commission which was very unpleasant to me, I had at all events saved an innocent girl from tempting Mr. Walter Clifford to his destruction and ruining herself. I say, I thought and hoped so. But it seems now that the young lady has defied the warning, and has married your son after all. Mrs. Walter Clifford has heard of it in Derby, and she is naturally surprised, and I am afraid she is now somewhat incensed.”

“Before we go any further, sir,” said Colonel Clifford, “I should like to see the certificate you say you showed to Miss Bartley.”

“I did, sir,” said Monckton, “and here it is—that is to say, an attested copy; but of course sooner or later you will examine the original.”

Colonel Clifford took the paper with a firm hand, and examined it closely. “Have you any objection to my taking a copy of this?” said he, keenly.

“Of course not,” said Monckton; “indeed, I don’t see why I should not leave this document with you; it will be in honorable hands.”

The Colonel bowed. Then he examined the document.

“I see, sir,” said he, “the witness is William Hope. May I ask if you know this William Hope?”

“I was not present at the wedding, sir,” said Monckton, “so I can say nothing about the matter from my own knowledge; but if you please, I will ask the lady.”

“Why didn’t she come herself instead of sending you?” asked the Colonel, distrustfully.

“That’s just what I asked her. And she said she had not the heart nor the courage to come herself. I believe she thought as I was a clergyman, and not directly interested, I might be more calm than she could be, and give a little less pain.”

“That’s all stuff! If she is afraid to come herself, she knows it’s an abominable falsehood. Bring her here with whatever evidence she has got that this Walter Clifford is my son, and then we will go into this matter seriously.”

Monckton was equal to the occasion.

“You are quite right, sir,” said he. “And what business has she to put me forward as evidence of a transaction I never witnessed? I shall tell her you expect to see her, and that it is her duty to clear up the affair in person. Suppose it should be another Mr. Walter Clifford, after all? When shall I bring her, supposing I have sufficient influence?”

“Bring her to-morrow, as early as you can.”

“Well, you know ladies are not early risers: will twelve o’clock do?”

“Twelve o’clock to-morrow, sir,” said the Colonel.

The sham parson took his leave, and drove away in a well-appointed carriage and pair. For we must inform the reader that he had written to Mr. Middleton for another L100, not much expecting to get it, and that it had come down by return of post in a draft on a bank in Derby.

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Stout Colonel Clifford was now a very unhappy man. The soul of honor himself, he could not fully believe that his own son had been guilty of perfidy and crime. But how could he escape *doubts*, and very grave doubts too? The communication was made by a gentleman who did not seem really to know more about it than he had been told, but then he was a clergyman, with no appearance of heat or partiality. He had been easily convinced that the lady herself ought to have come and said more about it, and had left an attested copy of the certificate in his (Colonel Clifford's) hands with a sort of simplicity that looked like one gentleman dealing with another. One thing, however, puzzled him sore in this certificate—the witness being William Hope. William Hope was not a very uncommon name, but still, somehow, that one and the same document should contain the names of Walter Clifford and William Hope, roused a suspicion in his mind that this witness was the William Hope lying in his own house so weak and ill that he did not like to go to him, and enter upon such a terrible discussion as this. He sent for Mrs. Milton, and asked her if Mrs. Walter Clifford was quite recovered.

Mrs. Milton reported she was quite well, and reading to her father. The Colonel went upstairs and beckoned her out.

"My child," said he, "I am sorry to renew an agitating subject, but you are a good girl, and a brave girl, and you mean to confide in me sooner or later. Can you pity the agitation and distress of a father who for the first time is compelled to doubt his son's honor?"

"I can," said Grace. "Ah, something has happened since we parted; somebody has told you: that man with a certificate!"

"What, then," said the Colonel, "is it really true? Did he really show you that certificate?"

"He did."

"And warned you not to marry Walter?"

"He did, and told me Walter would be put into prison if I did, and would die in prison, for a gentleman can not live there nowadays. Oh, sir, don't let anybody know but you and me and my father. He won't hurt him for my sake; he has wronged me cruelly, but I'll be torn to pieces before I'll own my marriage, and throw him into a dungeon."

"Come to my arms, you pearl of goodness and nobility and unselfish love!" cried Colonel Clifford. "How can I ever part with you now I know you? There, don't let us despair, let's fight to the last. I have one question to submit to you. Of course you examined the certificate very carefully?"

"I saw enough to break my heart. I saw that on a certain day, many years ago, one Lucy Muller had married Walter Clifford."

“And who witnessed the marriage?” asked the Colonel, eyeing her keenly.

“Oh, I don’t know that,” said Grace. “When I came to Walter Clifford, everything swam before my eyes; it was all I could do to keep from fainting away. I tottered into my father’s study, and, as soon as I came to myself, what had I to do? Why, to creep out again with my broken heart, and face such insults—All! it is a wonder I did not fall dead at their feet.”

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“My poor girl!” said Colonel Clifford. Then he reflected a moment. “Have you the courage to read that document again, and to observe in particular who witnessed it?”

“I have,” said she.

He handed it to her. She took it and held it in both hands, though they trembled.

“Who is the witness?”

“The witness,” said Grace, “is William Hope.”

“Is that your father?”

“It’s my father’s name,” said Grace, beginning to turn her eyes inward and think very hard.

“But is it your father, do you think?”

“No, sir, it is not.”

“Was he in that part of the world at the time? Did he know Bartley? the clergyman who brought me this certificate—”

“The clergyman!”

“Yes, my dear, it was a clergyman, apparently a rector, and he told me—”

“Are you sure he was a clergyman?”

“Quite sure; he had a white tie, a broad-brimmed hat, a clergyman all over; don’t go off on that. Did your father and my son know each other in Hull?”

