

A PLOT WITHIN A PLOT;

OR,

THE MYSTERIES OF THE DOG'S NOSE.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was a sad and spiritless cavalcade that threaded its difficult way along the tortuous bridle-path leading inland. Even the face of the callous Frenchman wore a sombre, half-daunted look; and he peered furtively around in the pale moonlight, as if ghostly avengers were on his track, and the voice of the dead were still ringing in his ears.

As for Calvert, it is no shame to his manhood to tell how often the hand dashed away the dimming tear that blurred for him the sight of the track along which he led the sobbing maiden's animal.

After coasting along the upland for about three miles, they at last debouched on the turnpike road; and here Calvert leaped on his beast, the maiden's arm clasping him as she rode behind *en croupe*. Her brother being likewise accommodated with one of the men's horses, the party broke into a smart trot down the incline, rattled across the bridge, and after brief delay at the park gates, clattered up the broad drive towards Ansdell Hall.

A goodly mansion it shewed, towering over the billowy mass of foliage, with its noble portico, its balconied tiers of windows—here swelling out into roomy bays, there long and lanceolate; oval dormers and peaked gables, and ornate chimney-stacks aloft to break the monotony of the French roof. Broad wings flanked it on either hand, and a conservatory whose crystal walls and roof glistened like a glacier. The sweeping terraces, with their carved open-work balustrade of stone, formed a richly-fretted base line.

This being the fair centre-piece of the picture, the surrounding accessories were well fitted to bring out the effect. The trailing shadows and ghostly shimmer of the moonbeams played over open lawn and bosky glades, and startled deer bounding away noiselessly into the dense shades of the plantation around.

A burst of involuntary admiration on the part of the strangers greeted the view; and Calvert's heart swelled within him as his fair companion said, enthusiastically:

"Why, what a charming abode you have, Calvert! One could be very happy here."