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AN ADVENTURE.

I was the only passenger of the creaking stage, which started from "Black Heath Hotel," on that stormy, bleak autumnal night.

All day a drift of clouds had rested on the horizon, and a strange sound, mingled with the beating of the sea against the rock-bound coast near by, as though the wraiths of storm-tost mariners, wrecked off that windy shore long years before, steered phantom vessels through the weltering waves, and hailed the earthly schooners as they passed, with words of solemn warning.

It was a night to waken all the wild remembrances the spirit treasures up.

Old tales of robbery and murder grew vivid and distinct in every horrible particular, as if the pages from whence my childhood culled them, were once more before me.

As I thought of the lonely journey which lay before me at such an hour, and through such desolate and dreary scenes, my heart grew faint with terror.

It was necessary that I should journey in that night's-coach, in order that I might meet the morning train of cars, at the F— station.

Circumstances had detained the person who should have been my companion, and miles still lay between me and my expectant friends, consequently I was alone that cold October night, awaiting my departure in the parlor of the hotel. The apartment in which I awaited the moment of my departure, was large, and low, roofed, wainscoted with wood of almost ebon blackness.

In the huge chimney-place the flames roared fiercely, as the great oaken logs piled up in its recesses kindled on after the other. Two tall candles flared away on either end of the high wooden mantelpiece, throwing vermilion tinges on the japanned sides of an ancient tea-caddy, in the form of a temple.

Above hung a large and exceedingly cosmopolitan landscape, representing a Swiss cottage surrounded by palm trees. A lake of deepest blue in the foreground across which a Chinese bridge led to a building which was either mosque or belfry, as the imagination of the spectator wandered from homely scenes to the country of the Musselman. Among these varied scenes wandered a highly complexioned Indian gentleman, armed with an immense bow and arrows, who was apparently meditating on the propriety of making game of a crimson-crested phoenix, perched on the branches of the tallest palm-tree.

This work of art was the chief pride and boast of the worthy hostess of the Black Heath Hotel, who now sat before the fire with her dress folded upon her knees.

How round, and rosy was the matron, how fat, and fair, and dimpled. Gazing on her portly form, one almost forgot it was possible to be thin.

As my eyes turned from the dreary prospect without the diamond shaped panes through which I had been gazing, and fell upon the comfortable form of this good lady, imparadised in the warmth and security of that glowing hearth, I dreaded more than ever the discomforts of the dingy stage. Nor were my spirits raised by her kindly-meant condolences.

"Laws a massy," she said, it's an awful night, a most as dark as the one when black Grimes murdered the pedlar, just down the road here.— Did ye ever hear tell about it? they say it was in all the city papers, so of course you have. But that wasn't so terrible as the time he killed poor little Peggy, who lived out at service in the village. You see she was goin' home with her wages, [she was just about your age, Miss] and folks think he killed her because she wouldn't give up peaceable. Oh, he wss an awful fellow, that black Grimes, I assure ye.

I expressed a hope that Mr. Grimes would not fancy my unhappy self as his next victim, and was much relieved by receiving the information that he had experienced capital punishment not long since.

"Though," continued the good lady, "there's as bad as him along the road, and they do say his ghost walks every night along by the old elm trees, where he used to lay in wait for the travellers, and the farmers, going home from market."

This was comfortable intelligence, especially at this moment, the driver made his appearance at the door, wiping the froth of his last glass of beer from his lips, and announced that—"he was ready, and so was his horses."

Making the best I could of it I arose, and wrapping my cloak around me, I entered the rattling vehicle. My trunk was strapped on behind, my portmanteau stowed under the seat.— The driver, and a boy who assisted him climbed to the roof, and with a crack of the whip we were off, the landlady nodding farewell from the glowing window of the hostel, until it was hidden from sight by our descent into lower ground.

Let no one ever laud the old fashioned stage-coach in my presence, jolting, creaking, rumbling, rickety tortures, they must have been invented by some member of the inquisition to dislocate

the bones of all poor sinners who ventured into them.

An hour or more had elapsed, and our course was uninterrupted. A feeling of security began to replace the fears I had cherished at its commencement. My mind wandered to past scenes and distant friends, thence through the misty mazes of the unknown future, and then a drowsy lull crept over me, and I left the world for dream land.

I was aroused by a sudden jolt. The stage had stopped. The rain no longer rattled on its roof. A pale and watery moon struggled thro' the windy clouds above, showing two great elm trees with interlacing boughs, beneath which stood a man, wrapped in a heavy cloak, and wearing a slouched hat which nearly concealed his features.

Ghastly and strangely gaunt looked that draped figure in the dim moonlight.

Was it black Giles' wraith, or a living robber scarcely less terrible in that midnight loneliness? I trembled.