“That they did. You are right,” said Grace, “this witness was my father; see that, now. But if so—Don’t speak to me; don’t touch me; let me think—there is something hidden here;” and Mrs. Walter Clifford showed her father-in-law that which we have seen in her more than once, but it was quite new and surprising to Colonel Clifford. There she stood, her arms folded, her eyes turned inward, her every feature, and even her body, seemed to think. The result came out like lightning from a cloud. “It’s all a falsehood,” said she.

“A falsehood!” said Colonel Clifford.

“Yes, a falsehood upon the face of it. My father witnessed this marriage, and therefore if the bridegroom had been our Walter he would never have allowed our Walter to court me, for he knew of our courtship all along, and never once disapproved of it.”

“Then do you think it is a mistake?” said the Colonel, eagerly.

“No, I do not,” said Grace. “I think it is an imposture. This man was not a clergyman when he brought me the certificate; he was a man of business, a plain tradesman, a man of the world; he had a colored necktie, and some rather tawdry chains.”

“Did he speak in a kind of sing-song?”

“Not at all; his voice was clear and cutting, only he softened it down once or twice out of what I took for good feeling at the time. He’s an impostor and a villain. Dear sir, don’t agitate poor Walter or my dear father with this vile thing (she handed him back the certificate). It has been a knife to both our hearts; we have suffered together, you and I, and let us get to the bottom of it together.”

“We shall soon do that,” said the Colonel, “for he is coming here to-morrow again.”

“All the better.”

“With the lady.”

“What lady?”

“The lady that calls herself Mrs. Walter Clifford.”

“Indeed!” said Grace, quite taken aback. “They must be very bold.”

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“Oh, for that matter,” said the Colonel, “I insisted upon it; the man seemed to know nothing but from mere hearsay. He knew nothing about William Hope, the witness, so I told him he must bring the woman; and, to be just to the man, he seemed to think so too, and that she ought to do her own business.”

“She will not come,” said Grace, rather contemptuously. “He was obliged to say she would, just to put a face upon it. To-morrow he’ll bring an excuse instead of her. Then have your detectives about, for he is a villain; and, dear sir, please receive him in the drawing-room; then I will find some way to get a sight of him myself.”

“It shall be done,” said the Colonel. “I begin to think with you. At all events, if the lady does not come, I shall hope it is all an imposture or a mistake.”

With this understanding they parted, and waited in anxiety for the morrow, but now their anxiety was checkered with hope.

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To-morrow bade fair to be a busy day. Colonel Clifford, little dreaming the condition to which his son and his guest would be reduced, had invited Jem Davies and the rescuing parties to feast in tents on his own lawn and drink his home-brewed beer, and they were to bring with them such of the rescued miners as might be in a condition to feast and drink copiously. When he found that neither Hope nor his son could join these festivities, he was very sorry he had named so early a day; but he was so punctilious and precise that he could not make up his mind to change one day for another. So a great confectioner at Derby who sent out feasts was charged with the affair, and the Colonel’s own kitchen was at his service too. That was not all. Bartley was coming to do business. This had been preceded by a letter which Colonel Clifford, it may be remembered, had offered to show Grace Clifford. The letter was thus worded:

“COLONEL CLIFFORD,—A penitent man begs humbly to approach you, and offer what compensation is in his power. I desire to pay immediately to Walter Clifford the sum of L20,000 I have so long robbed him of, with five per cent, interest for the use of it. It has brought me far more than that in money, but money I now find is not happiness.

“The mine in which my friend has so nearly been destroyed—and his daughter, who now, too late, I find is the only creature in the world I love—that mine is now odious to me. I desire by deed to hand it over to Hope and yourself, upon condition that you follow the seams wherever they go, and that you give me such a share of the profits during my lifetime as you think I deserve for my enterprise. This for my life only, since I shall leave all I have in the world to that dear child, who will now be your daughter, and perhaps never deign again to look upon the erring man who writes these lines.

“I should like, if you please, to retain the farm, or at all events a hundred acres round about the house to turn into orchards and gardens, so that I may have some employment, far from trade and its temptations, for the remainder of my days.”

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In consequence of this letter a deed was drawn and engrossed, and Bartley had written to say he would come to Clifford Hall and sign it, and have it witnessed and delivered.

About nine o'clock in the evening one of the detectives called on Colonel Clifford to make a private communication; his mate had spotted a swell mobsman, rather a famous character, with the usual number of aliases, but known to the force as Mark Waddy; he was at the Dun Cow; and possessing the gift of the gab in a superlative degree, had made himself extremely popular. They had both watched him pretty closely, but he seemed not to be there for a job, but only on the talking lay, probably soliciting information for some gang of thieves or other. He had been seen to exchange a hasty word with a clergyman; but as Mark Waddy's acquaintances were not amongst the clergy, that would certainly be some pal that was in something or other with him.

"What a shrewd girl that must be!" said the Colonel.

"I beg your pardon, Colonel," said the man, not seeing the relevancy of this observation.

"Oh, nothing," said the Colonel, "only *I* expect a visit to-morrow at twelve o'clock from a doubtful clergyman; just hang about the lawn on the chance of my giving you a signal."

Thus while Monckton was mounting his batteries, his victims were preparing defenses in a sort of general way, though they did not see their way so clear as the enemy did.

Colonel Clifford's drawing-room was a magnificent room, fifty feet long and thirty feet wide. A number of French windows opened on to a noble balcony, with three short flights of stone steps leading down to the lawn. The central steps were broad, the side steps narrow. There were four entrances to it: two by double doors, and two by heavily curtained apertures leading to little subsidiary rooms.

