

The girl's eyes filled with sudden tears, and she turned her head aside upon the pillow that supported it.

"I was so happy then, Lucius," she said; "now I am full of cares."

"Needless cares, believe me, dearest," answered her lover. "Your grandfather is a great deal better—weak still, but much stronger than you are. He will be down-stairs first, depend upon it. I should have brought him in to take tea with us this afternoon if I had not been afraid of agitating you. I never had such a nervous excitable patient."

"Ah, you may well say that, Dr. Davoren," said Nurse Milderson, with her good-natured scolding tone, "I never see such an egg-situable patient—toss and turn, and worrit her poor dear self, as if she had all the cares of this mortal world upon her blessed shoulders. Why, Mrs. Beck, in Stevedor-square, that has seven children and a chandler's business to look after, doesn't worrit half as much when she keeps her bed, tho' she knows as everything is at sixes and sevens down-stairs; those blessed children tumbling down and hurting of themselves at every hand's turn—and a bit of a girl serving in the shop that don't know where to lay her hand upon a thing, and hasn't headpiece to know the difference between best fresh and thirteen-penny Dorset."

Altogether this tea-drinking had been a happy break in Lucius Davoren's life, despite those tears of Lucille. He had been with her once more; it had seemed something like old times. He saw a great peril past, and was thankful. After tea he read to her a little—some mild tender lines of Wordsworth's—and then they sat talking in the dusk.

Many times during her illness Lucille had embarrassed her lover by her anxious inquiries about the Winchers. He had hitherto waived the question; now he told her briefly that they were gone—Mr. Sivewright had dismissed them.

She protested against this as a great cruelty. "They were devoted to my grandfather; they were the best and most faithful servants that ever any one had," she said.

"They might seem so, Lucille, and yet be capable of robbing their old master on the first good opportunity. Your grandfather's long illness afforded them that opportunity, and I believe they took it."

"How can you know that? Was anything stolen?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes; some valuable pieces of old silver, and other property, were taken."

A look of intense pain came into the pale careworn face.

"How can you be sure those things were taken by the Winchers?" she asked.

"Simply because there is no one else who could possibly get at them. Mr. Wincher showed himself very clever throughout the business, acted a little comedy for my edification, and evidently thought to hoodwink me. But I was able to see through him. In point of fact, the evidence against him was conclusive. So at my advice your grandfather dismissed him, without an hour's warning; and strange to say, his health has been slowly mending ever since his faithful servant's departure."

"What!" cried Lucille, with a horrified look, "you think it possible that Wincher can have—"

"Tampered with the medicine by your grandfather's bedside. Yes, Lucille, that is what I do believe; but he is now safe on the outside of this house, and you need not give yourself a moment's uneasiness upon the subject. Think of it as something that has never been, and trust in my care for the security of the future. No evil-disposed person shall enter this house while I am here to guard it."

The girl looked at him with a wild despairing gaze—looked at him without seeing him—looked beyond him, as if in empty space her eyes beheld some hideous vision. She flung her head aside upon the pillow, with a gesture of supreme dejection.

"A thief and a murderer!" she said in tones too low to reach the lover's ear. "Oh, my dream, my dream!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AN OLD FRIEND REAPPEARS.

LUCIUS had been working a little harder than usual on one of those September afternoons, and was just a shade more weary of Shadrack Basin and its surroundings than his wont. He looked at the forest of spars visible yonder above the house-tops, and wished that he and Lucille could have sailed together in one of those great ships, far out into the wild wide main, to seek some new-made world, where care was not, only love and hope. He had often envied the stalwart young Irishmen, the healthy apple-cheeked girls, the strong hearty wayfarers from north and south and east and west, whom he had seen depart, happy and hopeful, from possible penury here to follow fortune to the other side of the globe, in some monster emigrant-ship, which sailed gaily down the river with her cargo of human life. To-day he had felt more than usually oppressed by the fetid atmosphere of narrow alleys, the dirt-poison which pervaded those scenes in which he had been called to minister—human dens, many of them, which only he and the pale-faced High-Church curate of St. Winifred's Shadrack-road, ever penetrated, excepting always the landlord's agent, who came as regular as Monday morning itself, with his book and his little ink-bottle in his waistcoat-pocket, ready to make his entry of the money which so very often was not to hand. He gave a great sigh of relief as he came out of the last

of the narrow ways to which duty had called him; a lane of tall old houses, in which one hardly saw the sky, and where smallpox had lately appeared—a more hateful visitor than even the agent with his ink-bottle.

