

"And now, ladies, I am arrived at the most marvellous portion of my strange, eventful history. If you harbour the slightest suspicion of my veracity, please say so at once, and I shall remain eternally silent! A million times rather would I be torn to vulgar fractions by wild horses, than be deemed capable of drawing that warlike but immoral weapon, the long bow!"

With many passionate protestations, the gentle auditors certiorated their knight that he enjoyed their entire and unbroken confidence. Indeed, Fanny declared, with something approximating to a zephyr-like oath, that she believed the passages under narration quite as implicitly as if she had beheld them enacted!

Whereupon the bearded Hungarian ventured to osculate the not unwilling hand of the maiden, in token of his approbation of her flattering faith, and then proceeded to unwind the clew of his discourse.

"That very night," he said, "as I was reclining in a delicious and ecstatic snooze, induced by the generous and unwonted meal which I had bagged, a bright and gracious apparition was vouchsafed to me.

"Lo and behold! a lady, young in years, and beautiful exceedingly, stood at the side of my couch of sordid straw, and asked me, in tones more dulcet than the bagpipes of Fingal, whether I longed to behold once more the green earth and the blue sky?"

"Need I say that I jumped at the offer which the interrogation evidently enshrouded—jumped at it even as the male domestic fowl jumpeth to ravish the charms of a ripe and luscious gooseberry? Surely, oh surely, it is altogether unnecessary for me to say any such thing!

"The lovely vision then informed me, that on one condition she would put me in the way of giving limb security to my cruel and sanguinary oppressor. It was to the effect that I would never wed any daughter of our common ancestress Eve, except herself. Without one moment's hesitation I pledged myself as required, and the phantom, after pointing to a particular quarter of my bed, vanished in a flood of liquid fire!"

At this epoch of the story, Miss Newlove was overcome by a sudden attack of all-overishness, and it required the administration of a modicum of cherry and water, to enable her to regain her tranquillity.

"Starting up from my slumber," continued

the Count, "I made diligent search amongst the straw indicated by the vision, and found—"

"What?" eagerly interjected both the ladies.

"A bunch of keys," replied the narrator, "which evidently had been dropped by one of the vassals, in the confusion consequent upon my oyster onslaught.

"With the aid of t.ess friends in need, I managed not merely to free myself from the darbies which decorated me, but to gain the exterior of my grewsome bastile. Most providentially a railway train was puffing and snorting past, at that identical moment, and securing a first-class passage to Paris I was soon far beyond the reach of all pursuit.

"Not long afterwards, I had the satisfaction of reading in the public prints, that the rascal at whose hands I had suffered so much, had met with his most righteous deserts. Enraged beyond measure at my escape, Cloodmahoun cut the throats of all his retainers with one of Mechi's razors, and then expired in a fit of indigestion, induced by supping upon sixteen maturely grown lobsters. I could not but admire the aptness of the retribution, which made crustaceous fish the mediums of this matchless wretch's punishment. Never was there a more admirable instance of pure poetical justice!"

"And pray, noble Count," queried Squire Newlove's daughter; "pray, if it be not an indelicate and impertinent question, did you ever chance to fall in with the reality of the damsel, who visited you when in the embrace of Somms?"

"Never," returned the hairy man, "till this memorable and never-to-be-forgotten day! Oh most peerless and transcendental of maidens!" cried he, convulsively laying hold of the agitated Fanny's hand, and looking round to see that there were no obtrusive onlookers, "it was thy thrice-blessed form which illumined the gloom of my Austrian dungeon! Behold, I lay myself, my title, and my fortune at thy feet, beseeching thee to make thy devoted knight the most felicitous of living men!"

Poor Fanny, as might be easily conceived, was struck dumb by a host of conflicting emotions, but her aunt was not backward in responding on behalf of the damsel. She roundly asserted that even a blind man could see the finger of fate in the affair, and that it would be the *ne plus ultra* of wickedness and reprobation to fight against the developed decrees of destiny!

Emboldened by this hearty backing, Von Hoaxenstein ventured to suggest, that to guard