At twelve o'clock next day, what with the burst of color from the potted flowers on the balcony, the white tents, and the flags and streamers, and a clear sunshiny day gilding it all, the room looked a "palace of pleasure," and no stranger peeping in could have dreamed that it was the abode of care, and about to be visited by gloomy Penitence and incurable Fraud.

The first to arrive was Bartley, with a witness. He was received kindly by Colonel Clifford and ushered into a small room.

He wanted another witness. So John Baker was sent for, and Bartley and he were closeted together, reading the deed, *etc*., when a footman brought in a card, "The Reverend Alleyn Meredith," and written underneath with a pencil, in a female hand, "Mrs. Walter Clifford."

“Admit them,” said the Colonel, firmly.

At this moment Grace, who had heard the carriage drive up to the door, peeped in through one of the heavy curtains we have mentioned.

“Has she actually come?” said she.

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“She has, indeed,” said the Colonel, looking very grave. “Will you stay and receive her?”

“Oh no,” said Grace, horrified; “but I’ll take a good look at her through this curtain. I have made a little hole on purpose.” Then she slipped into the little room and drew the curtain.

The servant opened the door, and the false rector walked in, supporting on his arm a dark woman, still very beautiful; very plainly dressed, but well dressed, agitated, yet self-possessed.

“Be seated, madam,” said the Colonel. After a reasonable pause he began to question her.

“You were married on the eleventh day of June, 1868, to a gentleman of the name of Walter Clifford?”

“I was, sir.”

“May I ask how long you lived with him?”

The lady buried her face in her hands. The question took her by surprise, and this was a woman’s artifice to gain time and answer cleverly.

But the ingenious Monckton gave it a happy turn. “Poor thing! Poor thing!” said he.

“He left me the next day,” said Lucy, “and I have never seen him since.”

Here Monckton interposed; he fancied he had seen the curtain move. “Excuse me,” said he, “I think there is somebody listening!” and he went swiftly and put his head through the curtain. But the room was empty; for meantime Grace was so surprised by the lady’s arrival, by her beauty, which might well have tempted any man, and by her air of respectability, that she changed her tactics directly, and she was gone to her father for advice and information in spite of her previous determination not to worry him in his present condition. What he said to her can be briefly told elsewhere; what he ordered her to do was to return and watch the man and not the woman.

During Lucy’s hesitation, which was somewhat long, a clergyman came to the window, looked in, and promptly retired, seeing the Colonel had company. This, however, was only a modest curate, *alias* a detective. He saw in half a moment that this must be Mark Waddy’s pal; but as the police like to go their own way he would not watch the lawn himself, but asked Jem Davies, with whom he had made acquaintance, to keep an eye upon that with his fellows, for there was a jail-bird in the house; then he went round to the front door, by which he felt sure his bird would make his exit. He had no earthly

right to capture this ecclesiastic, but he was prepared if the Colonel, who was a magistrate, gave him the order, and not without.

But we are interrupting Colonel Clifford's interrogatories.

"Madam, what makes you think this disloyal person was my son?"

"Indeed, sir, I don't know," said the lady, and looking around the room with some signs of distress. "I begin to hope it was not your son. He was a tall young man, almost as tall as yourself. He was very handsome, with brown hair and brown eyes, and seemed incapable of deceit."

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“Have you any letters of his?” asked the Colonel.

“I had a great many, sir,” said she, “but I have not kept them all.”

“Have you one?” said the Colonel, sternly.

“Oh yes, sir,” said Lucy, “I think I must have nearer twenty; but what good will they be?” said she, affecting simplicity.

“Why, my dear madam,” said Monckton, “Colonel Clifford is quite right; the handwriting may not tell *you* anything, but surely his own father knows it. I think he is offering you a very fair test. I must tell you plainly that if you don’t produce the letters you say you possess, I shall regret having put myself forward in this matter at all.”

“Gently, sir,” said the Colonel; “she has not refused to produce them.”

Lucy put her hand in her pocket and drew out a packet of letters, but she hesitated, and looked timidly at Monckton, after his late severity. “Am I bound to part with them?”

“Certainly not,” said Monckton, “but you can surely trust them for a minute to such a man as Colonel Clifford. I am of opinion,” said he, “that since you can not be confronted with this gentleman’s son (though that is no fault of yours), these letters (by-the-bye, it would have been as well to show to me,) ought now at once to be submitted to Colonel Clifford, that he may examine both the contents and the handwriting; then he will know whether it is his son or not; and probably as you are fair with him he will be fair with you and tell you the truth.”

Colonel Clifford took the letters and ran his eye hastily over two or three; they were filled with the ardent protestations of youth, and a love that evidently looked toward matrimony, and they were written and signed in a handwriting he knew as well as his own.

He said, solemnly, “These letters are written and were sent to Miss Lucy Muller by my son, Walter Clifford.” Then, almost for the first time in his life, he broke down, and said, “God forgive him; God help him and me. The honor of the Cliffords is an empty sound.”

Lucy Monckton rose from her chair in genuine agitation. Her better angel tugged at her heartstrings.

“Forgive me, sir, oh, forgive me!” she cried, bursting into tears. Then she caught a bitter, threatening glance of her bad angel fixed upon her, and she said to Monckton, “I can say no more, I can do no more. It was fourteen years ago—I can’t break people’s hearts. Hush it up amongst you. I have made a hero weep; his tears burn me. I don’t care for the man; I’ll go no further. You, sir, have taken a deal of trouble and expense. I

dare say Colonel Clifford will compensate you; I leave the matter with you. No power shall make me act in it any more."

Monckton wrote hastily on his card, and said, quite calmly, "Well, I really think, madam, you are not fit to take part in such a conference as this. Compose yourself and retire. I know your mind in the matter better than you do yourself at this moment, and I will act accordingly."

