

band's restraining hand was laid upon her arm.

"Mary," he said, "I advise you as your friend not to open this closet, but wait and ask Mr. Gordon for an explanation of his very mysterious conduct. What there may be to affect your future happiness we can none of us conjecture, but at present it is his secret. Let it remain so."

"It is too late to wait now," answered Mrs. Wigley impatiently, "they have roused our curiosity, and it shall be satisfied at any cost. I wish to know the worst."

"To own the truth, I was heartily glad of the old lady's decision, though it was opposed to my husband's judgment. I, too, was consumed by an inextinguishable curiosity to fathom our enigma. Behind the door lay the mysteries that had been all the day arranging themselves into numberless forms within our busy brains, and now to wait for Mr. Gordon's return, and then perhaps to be denied an explanation, was a moral impossibility. Mary slowly but resolutely opened the door, and we all, even my husband, looked into the unlighted closet with an intense gaze; but there was manifested no scene of horror or mechanism for future purposes. In the darkness there was shaped out only two small mahogany boxes, something like violin-cases; here, then, lay the very core and kernel of our haunting mystery—the solving of the problem on which Mary's future life depended.

"Nothing could have stayed us now. Mary rapidly detached one of the keys from me, and we knelt down to fit them into the minute locks of the mahogany cases. We raised the lids simultaneously, and our eager, earnest eyes fell upon two wooden legs.

"I scarcely know what we felt the first few minutes. It was a relief; for though our suspense was over, our astonishment was not lessened. We had not the dignity of being horror-stricken, nor the indignation of being hoaxed: we were passively astonished. Mary silently relocked the cases and the closet, and we adjourned quietly to the library. A spirit of deep musing had fallen upon us

all. Out of the profound abyss of contemplation, suggestion after suggestion was summoned; but none could satisfy us, or explain all the circumstances of the case.

"We felt great excitement when the return of the master of the house was heard. Mary threw herself back into her chair, and my husband and Mrs. Wigley rose to meet him as he entered the room. Glancing keenly round on our attitudes of expectations, and on the littered room, he advanced and placed himself behind Mary's chair.

"Permit me," he said, "to give you an intelligible explanation of my conduct before you reproach me for my secrecy. My father made a match for me when I was very young, with a relative who possessed much wealth, but who had suffered an amputation. She died about two years after our marriage, and bequeathed her property to me, on condition that if I married again it should be to a woman similarly afflicted. A few years after, I met with a lady possessing the necessary qualification, and gifted with so much sweetness and amiability of temper, that I loved her truly. It suited me to watch over and protect her, and we were very happy, but for a few months only. Thus it happened that, while quite a young man, I was a widower for the second time. My last wife, with a caprice at variance with her usual character, had made a similar will to my first wife's; and though I would have given up their united fortunes had I found any one whom I could love, these circumstances tended to invest a cripple with peculiar interest in my eyes, and I have made it a rule to seek the acquaintance of those I met. As my position and presumed object became known, I was made the victim of several unworthy artifices, so that I determined to make all future advances under an assumed name,—as I did to you Mary. At first I was pleased with the notion that you loved me for myself; but when I came to know your excellencies, your cultivated intellect, your delicate sense of honour, and your modest reserve, I did not dare to confess I had deceived you, until I had called to my aid the adventitious influences of position and for-