

He lifted his hat ceremoniously, and departed towards the patch of moonlit water at the end of the street, leaving the lion-tamer standing on the pavement, transfixed and brooding.

It was just as he had imagined—the man was an amateur of sudden death.

The supper at the Lion and Lamb public-house—a snug little hostelry five doors from the theatre, and much affected by the actors—was a gastronomic success, but not a social one. The fare was excellent. The giver of the feast ordered liquors on a liberal scale, and eatables and drinkables disappeared with a celerity cheering to witness. Yet the lion-quar was not a cheerful one. Nothing could rouse Prusinowski from the gloom that had fallen upon him. The actors did their utmost to beguile him into gaiety, with boisterous talk and laughter, racy anecdotes, and an unlimited amount of that humorous converse commonly known as "chaff," to which the theatrical mind is especially prone; but all their efforts failed. Once or twice he did make some faint show of rallying—gave a smart answer or two, threw a lobster claw at the tragic and dignified Fitz Raymond, when that great artist was engaged in argument, and pushed a stick of celery down the coat-collar of the absent-minded De la Zouche. But these were the feeblest spurts of gaiety, and by degrees the talk fell flat, and the revels, which under happier auspices would have lasted far into the summer dawning, broke up abruptly at a quarter past two.

Mr. Warbeck, the prompter, walked home with Tiddikins and De la Zouche, and told them what had happened after the fall of the curtain.

"Prusinowski's as good a fellow as ever breathed," he said in conclusion, being thoroughly warmed through with gin-and-water. "If he was my own brother, I couldn't like him better than I do. But I'm afraid there's something queer hereabouts."

He tapped his forehead significantly.

"A loose slate," said Mr. Tiddikins.

"A bee in his bonnet," said Mr. De la Zouche.

CHAPTER III.

THE THIRD TIME.

It was three years later in the life of the lion-tamer, and he was performing for three nights only at a seacoast town in the north of England, a dreary little place enough, whither he had strayed from the rich manufacturing districts, where his harvests were wont to be so plentiful—a dismal little town, beside which the sea seemed to howl more dolefully than by other shores; a stony High Street, a damp, wintry fish market, a beach of great loose pebbles and a long wooden jetty stretching out to sea, and slippery always with slime and weed, dead fish, and other refuse of the great ocean.

Three years!—and yet on his benefit night at Spindicem Herr Prusinowski had talked about retiring on his laurels in a year. He had not been doing badly either; prosperity had followed all his wanderings; but the human mind is elastic in its estimate of money, and Herr Prusinowski's notions of the fortune he ought to retire upon had widened with the passage of time.

"Another six months, little woman," he said, "and I'll sell the beasts by auction, and take a public house," which was his notion of peace and retirement.

"I wish it was to be to-morrow, William," the little woman answered sadly. "I shall never know a happy moment till you've done with those animals."

The first two nights at Lowshore, this obscure northern seaport, had been tolerably successful. The theatre was the mouldiest old barn perhaps that had ever been dedicated to public entertainment, and was opened about twice in two years for a week or so of transient splendour, when some wandering star of the dramatic firmament, more wildly speculative than his brethren, essayed his fortunes at Lowshore, and informed the nobility and gentry of the district that he was about to appear for six nights only in a round of favourite characters. Rarely as the doors of the temple were open, the denizens of Lowshore were not wont to rush with remarkable unanimity to the shrine. It would have seemed, indeed, as if the drama were a dead letter in the seaport, the audience which came to be subdued by pity and terror being generally restricted to some two or three dozen seafaring men smelling strongly of fish, a sprinkling of boys, and a dash of brightness and colour in the shape of young women in service, or fisherman's wives and daughters.

But what the drama, whether legitimate or illegitimate, failed to do, the lions succeeded in doing. They drew very fair houses—not the nobility and gentry, as represented by one elderly peer, whose estates bordered Lowshore, but who was rarely known to inhabit his great stone castle, preferring a little box at Richmond, stuffed with rare old silver and costly curios; and the vicar—but the shopkeepers and their young men and maidens; the few visitors and the lodging-house proprietors; all the seafaring men and their families; the maids-of-all-work and fisher-

boys; the policeman off duty, and a sprinkling of farmers from inland farms. It was late in October, the very dreariest time of the year, and Herr Prusinowski had come to Lowshore in a speculative humour, just to fill up a blank week in his winter programme.