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She retired, and drove away to the Dun Cow, which was the place Monckton had appointed when he wrote upon the card.

“Colonel Clifford,” said Monckton, “all that is a woman’s way. When she is out of sight of you, and thinks over her desertion and her unfortunate condition—neither maid, wife, nor widow—she will be angry with me if I don’t obtain her some compensation.”

“She deserves compensation,” said the Colonel, gravely.

“Especially if she holds her tongue,” said Monckton.

“Whether she holds her tongue or not,” said the Colonel. “I don’t see how I can hold mine, and you have already told my daughter-in-law. A separation between her and my son is inevitable. The compensation must be offered, and God help me, I’m a magistrate, if only to compound the felony.”

“Surely,” said Monckton, “it can be put upon a wider footing than that; let me think,” and he turned away to the open window; but when he got there he saw a lot of miners clustering about. Now he had no fear of their recognizing him, since he had not left a vestige of the printed description. But the very sight of them, and the memory of what they had done to his dead accomplice, made him shudder at them. Henceforth he kept away from the window, and turned his back to it.

“I think with you, sir,” said he, mellifluously, “that she ought to have a few thousands by way of compensation. You know she could claim alimony, and be a very blister to you and yours. But on the other hand I do think, as an impartial person, that she ought to keep this sad secret most faithfully, and even take her maiden name again.”

Whilst Monckton was making this impartial proposal Bartley opened the door, and was coming forward with his deed, when he heard a voice he recognized; and partly by that, partly by the fellow’s thin lips, he recognized him, and said, “Monckton! That villain here!”

“Monckton,” said Colonel Clifford, “that is not his name. It is Meredith. He is a clergyman.” Bartley examined him very suspiciously, and Monckton, during this examination, looked perfectly calm and innocent. Meantime a note was brought to Colonel Clifford from Grace: “Papa was the witness. He is quite sure the bridegroom was not our Walter. He thinks it must have been the other clerk, Leonard Monckton, who robbed Mr. Bartley, and put some of the money into dear Walter’s pockets to ruin him, but papa saved him. Don’t let him escape.”

Colonel Clifford’s eye flashed with triumph, but he controlled himself.

“Say I will give it due attention,” said he; “I’m busy now.”

And the servant retired.

“Now, sir,” said he, “is this a case of mistaken identity, or is your name Leonard Monckton?”

“Colonel Clifford,” said the hypocrite, sadly, “I little thought that I should be made to suffer for the past, since I came here only on an errand of mercy. Yes, sir, in my unregenerate days I was Leonard Monckton. I disgraced the name. But I repented, and when I adopted the sacred calling of a clergyman I parted with the past, name and all. I was that man’s clerk; and so,” said he, spitefully, and forgetting his sing-song, “was your son Walter Clifford. Was that not so, Mr. Bartley?”

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“Don’t speak to me, sir,” said Bartley. “I shall say nothing to gratify you nor to affront Colonel Clifford.”

“Speak the truth, sir,” said Colonel Clifford; “never mind the consequences.”

“Well, then,” said Bartley, very unwillingly, “they *were* clerks in my office, and this one robbed me.”

“One thing at a time,” said Monckton. “Did I rob you of twenty thousand pounds, as you robbed Mr. Walter Clifford?”

His voice became still more incisive, and the curtain of the little room opened a little and two eyes of fire looked in.

“Do you remember one fine day your clerk, Walter Clifford, asking you for leave of absence—to be married?”

Bartley turned his back on him contemptuously.

But Colonel Clifford insisted on his replying.

“Yes, he did,” said Bartley, sullenly.

“But,” said the Colonel, quietly, “he thought better of it, and so—you married her yourself.”

This bayonet thrust was so keen and sudden that the villain’s self-possession left him for once. His mouth opened in dismay, and his eyes, roving to and fro, seemed to seek a door to escape.

But there was worse in store for him. The curtains were drawn right and left with power, and there stood Grace Clifford, beautiful, but pale and terrible. She marched toward him with eyes that rooted him to the spot, and then she stopped.

“Now hear *me*; for he has tortured me, and tried to kill me. Look at his white face turning ghastly beneath his paint at the sight of me; look at his thin lips, and his devilish eyebrows, and his restless eyes. THIS IS THE MAN THAT BRIBED THAT WRETCH TO FIRE THE MINE!”

These last words, ringing from her lips like the trumpet of doom, were answered, as swiftly as gunpowder explodes at a lighted torch, by a furious yell, and in a moment the room seemed a forest of wild beasts. A score of raging miners came upon him from every side, dragging, tearing, beating, kicking, cursing, yelling. He was down in a moment, then soon up again, then dragged out of the room, nails, fists, and heavy boots all going, stripped to the shirt, screaming like a woman. A dozen assailants rolled down

the steps, with him in the midst of them. He got clear for a moment, but twenty more rushed at him, and again he was torn and battered and kicked. “Police! police!” he cried; and at last the detectives who came to seize him rushed in, and Colonel Clifford, too, with the voice of a stentor, cried, “The law! Respect the law, or you are ruined men.”

And so at last the law he had so dreaded raised what seemed a bag of bones: nothing left on him but one boot and fragments of a shirt, ghastly, bleeding, covered with bruises, insensible, and to all appearance dead.

After a short consultation, they carried him, by Colonel Clifford’s order, to the Dun Cow, where Lucy, it may be remembered, was awaiting his triumphant return.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

STRANGE TURNS.