"I must get the taint of that place blown out of me somehow before I go to her," thought Lucius. "I'll take a walk down by the docks, and get what air is to be had from the river."

Air in those narrow streets there was none; life in a diving-bell could hardly have been much worse. The fresh breeze from the water seemed more invigorating than strong wine. Lucius got all he could of it—which was not very much—so completely was the shore occupied by tall warehouses, stores, provision-wharfs, and so on.

He walked as far as St. Katharine's Wharf, always hugging the river; and here, having some time to spare before his usual hour for presenting himself at Cedar House, he folded his arms and took his ease, lazily watching the bustle of the scene around him.

He had been here before many times in his rare intervals of leisure—the brief pauses in his long day's work—and had watched the departing steamers with a keen envy of the travellers they carried—a longing for quiet old German cities—for long tranquil summer days dawdled away in the churches and picture-galleries of quaint old Belgian towns—for idle wanderings in Brittany's quaint old villages, by the sunlit Rance,—for anything, in short, rather than the dusty beaten track of his old dull life. Of course this was before he knew Lucille; all his aspirations nowadays included her.

On this bright sunny afternoon, a west wind blowing freshly down the river, he lounged with folded arms, and watched the busy life of that silent highway with a sense of supreme relief at having ended his day's work. The wharf itself was quiet enough at this time. A few porters loitered about; one or two idlers seemed on the look-out, like Lucius, for nothing in particular. He heard the porters say something about the Polestar, from Rotterdam—heard without heeding, for his gaze had wandered after a mighty vessel—an emigrant-ship, he felt assured—which had just emerged from the docks, and was being towed down the broadening river by a diminutive black tug, which made no more of the business than if that floating village had been a cockle-shell. He was still watching this outward-bound vessel, when a loud puffing and panting and snorting arose just below him. A bell rang: the porters seemed to go suddenly mad; a lot of people congregated from nowhere in particular, and the wharf was all life and motion, frantic hurry and eagerness.

The Polestar steamer had just arrived from Rotterdam, three hours after her time, as he heard the porters tell each other. Lucius looked down at that vessel, with her cargo of common-place humanity—looked listlessly, indifferently—while the passengers came scrambling up the gangway, all more or less dilapidated by the sea voyage.

But presently Lucius gave a great start. Just beneath him, among those newly disembarked voyagers, he beheld a little fat man, with a round comfortable florid face, close shaven—a supremely calm individual, amidst all that turmoil and hurry, carrying a neat little shiny portmanteau, and resolutely refusing all assistance from porters. Lucius had last seen this man on the shores of the Pacific. That round contented Netherlandish visage belonged to none other than Absalom Schanck.

The sight of that once-familiar face had a powerful effect upon Lucius. It brought back the memory of those dark days in the forest—the vision of the log-hut—those three quiet figures sitting despondently by the desolate hearth, where the pine-branches flared and crackled in the silence—three men who had no heart for cheerful talk—who had exhausted every argument by which hope might be sustained. And still more vividly came back to him the image of that fourth figure—the haggard face, with its tangled fringe of unkempt hair, the wild eyes and tawny skin, the long claw-like hands. Yes, it came back to him as he had seen it first peering in at the door of the hut—as he had seen it afterwards in the lurid glare of the pine-logs—as he had seen it last of all, distorted with a sudden agony—the death pang—when those bony hands relaxed their clutch upon the shattered casement.

Swiftly did these hated memories flash through his mind. His time for thought was of the briefest, for the little Dutchman had not far to come before he must needs pass his old travelling companion. He looked about him gaily as he mounted, his cheery countenance and bearing offering a marked contrast to the dishevelled and woebegone air of his fellow passengers. Presently, as his gaze roved here and there among the crowd, his eyes lighted upon Lucius. His face became instantly illuminated. He had been warmly attached to the captain of the small band, yonder in the West.

"Thank God," thought Lucius, seeing that glad eager look, "at least he doesn't think of me as a murderer. The sight of me inspire no horror in his mind."

"Yase," said the Dutchman, holding out his plump little hand; "there is no mistakes—it is my friend Daforen."

He and his "frient Daforen" grasped hands heartily, and suffered themselves to be pushed against the wooden railing of the wharf, while the crowd surged by them.

"I thought you were in California," said Lucius, after that cordial salutation.