Nothing of air was this which stood with out, a living, breathing mortal. A common every day passenger he proved, for after a short colloquy the door was opened, and he stepped in and took his seat.

The light of the little lamp within fell full upon the stranger's form and face. While the seat which I occupied lay more within the shadow, so that apparently, he did not at first observe me, but believed himself alone, for he muttered to himself, and sat staring at nothing in a way which made my blood run cold.

He was a tall, thin man, apparently young in years, but with a hollow, careworn face; his eyes were black and piercing, and about his neck and temples hung rippling masses of jet black hair.

So long he sat wrapped in meditation, with his head sunken upon his breast that I tho't at last that he had fallen asleep, and wrapping my shawl more closely around me drew yet further into the shadow.

The movement seemed to attract his attention. He turned, arose, and snatching the little lamp from its place held it so that the light fell directly upon me.

"Oh!" he said, in a low, freezing whisper, "oh! a woman!" and then replacing the lamp subsided into silence. But the look with which these words were accompanied, and the tone in which they were uttered told all.

I was alone with a maniac!

The carriage was rattling rapidly on, there were no visible means of attracting the driver's attention. Should I scream for aid no one would hear me but my terrible companion. My only hope was that he might forget me, and in this hope I sat silent and motionless as was possible.

Nevertheless, in fifteen minutes at the farthest, the man again rose, and again took down the lamp and flung its light upon my face.

"A woman," he repeated, "a woman, young, lovely, and possessed of a good heart, madam, I beg your pardon, but is your heart good?"

I sat aghast!

"You need not answer," he continued, "I know you have. A good, true, constant, pure young heart, that is the kind what I am in search of. Madam, will you give me this good, true, constant, pure young heart of yours?" He replaced the lamp and waited for a reply.

"It is much to ask of a stranger, I am well aware," he continued, "but listen and I will tell you why I want it: I have been alive three centuries. I shall live another. The first century I was a boy—a boy with long, glossy, gold brown hair, for I remember well how my mother used to curl it round her finger. When this is done, and I go to Heaven, I shall have such hair again. I remember chasing butterflies, wading ankle deep in rain pools, or running barefoot along the green delicious grass. Ah! for a whole century I was a boy. I shall never know anything like it again until all the centuries are over.

"The second century had begun, and my hair had lost its gold and was dark as it is now, when I first met her. I remember when I met her, but not how. I think she rose one evening with the moon. I always think of moon and her eyes at the same moment, and this must be the reason.

"That second century was a very happy one. She sung to me songs she had learnt of the angels, and we used to walk together in the garden of Eden, (I know it was there, so you must believe me) hand in hand by starlight.

We were married then also, the music of the bells married us. I remember hearing it, it rose and swelled up the air, and died away in a low sighing prayer, and we were married. I had two friends, one came from the sunset of the first century. The bells that married us rang the other into life. Music, mirth, and wine, the time seemed made of these, until I forgot how or why I was far away in another country. Then one night when it was dark my first friend came to me, quickly stealthily, he told me something; he

had letters in his hand which she had written.— Don't ask me what was in them, I will never tell you, never.

"That night I was riding homeward I rode so fast that the echo has not died away yet, listen I hear it now."

And as he paused, the tramp of horses' hoofs fell on my ear, above the rattling of the coach wheels.

"I rode on," he continued, "I came to her home and found that it was all true. She was not an angel, no she was worse than a demon.

"You did wrong to love her," my friend had said to me, "she has a bad heart."

"I thought of this a long time, and then I sought her chamber. She slept, oh! how beautiful she was. She was an angel, my friend was right. It was only her heart that was bad, she was perfect.

"As I knelt there I made a great resolve, I would take away that bad heart and give her a good one.

"I would do it while she slept, and when she awakened how she would bless me for the good pure heart I should have given her. I had a dagger in my belt, and I took it out and slow, softly, so that she would not waken, I cut away that bad evil heart which had grown there so strangely, a lock of hair not mine, but the friend's who was rung into life by the bells which married us, lay upon the heart, and I threw them both together into the river which ran beneath the window.

"She is laying now white, and cold, and still upon her couch waiting for her heart, the pure new heart I have been searching for, and now that I have found it, I will have it if I tear it out. Give me your heart, quick, quick, your heart. The echo of my horse's hoof are growing louder, and she is waiting there without a heart," and the maniac drew a dagger from his breast, and sprang toward me.

But at that moment the stage stopped. Two horsemen dashed up to the window, opened the door and dismounted, the maniac hastily alighted and ran towards the trees, after reaching which, he turned brandishing the dagger, and rushed towards me as I was descending the steps of the coach. It was a moment of terror, but happily the officials arrived in time to seize, and secure the wretched being ere his fell purpose was consummated.