And yet this catastrophe rose out of a mistake. When the detective asked Jem Davies to watch the lawn, he never suspected that the clergyman was the villain who had been concerned in that explosion. But Davies, a man of few ideas and full of his own wrong, took for granted, as such minds will, that the policeman would not have spoken to him if this had not been *his* affair; so he and his fellows gathered about the steps and watched the drawing-room. They caught a glimpse of Monckton, but that only puzzled them. His appearance was inconsistent with the only description they had got—in fact opposed to it. It was Grace Clifford's denunciation, trumpet-tongued, that let loose savage justice on the villain. Never was a woman's voice so fatal, or so swift to slay. She would have undone her work. She screamed, she implored; but it was all in vain. The fury she had launched she could not recall. As for Bartley, words can hardly describe his abject terror. He crouched, he shivered, he moaned, he almost swooned; and long after it was all over he was found crouched in a corner of the little room, and his very reason appeared to be shaken. Judge Lynch had passed him, but too near. The freezing shadow of Retribution chilled him.

Colonel Clifford looked at him with contemptuous pity, and sent him home with John Baker in a close carriage.

* * * * *

Lucy Monckton was in the parlor of the Dun Cow waiting for her master. The detectives and some outdoor servants of Clifford Hall brought a short ladder and paillasses, and something covered with blankets, to the door. Lucy saw, but did not suspect the truth.

They had a murmured consultation with the landlady. During this Mark Waddy came down, and there was some more whispering, and soon the battered body was taken up to Mark Waddy's room and deposited on his bed. The detectives retired to consult, and Waddy had to break the calamity to Mrs. Monckton. He did this as well as he could; but it little matters how such blows are struck. Her agony was great, and greater when she saw him, for she resisted entirely all attempts to keep her from him. She installed herself at once as his nurse, and Mark Waddy retired to a garret.

A surgeon came by Colonel Clifford's order and examined Monckton's bruised body, and shook his head. He reported that there were no bones broken, but there were probably grave internal injuries. These, however, he could not specify at present, since there was no sensibility in the body; so pressure on the injured parts elicited no groans. He prescribed egg and brandy in small quantities, and showed Mrs. Monckton how to administer it to a patient in that desperate condition.

His last word was in private to Waddy. “If he ever speaks again, or even groans aloud, send for me. Otherwise—” and he shrugged his shoulders.

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Some hours afterward Colonel Clifford called as a magistrate to see if the sufferer had any deposition to make. But he was mute, and his eyes fixed.

As Colonel Clifford returned, one of the detectives accosted him and asked him for a warrant to arrest him.

“Not in his present condition,” said Colonel Clifford, rather superciliously. “And pray, sir, why did not you interfere sooner and prevent this lawless act?”

“Well, sir, unfortunately we were on the other side of the house.”

“Exactly; you had orders to be in one place, so you must be in another. See the consequence. The honest men have put themselves in the wrong, and this fellow in the right. He will die a sort of victim, with his guilt suspected only, not proved.”

Having thus snubbed the Force, the old soldier turned his back on them and went home, where Grace met him, all anxiety, and received his report. She implored him not to proceed any further against the man, and declared she should fly the country rather than go into a court of law as witness against him.

“Humph!” said the Colonel; “but you are the only witness.”

“All the better for him,” said she; “then he will die in peace. My tongue has killed the man once; it shall never kill him again.”

About six next morning Monckton beckoned Lucy. She came eagerly to him; he whispered to her, “Can you keep a secret?”

“You know I can,” said she.

“Then never let any one know I have spoken.”

“No, dear, never. Why?”

“I dread the law more than death;” and he shuddered all over. “Save me from the law.”

“Leonard, I will,” said she. “Leave that to me.”

She wired for Mr. Middleton as soon as possible.

The next day there was no change in the patient. He never spoke to anybody, except a word or two to Lucy, in a whisper, when they were quite alone.

In the afternoon down came Lawyer Middleton. Lucy told him what he knew, but Monckton would not speak, even to him. He had to get hold of Waddy before he understood the whole case.

Waddy was in Monckton's secret, and, indeed, in everybody's. He knew it was folly to deceive your lawyer, so he was frank. Mr. Middleton learned his client's guilt and danger, but also that his enemies had flaws in their armor.

The first shot he fired was to get warrants out against a dozen miners, Jem Davies included, for a murderous assault; but he made no arrests, he only summoned. So one or two took fright and fled. Middleton had counted on that, and it made the case worse for those that remained. Then, by means of friends in Derby, he worked the Press.

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An article appeared headed, “Our Savages.” It related with righteous indignation how Mr. Bartley’s miners had burned the dead body of a miner suspected of having fired the mine, and put his own life in jeopardy as well as those of others; and then, not content with that monstrous act, had fallen upon and beaten to death a gentleman in whom they thought they detected a resemblance to some person who had been, or was suspected of being that miner’s accomplice; “but so far from that,” said the writer, “we are now informed, on sure authority, that the gentleman in question is a large and wealthy landed proprietor, quite beyond any temptation to crime or dishonesty, and had actually visited this part of the world only in the character of a peace-maker, and to discharge a very delicate commission, which it would not be our business to publish even if the details had been confided to us.”

The article concluded with a hope that these monsters “would be taught that even if they were below the standard of humanity they were not above the law.”

Middleton attended the summonses, gave his name and address, and informed the magistrate that his client was a large landed proprietor, and it looked like a case of mistaken identity. His client was actually dying of his injuries, but his wife hoped for justice.

But the detectives had taken care to be present, and so they put in their word. They said that they were prepared to prove, at a proper time, that the wounded man was really the person who had been heard by Mrs. Walter Clifford to bribe Ben Burnley to fire the mine.

“We have nothing to do with that now,” said the magistrate. “One thing at a time, please. I can not let these people murder a convicted felon, far less a suspected criminal that has not been tried. The wounded man proceeds, according to law, through a respectable attorney. These men, whom you are virtually defending, have taken the law into their own hands. Are your witnesses here, Mr. Middleton?”