The house was nearly full the first night, a trifle less well attended the second, and on the third a considerable falling-off was apparent. Still it was a very fair house for Lowshore. There was a cheerful sprinkling in the pit, a very good gallery. The boxes alone had a cavernous and dismal aspect. The box audience—the upper middle-class of Lowshore, tradespeople and lodging-letters—had exhausted itself. Herr Prusinowski had brought a dramatic company of three with him to support the lions, and to eke out the evening's entertainment with a couple of farces or comediettas. This company consisted of a light comedian, a low comedian, and a comedy lady. The light comedian was the aspiring De la Zouche, who had blossomed from a walking gentleman into the popular provincial Charles Matthews—white hat, patent-leather boots, light-green trousers, cane, and rapid utterance. The performances began with *Delicate Grand*, and were to conclude with the *Secret*, a farce of an ancient and respectable character.

The lion-tamer, who was a spoilt child of fortune, had a supreme contempt for bad houses, and, with a defiant injustice, was wont to wreak upon the innocent few who did come to see him that wrath inspired by the guilty many who stopped away. That is to say, he punished the scanty but admiring audience by stamping his performance, and depriving them of their just due. The dramatic company were accustomed to empty benches and a barren dress-circle.

The weather was against Herr Prusinowski on this particular evening. The north winds came howling across the German Ocean as if they were intent upon sweeping Lowshore from the face of the earth, driving a salt-flavoured sleet before them, which well-nigh blinded the adventurous pedestrian. The Herr expressed himself very forcibly about the weather, as he took leave of his family before setting out for the theatre. The comedietta was just over as he went in at the stage-door, and he had to dress in a hurry, struggling into his close-fitting raiment, and girding himself with sash and gold, while a feeble little orchestra of four—clarionette, flute, and two fiddles—played some old-fashioned country-dance tunes, what time the audience regaled themselves with pawns and porter. The three lions looked from indolently big on the small stage, awfully red against the background of faded scenery. Robinson was out of sorts. He was sensitive upon the subject of weather, and had an especial aversion to high winds; perhaps some hereditary yearning for Libyan sands or Asia's burning sky—personally, he could know nothing about either, having been born in White-chapel—may have affected him at such times; at any rate the fact remained, cold or blustering weather disturbed his lionine mind.

The feeble little orchestra made a great struggle to produce a soul-inspiring chord, and came out superbly, the second violin a trifle in the rear. Herr Prusinowski bounded on to the stage from a rocky set piece, and began his work rather languidly, handling Robinson with a certain amount of caution.

He had got through half his performance, and was leading the three lions round the stage on their hind feet to the stirring music of the march in "Blue Beard"—stirring even from those poor feeble players—when he heard the opening and shutting of a door at the back of the boxes. He looked up quickly. A gentleman in evening dress was seating himself deliberately in the centre place, a pale complexioned man, with straight, reddish hair. The lion-tamer's heart turned cold. It was the man he had seen at Manchester and Spindicem, the man whose presence, by some morbid fancy, he associated with the idea of peril to himself. During the last three years he had been always more or less on the lookout for this man, and had never seen him—had begun to congratulate himself upon the probability that he would finish his public career without ever performing before him again; and here he was, in this remote seaport town, watching him with the same eager eyes and hungry face, watching as men watch the gladiators in old time, greedy for their blood.

If he could have brought the entertainment to an abrupt conclusion that instant he would have done so. He would have willingly returned the people their money, and sacrificed the night's profits to escape performing before that man. He was half inclined to plead sudden illness, bring down the curtain with an apology, but to do that would be to confess himself afraid of that man.

"D—n him!" he muttered to himself, "he shan't see that I'm afraid of him. Fasten!" he called out to the orchestra, "faster and louder!" and as the music quickened, he urged the animals with his whip.

Robinson, alias Moloch, resented the impertinence with a suppressed roar, and from that moment Rudolph Prusinowski lost his presence of mind and lost his temper. He was determined to bate not one of his tricks,

to demonstrate to that cold-blooded wretch in the boxes that he was not afraid of him. He made the animals do more work than usual, looking defiantly at that watchful face in the boxes all the while. The little theatre shook with applause, the pit rose to him, as the good old actors were wont to say; the gallery rang with bravos.

All in a moment, at the last, in the crowning feat which was to conclude the performance, the bravos changed to an awful shout of horror. No one could say how it happened, the brute's movements were too rapid for human eyes to follow. Herr Prusinowski was lying on the stage mangled and torn, the lion crouching upon him.

The keeper and a couple of brawny sceneshifters rushed upon the stage; they dragged him from under the infuriated beast insensible and covered with blood, and carried him off to the dressing-room, where the two rival surgeons of Lowshore came rushing in to him five minutes afterwards. Surgery could do nothing; his ribs were crushed to powder, and there was a perforation of the lung and hemorrhage. He breathed stertorously for about half an hour, and then died, without one ray of returning consciousness.

