

CHAPTER II.

The next few days passed quickly over, and Clarence was particularly alert in case his wife should catch him napping. He had no idea what her method of procedure would be; but, with the knowledge that she was rich in expedients, he determined to give her no chance to get the better of him. Milly, however, made no sign, and gradually, as the days passed over, his vigilance became first relaxed and then altogether lulled to sleep. The matter was not referred to again by his wife, and presently the last day of the time agreed upon was at hand.

It had been a very cold day with some rain, and as Clarence, homeward bound after a long day's toil, stepped into the train at Waterloo that evening, he looked forward with agreeable feelings to the comfortable fireside with Milly, his sweet little wife, presiding over the inviting supper table. He had the prospect of a forty minutes' run before arriving at his destination, Hampton Court, and he ensconced himself in an empty smoker in which to pass the interval as comfortably as possible.

The train was particularly empty, even for the 9.20 down, and he anticipated a solitary journey home. There was the usual irritating delay before the guard's whistle sounded, "all right," and just as the train slowly commenced to start the sound of running footsteps along the platform caught Clarence's ear. A face appeared at the window of his carriage, the door opened, and a lady sprang in and sank breathlessly into the opposite corner of the carriage to the one he occupied. Clarence felt considerably annoyed at the intrusion, and looked up from his paper to take a second glance at his companion. She was dressed in black, and wore a black veil thickly craped, which completely hid her features. From the way in which she breathed she had had a very near shave of missing the train. Satisfied with his scrutiny, Clarence addressed her in his suavest tones: "I trust, madam, you don't object to my smoking?"

"Not at all," replied the lady in low breathless tones, with a slight gesture of dissent, and her questioner, thanking her, at once produced his case, and, lighting up a fragrant weed, devoted himself once more to his paper, speedily forgetting the presence of his fair travelling companion. The train did not stop till it reached Surbiton, and after a few minutes spent in vain endeavor to decipher the dancing print by the aid of the sickly lamp which shed its faint glow over the carriage, Clarence at last desisted, and laying down his paper gazed through the rain-streaked

window into the darkness through which they were spinning. Presently, with a jerk, the train began to draw up in Surbiton station. The lady, who had long recovered her composure, did not offer to change into a ladies' carriage, and presently they were off again. Clarence closed his eyes and devoted himself to thought. How long he had been thus engaged he did not know, but he suddenly became aware that his fellow-passenger had shifted her position. At the same time he heard a low intense voice exclaim, "Throw up your hands," and, opening his eyes, he gazed straight down the polished barrel of a small but highly murderous-looking revolver, from which a cold light seemed to exude, which unpleasantly affected his spine. He held up his hands with alacrity—bloodcurdling thoughts of outrage and murder chasing each other through his brain with alarming rapidity. His companion raised the heavy veil which had covered her features, and Clarence, with cold chills chasing each other all over him, saw, by the small black moustache and beard with which the pale features were adorned, that his aggressor was not a woman but a man, and by the look in his eyes one who would not hesitate about shooting him if he disobeyed orders.

"Turn out your pockets," exclaimed the stern voice, which trembled at the same time with suppressed excitement. Like a man in a dream Clarence obeyed, while the muzzle of the revolver hovered mercilessly on a line with his nose.

"Now your watch and chain."

Again our unfortunate traveller, inwardly anathematising the South-Western Railway Company for allowing such outrages, hastened to do the bidding of the revolver-backed voice.

"All your loose cash and valuables!" Clarence produced from his trouser pockets a handful of loose silver, from his vest a sovereign purse, a gold pencil case (which was a present from his beloved Milly), and, finally, his gold-mounted cigar case. As he handed over these things to his plunderer, they were stowed away in a lady's bag which the miscreant had on his knees. Clarence's first fright had passed off, and he now awaited the end, whatever it was, with a certain amount of despairing courage which surprised himself. For a few moments the grim figure opposite made no sign, and Clarence began to wonder what his next move would be. He had not long to wait.

"Say your prayers!" sounded the death-knell of his hopes, and the revolver once more rose to the level of his nose. Should he make a dash for it? The thought was silenced immediately by a stern repetition of the murderous command. What did his plunderer want to