“Not at present, sir; and when I was interrupted, I was about to ask your worship to grant me an adjournment for that purpose. It will not be a great hardship to the accused, since we proceed by summons. I fear I have been too lenient, for two or three of them have absconded since the summons was served.”

“I am not surprised at that,” said the magistrate; “however, you know your own business.”

Then the police applied for a warrant of arrest against Monckton.

“Oh!” cried Middleton, with the air of a man thoroughly shocked and scandalized.

“Certainly not,” said the magistrate; “I shall not disturb the course of justice; there is not even an *exparte* case against this gentleman at present. Such an application must be supported by a witness, and a disinterested one.” So all the parties retired crest-fallen except Mr. Middleton; as for him, he was imitating a small but ingenious specimen of nature—the cuttle-fish. This little creature, when pursued by its enemies, discharges an inky fluid which obscures the water all around, and then it starts off and escapes.

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One dark night, at two o'clock in the morning, there came to the door of the Dun Cow an invalid carriage, or rather omnibus, with a spring-bed and every convenience. The wheels were covered thick with India-rubber; relays had been provided, and Monckton and his party rolled along day and night to Liverpool. The detectives followed, six hours later, and traced them to Liverpool very cleverly, and, with the assistance of the police, raked the town for them, and got all the great steamers watched, especially those that were bound westward, ho! But their bird was at sea, in a Liverpool merchant's own steamboat, hired for a two months' trip. The pursuers found this out too, but a fortnight too late.

"It's no go, Bill," said one to the other. "There's a lawyer and a pot of money against us. Let it sleep awhile."

The steamboat coasted England in beautiful weather; the sick man began to revive, and to eat a little, and to talk a little, and to suffer a good deal at times. Before they had been long at sea Mr. Middleton had a confidential conversation with Mrs. Monckton. He told her he had been very secret with her for her good. "I saw," said he, "this Monckton had no deep regard for you, and was capable of turning you adrift in prosperity; and I knew that if I told you everything you would let it out to him, and tempt him to play the villain. But the time is come that I must speak, in justice to you both. That estate he left your son half in joke is virtually his. Fourteen years ago, when he last looked into the matter, there *were* eleven lives between it and him; but, strange to say, whilst he was at Portland the young lives went one after the other, and there were really only five left when he made that will. Now comes the extraordinary part: a fortnight ago three of those lives perished in a single steamboat accident on the Clyde; that left a woman of eighty-two and a man of ninety between your husband and the estate. The lady was related to the persons who were drowned, and she has since died; she had been long ailing, and it is believed that the shock was too much for her. The survivor is the actual proprietor, Old Carruthers; but I am the London agent to his solicitor, and he was reported to me to be *in extremis* the very day before I left London to join you. We shall run into a port near the place, and you will not land; but I shall, and obtain precise information. In the meantime, mind, your husband's name is Carruthers. Any communication from me will be to Mrs. Carruthers, and you will tell that man as much, or as little, as you think proper; if you make any disclosure, give yourself all the credit you can; say you shall take him to his own house under a new name, and shield him against all pursuers. As for me, I tell you plainly, my great hope is that he will not live long enough to turn you adrift and disinherit your boy."

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To cut short for the present this extraordinary part of our story, Lewis Carruthers, *alias* Leonard Monckton, entered a fine house and took possession of eleven thousand acres of hilly pasture, and the undivided moiety of a lake brimful of fish. He accounted for his change of name by the favors Carruthers, deceased, had shown him. Therein he did his best to lie, but his present vein of luck turned it into the truth. Old Carruthers had become so peevish that all his relations disliked him, and he disliked them. So he left his personal estate to his heir-at-law simply because he had never seen him. The personality was very large. The house was full of pictures, and China, and cabinets, *etc*. There was a large balance at the banker's, a heavy fall of timber not paid for, rents due, and as many as two thousand four hundred sheep upon that hill, which the old fellow had kept in his own hands. So, when the new proprietor took possession as Carruthers, nobody was surprised, though many were furious. Lucy installed him in a grand suite of apartments as an invalid, and let nobody come near him. Waddy was dismissed with a munificent present, and could be trusted to hold his tongue. By the advice of Middleton, not a single servant was dismissed, and so no enemies were made. The family lawyer and steward were also retained, and, in short, all conversation was avoided. In a month or two the new proprietor began to improve in health, and drive about his own grounds, or be rowed on his lake, lying on soft beds.

But in the fifth month of his residence local pains seized him, and he began to waste. For some time the precise nature of the disorder was obscure; but at last a rising surgeon declared it to be an abscess in the intestines (caused, no doubt, by external violence).

By degrees the patient became unable to take solid food, and the drain upon his system was too great for a mere mucilaginous diet to sustain him. Wasted to the bone, and yellow as a guinea, he presented a pitiable spectacle, and would gladly have exchanged his fine house and pictures, his heathery hills dotted with sheep, and his glassy lake full of spotted trout, for a ragged Irishman's bowl of potatoes and his mug of buttermilk—and his stomach.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CURTAIN.

Striking incidents will draw the writer; but we know that our readers would rather hear about the characters they can respect. It seems, however, to be a rule in life, and in fiction, that interest flags when trouble ceases. Now the troubles of our good people were pretty well over, and we will put it to the reader whether they had not enough.

Grace Clifford made an earnest request to Colonel Clifford and her father never to tell Walter he had been suspected of bigamy. "Let others say that circumstances are always to be believed and character not to be trusted; but I, at least, had no right to

believe certificates and things against my Walter's honor and his love. Hide my fault from him, not for my sake but for his; perhaps when we are both old people I may tell him."