"Ah, zat is der vey mit von's freinds. Man goes to a place, and zey tink he is pound to stay

there for the eternity. He is gone, zey say, as if he had the bower of locomotion ferlost. Man talks of him as if he was dead. Yase, I have been to California. I have digged, and not found gold, and have come back to England; and have gone to Holland to see my families; and have found my families for the mosten dead, and am come back to my cuddy at Pat-tersea, where my little housekeeper keep all things straight while I am away. If I am in the Rocky Moundains, if I am in California, it is nights. She keep my place tidy. She have my case-bottle and my bipe ready when I go home. And now, Daforen, come to Pattersea one time, and let us have one long talk."

"Yes," answered Lucius thoughtfully. "I want a long talk with you, my dear old Schanck. The time when we parted company seems to me something like a dream. I can just remember our parting. But when I look back to those days I see them through a mist—like the dim outline of the hills in the cloudy autumn daybreak. Our journey through the forest with those Canadians—our arrival at Lytton. I know that such things were, but I feel as if they must have happened to some one else, and not to me. Yet all that went before that time is clear enough, God knows. I shall never lose the memory of that."

"Ah! you was fery ill—you valked in your head, for long time. If I had not made one little hole in your arm, and let the blood spurten, like one fountain, you might have shall died becomen been," said the Dutchman, somewhat vague in his grasp of English compound tenses, which he was apt to prolong indefinitely. "Yes, you valk in your talk—vat it is you say? ramblen. But come now, shall we take a cab—it is long ways to Pattersea—or wait for a steamer at Towers Varf."

"The steamer will be quicker, perhaps," said Lucius, "and we can talk on board her. There are some questions I want to ask you, Schanck. I shall have to touch upon a hateful subject; but there are some points on which I want to be satisfied."

"You shall ask all questions das you vish. Come quick to Towers Varf."

"Stay," said Lucius, "I am expected somewhere this evening, and the Battersea voyage will take some time. You want to get home at once, I suppose, old fellow?"

"That want I much. There is the little housewife. I want that she has not run away to see."

"Run away to see," cried Lucius, puzzled. "Has she any proclivity of that kind?"

"I want to see she not has run away. Where is it you English put your verb?"

"Well, just let me send a message, Salom!"—Salom was short for Absalom, a pet name bestowed on the little Dutchman in the brighter days of their expedition—"and I'm at your service."

Lucius scrawled a few lines in pencil on a leaf of his pocket-book, which he tore out and folded into a little note. This small missive he addressed to Miss Sivewright, Cedar House, and intrusted to a porter, whose general integrity and spotlessness of character were certified by a metal badge, and who promised to deliver the note for the modest sum of sixpence.

The note was only to inform Lucille that Lucius had an unexpected engagement for that evening, and could not be at Cedar House till late. It had become a custom for him to drink tea in the sick room, with Lucille, and Mrs. Milderson, who was overflowing with sympathy.

This small duty accomplished, Lucius accompanied Mr. Schanck to Tower Wharf, where they speedily embarked on a steamer bound for the Temple Pier, where they could transfer themselves to another bark which plied between that pier and Chelsea.

The boat was in no wise crowded, yet Lucius felt it was no place for confidential talk. Who could say what minion of Mr. Otranto's might be lurking among those seedily-clad passengers, most of whom had a nondescript vagabond look, as if they had neither trade nor profession and had no motive for being on board that boat save a vague desire to get rid of time?

Influenced by this insecurity Lucius spoke only of indifferent subjects, till, after stopping at innumerable piers, and lowering their chimney beneath innumerable bridges, as it seemed to Lucius, they came at last to Cadogan Pier, whence it was an easy walk across Battersea-bridge to the Dutchman's domicile.

This bit of the river-side has an old-world look or had a few years ago—a look that reminded Mr. Schanck pleasantly of little waterside towns on the shores of the slow Scheldt. The wooden backs of the dilapidated old houses overhung the water; the tower of Chelsea Church rose above the flat; there were a few trees, an old bridge; a generally picturesque effect produced out of the humblest materials.

"It puts me in mind of my faterlant," said Absalom, as they paused on the bridge to look back at the Chelsea shore.

Mr. Schanck's abode was small and low—on a level with the river; whereby at spring-tide the small housewife's kitchen was apt to be flooded. A flagstaff adorned the little square of garden, which was not floral, its chief adornments being a row of large conk shells, and two ancient figure-heads, which stood on either side of the small street-door, glaring at the visitor, painted a dead white, and ghastrly as the spectres of departed vessels.

One was the famous Admiral Von Tromp; the other was The Flying Dutchman; and these were the tutelary gods of Mr. Schanck's home.

