

him in some astonishment, saw him draw his breath hard, as if recalling some unpleasant event.

At length he turned suddenly, and taking one of the little hands near him in his, said, "Nellie, would you care to know that I was in great danger since I saw you last, and would it please you to hear how I was saved?"

He waited for an answer; and the eager "Yes, oh, yes!" pleased him so much, and the mute expression of those lovely blue eyes, beaming with love and purity, caused him to tell a different tale ("the old, old story") than that he had first intended. Grown bolder, he bent over the fair face beside him, and his dark hair mingled with her golden locks as he whispered, "Nellie, darling, you know I love you. Can you love me just a little?" There was no reply, and he gently raised the blushing face and read his answer in the loving gaze she sought not to conceal.

"My love, my darling!" was all he said, as he gathered her to his manly breast in a passionate embrace, as if nothing could ever separate them again. Each felt that, come what might, they two would share it together, and that henceforth life to them was happiness.

Lovers' conversation is proverbially uninteresting to all but the immediate parties concerned, so we will retire in the meantime, and join them again on Mr. Barton's return from the Lodge, some hours afterwards. Then, when Frank had made him acquainted with what had transpired during his absence, and had forced from Nellie a blushing acknowledgment that she was a willing party to the transaction, the old gentleman's astonishment knew no bounds. However, when he had recovered his presence of mind, and remembered that Nellie was really a young lady, and not the little girl he had been thinking she was, he came to the conclusion that if she must be married, she could not have made a better choice. So he told them, and the whole party shortly after retired to rest, with bright hopes for the future.

#### CHAPTER II.—THE CAPTURE.

The next morning, after breakfast, as Mr. Barton, Nellie and Frank were sitting in the library, looking over some curiosities that Frank had brought from Russia, where he had lately been travelling, Nellie suddenly claimed Frank's fulfilment of the story, promised the night before.

"Certainly," said Mr. Barton, "let's have it. But remember, no 'traveller's tales'."

"Well, sir," said Frank, "the 'story,' as Nellie calls it, is rather startling, I must confess; but still it was much too true for me to dwell on it even now. So I will hurry and get it done, as the remembrance of it sends a thrill through my frame even yet. Strange to say, that although the occurrence took place more than a year ago, I have never conquered a strong reluctance to speak of it; but last night, when I heard Nellie's fierce onslaught on Masonry," and he smilingly shook his head at her, "it all came back to me, and, for the first time, I felt that I could tell it.

"Well then, Nellie, 'once upon a time,' or more definitely, about fifteen months ago, I had occasion to visit Naples, as I dare say you remember. While there, I received a dispatch from the senior partner, Mr. Wareham, saying that a merchant who was

indebted to the firm in a considerable amount, had written to him, that if he would send some one to Ascoli, where he resided, about forty miles from Naples, he would pay the money. It happened that just as I received his letter, I was starting on horseback for another place. Thinking it better to attend to this matter promptly, I changed my route, and without disclosing my intention to any one, started at once for Ascoli.

"The roads were very bad, and often really dangerous, as part of the way was by narrow mountain paths, where a mis-step would be fatal. Added to that, I several times lost my way, so you may be sure I was glad enough to reach the place at last, and to take the first shelter I could find. The inn-keeper, a rough, villainous looking man, I seemed to dislike at once; and several men, who lounged around the room, were no improvement on him. Some way, the significant look on one man's face, when I asked for the person I came to see, rather alarmed me; and when I left the inn to proceed to his house, I mentally determined not to return there again, if possible. I found the merchant, who paid me the money, but did not seem at all inclined to be hospitable. He appeared to be so anxious to get rid of me, that I refrained from asking him for accommodations, and hurried back to the inn, looking, as I went, to see if there was any other place of more promising appearance,—but in vain. It was a miserable little town, and my inn seemed the only one in the place. It was now getting late; and on my way I tried to think that my previous feeling towards the men at the inn was merely nervousness, and that there was no occasion for it. Still, when I returned to the inn the old foreboding came back, and I felt sure I had fallen on a nest of thieves, if not worse.

"After a look around, to see if I could discover one face that seemed honest, and having failed, I determined to push on to another town of more pretensions, about five miles distant. The landlord, when advised of my intention, used every argument he could think of to induce me to stay. He said the road was dangerous, that it was infested with robbers, and that he was sure it would storm before long, and, in short, conjured up a host of evils I would be subject to if I ventured on such a course, but finding all of no avail, at length brought my horse, which seemed to have been well taken care of. As I rode away, I could not help remarking the dark scowl of every face, and I thought I heard one man mutter, 'it would have been less trouble here.' What would have been of less trouble here? To rob and perhaps murder me, I felt convinced, and I could not forget the sinister looks of the villainous crew.

"My way lay through a small wood, and on either side of it, the path narrowed, so that it required careful attention to follow it. I had a presentiment that in this wood, some evil would befall me. My horse too, seemed to share my uneasy feeling, for he trembled in every limb. However, there was no help for it, on I must go, so examining my revolver, and finding it all right, I drove the spurs into my horse, and he bounded forward with great speed. I had almost reached the centre of the wood, when he suddenly reared in the air, and almost unseated me. By the light of a dark lantern, which one of them carried, I saw a dozen men, armed to the teeth, and a more desperate looking