

grate; and, reaching from a shelf, a bottle and a glass, poured out some brandy and handed it to his companion. "Damn it, don't look so down in the mouth, Mr. Godfrey. This is the best friend in time of need. This is my way of driving out the blue devils, that pinch and freeze the heart."

Godfrey eagerly accepted the proffered liquor, and drained the glass to the dregs. "Well, that's what I call hearty," continued the ruffian, following his example. "There's nothing like that for killing care. I don't wonder at your being low neither. I feel queer myself—devilish queer. It is a strange thing to lose a father. A something is gone. A string is loosed from the heart which we feel can never be tied again. I wonder whether the souls gone from amongst us tonight are lost or saved? Or whether there is a heaven or hell!"

"Pshaw!" said Godfrey, lighting his pipe. "Do you believe such idle fables?"

"Why, do you see, Master Godfrey, I would fain think there was no such thing, for my own sake—that it is all an old woman's fable. But terrible thoughts will come into my mind; and though I seldom think of heaven, I often hear a voice from hell—a voice from the shut up depths of my heart which I cannot stifle. Do not smile," said the man gloomily. "I am in no mood to be laughed at. Bad as I am, confound me if you are not ten times worse."

"If you are so much afraid of going to hell," said Godfrey, sarcastically, "why do you not amend your life? I, for my part, am troubled with no such qualms of conscience."

"If you had seen blood upon your hand as often as I have, you would tell a differet story," said Mathews. "Kill a man, and then see if the things we hear of ghosts and spirits are mere fables. They never die. They live and walk about, and haunt you continually. The voice they speak with will be heard. In solitary places, in the midst of crowds, at fairs and merry makings, in the noon of day and at the dead of night, I hear their mocking tones." He leaned his elbows upon his knees, and, supporting his chin between the open palms of his hands, continued to stare upon Godfrey, with vacant blood-shot eyes.

"Don't take me for a ghost," said Godfrey, the same sarcastic smile passing over his face. "What does it matter to us where our fathers are gone? If there is a place of future rewards and punishments, depend upon it, we shall only have to answer for our own sins, and as you and I have but a small chance of getting to heaven, we may as well make the most of our time whilst upon earth."

"Confound that death bell!" said the man. "It has a living voice tonight. Death and hell is in its sullen toll. I never hear it but it reminds me of Newgate, and I fancy I shall hear it toll for me before I die."

"A very probable consummation," said Godfrey. "But away with such gloomy thoughts. Take another glass of brandy and tell me what you are going to do now for a living. The lease of the farm expires in a few days. Mr. —— has taken possession of the estate, and means to put in another tenant. "What will become of you and Mary in the meanwhile."

"I have not thought about it yet," said Mathews. "At all events, we must leave this place. It's devilish little father has saved. Not much more than enough to bury him. There are the crops in the ground to be sure, and the cattle, and a few sticks of furniture. But debts of honor must be paid, you know, and I have been damned unlucky of late. By the by, Master Godfrey—what does your cousin mean to do with himself?"

"He must go home to his miserly dad, I suppose."

"Humph!" said Mathews. "I think I will go to Ashton and settle in that neighborhood myself. I like to be near old friends."

"What can induce you to go there?"

"I have my reasons," said Mathews, "strong reasons too, in which I am sure you will heartily concur." He looked into his companion's eyes, with an expression so dark and sinister that Godfrey started, as if some new light had suddenly flashed upon his soul. "Suppose we could get up a regular quarrel between the miser and his son, who then would in all probability be old Ironside's heir?"

Godfrey took the hand of the smuggler and grasped it hard. "Can you form no better scheme than that?"

"I understand you," said the man. "You are a perfect genius in wickedness. The devil never found a fitter agent for doing his business upon a grand scale. Yes, yes, I understand you."

"Would it be possible?"

"Every thing is possible to those who have courage to perform. If I could remove this obstacle out of the way, what would you give me for my share?"

"A thousand pounds."

"Your conscience! Do you think I would risk my life and limbs, for such a paltry sum as that?"

"You have done worse for a hundredth part."

"That's neither here nor there. If I have played the fool a dozen times, that's no reason that I am to do it again. Go shares, and promise to make an honest woman of Mary, and you shall not be long out of possession."

"The sacrifice is too great," said Godfrey musingly. "We will say no more about it at present."

"You will think about it," said Mathews.

"Thoughts are free."

"Not exactly. Evil thoughts lead to evil deeds. Try and lay that babe of the brain to rest, and see if it will not waken to plague you yet."

"It was one of your own begetting," said Godfrey. "You should know best how to quiet it."