Within, the visitor descended a step or two—the steps steep and brassbound, like a compau-

lion-ladder—to the small low-ceiled sitting-room which Mr. Schanck called his cuddy. Here he was provided with numerous cupboards with sliding-doors—in fact, the walls were all cupboards—in which were to be found all a ship's stores on a small scale, from mathematical instruments and case-bottles to tinned provisions and grocery. From these stores Mr. Schanck dealt out the daily rations to his housewife, a little woman of forty-five or so, whose husband had been his first mate, and had died in his service. There was a small cellar, approached by a trap-door, below this parlour or cuddy, where there were more tinned provisions and case-bottles, and which Mr. Schanck called the lazaret. The galley, or kitchen, was on the other side of a narrow passage, and a stair of the companion-ladder fashion—steep and winding—led to three small state-rooms or bedchambers, one of which was furnished with the hammock wherein Mr. Schanck had slept away so many unconscious hours, rocked in the cradle of the deep.

Above these rooms was the well-drained and leaded roof, which the proprietor of the mansion called the poop-deck—the place where, in fine weather, he loved best to smoke his long pipe and sip his temperate glass of schiedam-and-water.

He produced a case-bottle and a couple of bright little glasses from one of the cupboards, gave the housewife a tin labelled "stewed rumpsteak" out of another, and bade her prepare a speedy dinner. She seemed in no wise disturbed or flustered by his return, though he had been three months in Holland, and had sent no intimation of his coming.

"All's well?" he said interrogatively.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the housekeeper. And thus the question was settled.

"The ship has leaked a bit now and then, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, there was three feet of water in the lazaret last spring-tide."

"Ah, she is one good ship for all that. Now, Daforen, you will make yourself comfortable, and we will have some dinner presently."

The dinner appeared in a short space of time, smoking and savoury. Mr. Schanck, in the mean while, had laid the cloth with amazing handiness, and had produced a little loaf of black bread from one of the cupboards, and a sour-smelling cheese of incredible hardness; they may both have been there for the last three months; and with these *hors d'œuvres* proceeded to take the edge off his appetite. Notwithstanding which precaution he devoured stewed rumpsteak ravenously; while Lucius, who was in no humour to eat, made a feeble pretence of sharing his meal.

Finally, however, Mr. Schanck's appetite seemed to be appeased, or he had, at any rate, eaten all there was to eat, and he dismissed his housekeeper with a contented air.

"Let us go up to the poop for our talk and grog," he said; to which Lucius assented. They would seem more alone there than in close proximity to that busy little housewife, who was washing plates and dishes within earshot.

They ascended the companion-ladder, the host carrying a case-bottle in one hand, and a big brown water-jug in the other, and seated themselves on a wide and comfortable bench, which had once adorned the stern of Mr. Schanck's honest brig. There was a neat little table for the case-bottle and jug, the glasses and pipes.

"This is what I call comfortable," said Mr. Schanck, who got more English in his mode of expression, as he talked with Lucius, and forgot his "families" in Rotterdam, with whom he had lately held converse.

The sun was setting behind the western flats out Fulham way; the tide was low; the crimson orb reflected on the bosom of the shining mud, with an almost Turneresque effect.

"It was to live at Chelsea that made your Turner one great painter," said Mr. Schanck, with conviction. "Where else out of Holland could he see such landscapes?"

They began to talk presently of those old days in America, but Lucius shrank with a strange dread from that one subject which he was most anxious to speak about. There was one faintest shadow of a doubt which a few words from Absalom Schanck could dispel. That worthy, in talking over past experiences, dwelt more on the physical privations they had undergone—above all, on their empty larder.

"When I count my tinned provisions—man improves daily in the art of tinned provisions—I can scarcely believe I was one time so near to starve. I sometimes feel as if I could never eat enough to make up for that dreadful period."

"Yes," said Lucius gloomily, without the faintest idea of what the other had been saying. "I was very ill yonder, wasn't I, Schanck, when you bled me?"

"Yes, and after. When you did rave—sch, dear Lord, how you did rave!"

"My brain was on fire when I shot that wretch. Yet I think, had I been full master of my senses, which I believe I was not, I should have done just the same. Tell me, Schanck, you who knew all, and were my witness in that trying hour, did I commit a great crime when I killed that man?"

"I think you commit no grime at all when you did shoot him, and if you had killed him it would have been one very good job."

"If I had killed him!" cried Lucius, starting up. "Is there any doubt of his death?"

"Sit down, Daforen, be drangull; the man is not worth that we should be uneasy for him. You asked if there is any doubt of his death? There is this much doubt, dass when I saw him last he was allfe."