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This was Grace Clifford's petition, and need we say she prevailed?

Walter Clifford recovered under his wife's care, and the house was so large that Colonel Clifford easily persuaded his son and daughter-in-law to make it their home. Hope had also two rooms in it, and came there when he chose; he was always welcome; but he was alone again, so to speak, and not quite forty years of age, and he was ambitious. He began to rise in the world, whilst our younger characters, contented with their happiness and position, remained stationary. Master of a great mine, able now to carry out his invention, member of several scientific associations, a writer for the scientific press, *etc*., he soon became a public and eminent man; he was consulted on great public works, and if he lives will be one of the great lights of science in this island. He is great on electricity, especially on the application of natural forces to the lighting of towns. He denounces all the cities that allow powerful streams to run past them and not work a single electric light. But he goes further than that. He ridicules the idea that it is beyond the resources of science to utilize thousands of millions of tons of water that are raised twenty-one feet twice in every twenty-four hours by the tides. It is the skill to apply the force that is needed; not the force itself, which exceeds that of all the steam-engines in the nation. And he says that the great scientific foible of the day is the neglect of natural forces, which are cheap and inexhaustible, and the mania for steam-engines and gas, which are expensive, and for coal, which is not to last forever. He implores capital and science to work in this question. His various schemes for using the tides in the creation of motive power will doubtless come before the world in a more appropriate channel than a work of fiction. If he succeeds it will be a glorious, as it must be a difficult, achievement.

His society is valued on social grounds; his well-stored mind, his powers of conversation, and his fine appearance, make him extremely welcome at all the tables in the county; he also accompanies his daughter with the violin, and, as they play beauties together, not difficulties, they ravish the soul and interrupt the torture, whose instrument the piano-forte generally is.

Bartley is a man with beautiful silvery hair and beard; he cultivates, nurses, and tends fruit-trees and flowers with a love little short of paternal. This sentiment, and the contemplation of nature, have changed the whole expression of his face; it is wonderfully benevolent and sweet, but with a touch of weakness about the lips. Some of the rough fellows about the place call him a "softy," but that is much too strong a word; no doubt he is confused in his ideas, but he reads all the great American publications about fruit and flowers, and executes their instructions with tact and skill. Where he breaks down—and who would believe this?—is in the trade

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department. Let him succeed in growing apple-trees and pear-trees weighed down to the ground with choice fruit; let him produce enormous cherries by grafting, and gigantic nectarines upon his sunny wall, and acres of strawberries too large for the mouth. After that they may all rot where they grow; he troubles his head no more. This is more than his old friend Hope can stand; he interferes, and sends the fruit to market, and fills great casks with superlative cider and perry, and keeps the account square, with a little help from Mrs. Easton, who has returned to her old master, and is a firm but kind mother to him.

Grace Clifford for some time could not be got to visit him. Perhaps she is one of those ladies who can not get over personal violence; he had handled her roughly, to keep her from going to her father's help. After all, there may have been other reasons; it is not so easy to penetrate all the recesses of the female heart. One thing is certain: she would not go near him for months; but when she did go with her father—and he had to use all his influence to take her there—the rapture and the tears of joy with which the poor old fellow received her disarmed her in a moment.

She let him take her through hot-houses and show her his children—"the only children I have now," said he—and after that she never refused to visit this erring man. His roof had sheltered her many years, and he had found out too late that he loved her, so far as his nature could love at that time.

* * * * *

Percy Fitzroy had an elder sister. He appealed to her against Julia Clifford. She cross-questioned him, and told him he was very foolish to despair. She would hardly have slapped him if she was quite resolved to part forever.

"Let me have a hand in reconciling you," said she.

"You shall have b-b-both hands in it, if you like," said he; "for I am at my w-w-wit's end."

So these two conspired. Miss Fitzroy was invited to Percy's house, and played the mistress. She asked other young ladies, especially that fair girl with auburn hair, whom Julia called a "fat thing." That meant, under the circumstances, a plump and rounded model, with small hands and feet; a perfect figure in a riding habit, and at night a satin bust and sculptured arms.

The very first ride Walter took with Grace and Julia they met the bright cavalcade of Percy and his sister, and this red-haired Venus.

Percy took off his hat with profound respect to Julia and Grace, but did not presume to speak.

“What a lovely girl!” said Grace.

“Do you think so?” said Julia.

“Yes, dear; and so do you.”

“What makes you fancy that?”

“Because you looked daggers at her.”

“Because she is setting her cap at that little fool.”

“She will not have him without your consent, dear.”

And this set Julia thinking.

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The next day Walter called on Percy, and played the traitor.

“Give a ball,” said he.

Miss Fitzroy and her brother gave a ball. Percy, duly instructed by his sister, wrote to Julia as meek as Moses, and said he was in a great difficulty. If he invited her, it would, of course, seem presumptuous, considering the poor opinion she had of him; if he passed her over, and invited Walter Clifford and Mrs. Clifford, he should be unjust to his own feelings, and seem disrespectful.

Julia’s reply:

“DEAR MR. FITZROY,—I am not at all fond of jealousy, but I am very fond of dancing. I shall come.

“Yours sincerely,

“JULIA CLIFFORD.”

And she did come with a vengeance. She showed them what a dark beauty can do in a blaze of light with a red rose, and a few thousand pounds’ worth of diamonds artfully placed.

She danced with several partners, and took Percy in his turn. She was gracious to him, but nothing more.

Percy asked leave to call next day.

She assented, rather coldly.

His sister prepared Percy for the call. The first thing he did was to stammer intolerably.

“Oh,” said Julia, “if you have nothing more to say than that, I have—Where is my bracelet?”