"Hope you aint frightened, Miss," said the driver. "I hadn't no idea this here gentleman was looney, or I wouldn't her give him a lift.— They've been arter him all day. He's been crazy, and killin' his wife, that's all about it. All right then."

With the morning sun I was among my friends, but never in all my life shall I forget that terrible night on the Black Heath road.

THE VILLAGE BRAVO.

Nearly every country village has its "bravo." We do not mean "an assassin," nor "a man who murders for hire," as Worcester explains the word; but we mean the one man to whom all must give way—the man who can "whip anybody in the town"—the great big animal who thinks his position enviable, and who is envied by men with little bodies and littler brains.

Our village had its bravo, at all events; and a perfect type of his class he was, too. His name was Jonathan Burke, though I never heard him called Jonathan but once, and that was before a justice's court. Jack Burke was his name "the world over," as he often said. He was a big burly fellow; six feet and two inches tall; with broad, massive shoulders; great long arms; and a head like a small pumpkin. His face was characteristic. A low receding forehead; small pug nose; thick, heavy lips; and a broad, deep chin. His eyes were of a light grey, verging upon a cat-like green, while his hair, which was coarse and crisp, was of a burnt, sun-dried color, neither red nor flaxen, nor yet of a dark hue.— The only feature in the whole man which tended to detract from his herculean proportions was the flat, or rather hollow, appearance of his breast. To one skilled in anatomy, or physiology, it would have been at once apparent that he had but little of what is generally denominated "bottom," and that a long continued physical effort would have reduced his "wind" to a weak point.

Jack Burke was born and reared in our village, and ever since he had begun to go to school he had been the terror of all unlucky wights who chanced to cross his path.— He beat his companions without mercy and took delight in being feared. As he grew older he became more insolent and overbearing, and at the time of which we write he was disliked by all the decent people of the place. His voice was loud and coarse, and it broke in upon all circles which might be gathered near him.

And then this bravo did not possess that spirit of generosity usually betrayed by those who happen to be giants in size and strength. He was,

on the contrary low and mean, taking delight in tormenting the weak, and even laying out his full strength upon those not half his size. In short he was a coward as well as a bravo. He forced himself upon all our little gatherings, and seemed to take delight in stalking about, and realizing that none of us could "put him out."— He was now twenty-two, and was fast forgetting all of useful knowledge he had ever gained at school.

Among the recent accessions to the population of our village was a young doctor named William Granby. He was a small pale-looking man, not over five feet ten inches in height, and quite slim in frame; but the man who studied him closely would have seen that his paleness was the result of long confinement over his studies, and was more, after all, a delicate fairness of the skin than the want of health. And it would also have been seen that his light frame was a very muscular one, and most admirably moulded and put together.

William Granby was what the girls of our village called a handsome man, and none of the youth envied him the flattering encomiums he received from the female portion of our community, for as we became acquainted we loved him for the manly and generous qualities we found in him. He was a warm friend and noble opponent.

And Granby had proved himself an excellent physician, too; and though he had been in our village but a year and a month yet the confidence reposed in his skill was far greater than had been reposed in the ancient blisterer and phlebotomist who preceded him.

One day some of us went into his study—he was unmarried, but being only three-and-twenty, of course not a bachelor—we were invited in as we walked down by his boarding place, and were pleased to accept the invitation. His study was a gem of a place for comfort, and among the articles not absolutely necessary for the study of his profession we detected a rifle; a set of boxing gloves; a pair of foils; a pair of heavy wooden broadswords; while upon the floor were a pair of dumb bells. I wondered what these latter were for—surely not for the doctor's use, for I could do nothing with them, save to hold them in my hands, and swing them about at an angle of some forty-five degrees, and I was much heavier than he was.

I asked him what he did with them. "Oh," he said, "smiling, "I exercise my muscles with them;" and as he spoke he took them up and raised them at arms' length, and held them some time, his fine breast rounded out like a Roman cuirass. Then he threw them up, and out, and around, handing them as though they had been mere toys. It seemed impossible that so small a body could contain so much strength, but he assured us that he had gained it all by practice.— He had labored for years to develop a muscular system, in which he had been lacking when a child. And he also said that by keeping his muscles well hardened and developed, he was better able to bear the fatigue of his profession, which called him from his rest often for several nights in succession.

We were making arrangements for a grand picnic in our village. The girls were making pies and cakes of all sorts and shapes, while we youths were preparing two tables, and clearing up the grove which was just outside the village, and on the bank of the river.

The day at length came, and the sun smiled from a cloudless sky, and a fresh breeze came sweeping up the river bearing a grateful coolness upon its bosom.

We reached the ground in due season, and only one thing came to mar the pleasures of the occasion. Jack Burke made his appearance upon the ground, in a shabby, dirty suit, and with an insolent swagger. A chill ran through the whole crowd. Many of us would gladly have helped put him away, but we shrank from meddling with one who was so strong and gigantic, and withal, so reckless and merciless in his wrath. We saw the thin delicate lips of the doctor quiver as he noticed the filthy fellow swaggering about, but he said nothing then.