“It’s here,” said Percy, producing it eagerly. Julia smiled.

“My necklace?”

“Here!”

“My charms?”

“Here!”

“My specimens of your spelling? Love spells, eh?”

“Here—all here.”

“No, they are not,” said Julia, snatching them, “they are here.” And she stuffed both her pockets with them.

“And the engaged ring,” said Percy, radiant now, and producing it, “d-d-don’t forget that.”

Julia began to hesitate. “If I put that on, it will be for life.”

“Yes, it will,” said Percy.

“Then give me a moment to think.”

After due consideration she said what she had made up her mind to say long before.

“Percy, you’re a man of honor. I’ll be yours upon one solemn condition—that from this hour till death parts us, you promise to give your faith where you give your love.”

“I’ll give my faith where I give my love,” said Percy, solemnly.

Next month they were married, and he gave his confidence where he gave his love, and he never had reason to regret it.

* * * * *

“John Baker.”

“Sir.”

“You had better mind what you are about, or you’ll get fonder of her than of Walter himself.”

“Never, Colonel, never! And so will you.”

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Then, after a moment's reflection, John Baker inquired how they were to help it. "Look here, Colonel," said he, "a man's a man, but a woman's a woman. It isn't likely as Master Walter will always be putting his hand round your neck and kissing of you when you're good, and pick a white hair off your coat if he do but see one when you're going out, and shine upon you in-doors more than the sun does on you out-of-doors; and 'taint to be supposed as Mr. Walter will never meet me on the stairs without breaking out into a smile to cheer an old fellow's heart, and showing L2000 worth of ivory all at one time; and if I've a cold or a bit of a headache he won't send his lady's maid to see after me and tell me what I am to do, and threaten to come and nurse me himself if I don't mend."

"Well," said the Colonel, "there's something in all this."

"For all that," said John Baker, candidly, "I shall make you my confession, sir. I said to Mr. Walter myself, said I, 'Here's a pretty business,' said I; 'I've known and loved you from a child, and Mrs. Walter has only been here six months, and now I'm afraid she'll make me love her more than I do you.'"

"Why, of course she will," said Mr. Walter. "Why, *I* love her better than I do myself, and you've got to follow suit, or else I'll murder you."

So that question was settled.

* * * * *

The five hundred guineas reward rankled in the minds of those detectives, and, after a few months, with the assistance of the ordinary police in all the northern towns, they got upon a cold scent, and then upon a warm scent, and at last they suspected their bird, under the *alias* of Carruthers. So they came to the house to get sight of him, and make sure before applying for a warrant. They got there just in time for his funeral. Middleton was there and saw them, and asked them to attend it, and to speak to him after the reading of the will.

"Proceedings are stayed," said he; "but, perhaps, having acted against me, you might like to see whether it would not pay better to act with me."

"And no mistake," said one of them; so they were feasted with the rest, for it was a magnificent funeral, and after that Middleton squared them with L50 apiece to hold their tongues—and more, to divert all suspicion from the house and the beautiful woman who now held it as only trustee for her son.

Remembering that he had left the estate to another man's child, Monckton, one fine day, bequeathed his personal estate on half a sheet of note-paper to Lucy. This and the large allowance Middleton obtained from the Court for her, as trustee and guardian to

the heir, made her a rich woman. She was a German, sober, notable, and provident; she kept her sheep, and became a sort of squire. She wrote to her husband in the States, and, by the advice of Middleton, told him the exact truth instead of a pack of fibs, which she certainly would have done had she

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been left to herself. Poverty had pinched Jonathan Braham by this time; and as he saw by the tone of her letter she did not care one straw whether he accepted the situation or not, he accepted it eagerly, and had to court her as a stranger, and to marry her, and wear the crown matrimonial; for Middleton drew the settlements, and neither Braham nor his creditors could touch a half-penny. And then came out the better part of this indifferent woman. Braham had been a good friend to her in time of need, and she was a good and faithful friend to him now. She was generally admired and respected; kind to the poor; bountiful, but not lavish; an excellent manager, but not stingy.

In vain shall we endeavor, with our small insight into the bosoms of men and women, to divide them into the good and the bad. There are mediocre intellects; there are mediocre morals. This woman was always more inclined to good than evil, yet at times temptation conquered. She was virtuous till she succumbed to a seducer whom she loved. Under his control she deceived Walter Clifford, and attempted an act of downright villainy; that control removed, she returned to virtuous and industrious habits. After many years, solitude, weariness, and a gloomy future unhinged her conscience again: comfort and affection offered themselves, and she committed bigamy. Deserted by Braham, and once more fascinated by the only man she had ever greatly loved, she joined him in an abominable fraud, broke down in the middle of it by a sudden impulse of conscience, and soon after settled down into a faithful nurse. She is now a faithful wife, a tender mother, a kind mistress, and nearly everything that is good in a medium way; and so, in all human probability, will pass the remainder of her days, which, as she is healthy, and sober in eating and drinking, will perhaps be the longer period of her little life.

Well may we all pray against great temptations; only choice spirits resist them, except when they are great temptations to somebody else, and somehow not to the person tempted.

It has lately been objected to the writers of fiction—especially to those few who are dramatists as well as novelists—that they neglect what Shakespeare calls “the middle of humanity,” and deal in eccentric characters above or below the people one really meets. Let those who are serious in this objection enjoy moral mediocrity in the person of Lucy Monckton.

For our part we will never place Fiction, which was the parent of History, below its child. Our hearts are with those superior men and women who, whether in History or Fiction, make life beautiful, and raise the standard of Humanity. Such characters exist even in this plain tale, and it is these alone, and our kindly readers, we take leave of with regret.

THE END.