One of our party was a youth named David Singleton. He was a quiet, good-hearted fellow, and beloved by all. He had waited upon Mary Livingston to the picnic. Mary was a pretty, blue-eyed maiden of eighteen, and that she loved David right fondly, we all knew just as well as we knew that David loved her.

It so happened that Jack Burke had offered, on several occasions, to wait upon Mary, and she had as often peremptorily refused him. He had professed to like her, and had made his boast that he would have her yet, and if David Singleton dared to put his arm in the way he'd drop him!

On the present occasion Jack was not long in seeking Mary's side. David was nervous and uneasy. He was a light, small framed youth, and looked with dread upon the giant who sought to annoy both him and his fair companion.

Mary asked Burke to go away; and as she spoke she turned shuddering from him.

"I shan't go away," the burly brute returned. "If you don't like it, you may lump it!"

"Come, Mary," said young Singleton, trembling, "let's leave him."

"You will, eh?" cried Burke, seizing her by the arm, and drawing her back.

The affrighted girl uttered a quick cry of alarm, and Singleton started to his feet, quivering at every point.

"Miserable brute!" he exclaimed, "let her go!"

In an instant Burke leaped up, and swore he'd "whip the youngster within an inch of his life!"

In an instant all was alarm and confusion; but in the midst of the clamor arose a clear, clarion voice—

"Stand back! Stand back every one of you! Back, I say—and give me room!"

The way was quickly cleared, and the young doctor leaped into the open space, his bright eye burning keenly; his face flushed, and his slight, handsome frame erect and stern.

"Fellow," he thundered, "leave this place! Take your foul presence hence at once. Do you understand? What a miserable coward, to insult a girl! Shame! Shame! But go! go!"

For a few moments Burke was completely dumb-founded. There was something in the tones and bearing of the man before him, and in the strangely burning eye that beamed upon him, that awed him for the while. But he measured everything by its weight and size, and the courage of the brute soon came back to him.

"Who are you?" was his first remark, at the same time shaking his bullet head threateningly.

"I am the man who ordered you to leave this place! Your presence is very offensive. You were not invited, and if you had any decency you would not be here!"

"Look here, my fine daudy!" bellowed the brute, "just you say I aint decent agin, and I'll spile that lady-like face of yours, almighty quick."

There was a quiet smile upon the doctor's face as he replied—

"Your very course now shows that you are devoid of all decency. A decent man would not stay where he knew his presence was offensive."

With a fierce oath Burke raised his huge fists and darted forward. We would have interfered, but Granby sternly ordered us back.— Still we were fearful. What could the small gentlemanly physician do against such a giant?

But we were undeceived. Upon Burke's first advance, Granby nimbly slipped on one side, and with a quick motion of his foot caught the giant's toes, and sent him at full length upon the ground. Like a mad bull Burke sprang to his feet, and while the curses showered from his lips he started upon Granby as though he would have annihilated him at once. Calm and serene the young doctor stood, and as the brute came up he adroitly raised his left elbow, and passed the huge, dirty fist over his shoulder, and at the same moment he planted his own fist full upon Burke's face with a blow that knocked him completely from his feet. That blow sounded like the crack of a pistol, and was struck by a man who knew how to throw all his power to the best advantage wherever he wished to use it.

Jonathan Burke arose like one bewildered, and so he was. But in a few moments he recovered his senses, and leaped towards Granby again.— This time the doctor performed a feat that was as surprising as it was effective. Like a thung of steel wire and finely tempered springs, he jumped up and forward, planting both his feet upon the giant's breast! Burke fell like a log; but his breast was heavily boned, and he was soon on his feet again.

"Look ye," cried Granby sternly, "you have seen enough of me to know that I am not to be trifled with. Now go away and you shall go unharmed save that one black eye. But if you trouble me more I shall most assuredly hurt you. I have given you warning."

"I'll lick ye afore I go; if I don't—"

We will simply add that the remainder of this sentence was composed of fearful oaths, and that, while they yet quivered upon his lips, he clenched his fist and darted forward.

This time the doctor received him in a new fashion. He stopped every blow madly and clumsily aimed at him, and began to rattle in a shower of knocks upon his face and head, and breast, and arms, and body, that soon completely bewildered him. On they came—heavier and heavier—thicker and faster—each one cracking like a pistol, and planted exactly where it was aimed. In a very short time Burke was not only entirely exhausted, but his whole body, above the waist, was beaten till the flesh was black and contused. He bellowed like a calf for mercy.

"Will you leave the place at once?" demanded the doctor.

"Yes."

"And will you promise not to annoy Mary Livingston again?"