"Strange," the red-haired gentleman used to say afterwards, when he told the story as a pleasant kind of thing after dinner, and in some manner reflecting distinction upon himself; "the poor devil was the second of his trade I saw killed, and I had come across him three times at long intervals in the course of my travels in the north. I take a considerable interest in that sort of thing; there's more excitement about it than there is in the drama. Prusinowski was a very respectable fellow; had saved money, I believe; and left his wife and children comfortably provided for."

[THE END.]

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THE NEW MAGDALEN.

BY WILKIE COLLINS.

SECOND SCENE.—Mablethorpe House.

CHAPTER XL.—(Continued.)

"I will make myself understood. You asked me if I knew your name. I ask you, in return, which it is? The name on your card is 'Miss Roseberry.' The name marked on your clothes, when you were in the hospital, was 'Merry Merrick.'"

The self-possession which Grace had maintained from the moment when she had entered the dining-room, seemed now for the first time to be on the point of failing her. She turned and looked appealingly at Julian, who had thus kept his place apart, listening attentively.

"Surely," she said, "your friend, the consul, has told you in his letter about the mark on the clothes?"

Something of the girlish hesitation and timidity which had marked her demeanour at her interview with Merry in the French cottage, reappeared in her tone and manner as she spoke those words. The changes—mostly changes for the worse—wrought in her by the suffering through which she had passed since that time, were now (for the moment) effaced. All that was left of the better and simpler side of her character asserted itself in her brief appeal to Julian. She had hitherto repelled him. He began to feel a certain compassionate interest now.

"The consul has informed me of what you said to him," he answered kindly. "But, if you will take my advice, I recommend you to tell your story to Lady Janet in your own words."

Grace again addressed herself with submissive reluctance to Lady Janet.

"The clothes your ladyship speaks of," she said, "were the clothes of another woman. The rain was pouring when the soldiers detained me on the frontier. I had been exposed for hours to the weather—I was wet to the skin. The clothes marked 'Merry Merrick' were the clothes lent to me by Merry Merrick herself while my own things were drying. I was struck by the shell in those clothes. I was carried away in those clothes after the operation had been performed on me."

Lady Janet listened to perfection—and did no more. She turned confidentially to Horace and said to him, in her gracefully ironical way, "She is ready with her explanation."

Horace answered in the same tone, "A great deal too ready."

Grace looked from one of them to the other. A faint flush of colour showed itself in her face for the first time.

"Am I to understand?" she asked with proud composure, "that you don't believe me?"

Lady Janet maintained her policy of silence. She waved one hand courteously towards Julian, as if to say, "Address your inquiries to the gentleman who introduces you." Julian, noticing the gesture and observing the rising

colour in Grace's cheeks, interferred directly in the interests of peace.

"Lady Janet asked you a question just now," he said; "Lady Janet inquired who your father was."

"My father was the late Colonel Roseberry."

Lady Janet looked indignantly at Horace.

"Her assurance amazes me!" she exclaimed.

Julian interposed before his aunt could add a word more. "Pray let us hear her," he said in a tone of entreaty which had something of the imperative in it this time. He turned to Grace.

"Have you any proof to produce," he added in his gentler voice, "which will satisfy us that you are Colonel Roseberry's daughter?"

Grace looked at him indignantly. "Proof?" she repeated. "Is my word not enough?"

Julian kept his temper perfectly. "Pardon me," he rejoined, "you forget that you and Lady Janet meet now for the first time. Try to put yourself in my aunt's place. How is she to know that you are the late Colonel Roseberry's daughter?"

Grace's head sank on her breast; she dropped into the nearest chair. The expression of her face changed instantly from anger to discouragement. "Ah," she exclaimed bitterly, "if I only had the letters that have been stolen from me!"

"Letters," asked Julian, "introducing you to Lady Janet?"

"Yes." She turned suddenly to Lady Janet. "Let me tell you how I lost them," she said, in the first tones of entreaty which had escaped her yet.

Lady Janet hesitated. It was not in her generous nature to resist the appeal that had just been made to her. The sympathies of Horace were far less easily reached. He lightly launched a new shaft of satire—intended for the private amusement of Lady Janet. "Another explanation!" he exclaimed, with a look of comic resignation.

Julian overheard the words. His large luminous eyes fixed themselves on Horace with a look of unmeasured contempt.

"The least you can do," he said, sternly, "is not to irritate her. It is so easy to irritate her!" He addressed himself again to Grace, endeavouring to help her through her difficulty in a new way. "Never mind explaining yourself for the moment," he said.

"In the absence of your letters, have you any one in London who can speak to your identity?"

Grace shook her head sadly. "I have no friends in London," she answered.

It was impossible for Lady Janet—she had never in her life heard of anybody without friends in London—to pass this over without notice. "No friends in London!" she repeated, turning to Horace.

Horace shot another shaft of light satire. "Of course not!" he rejoined.

Grace saw them comparing notes. "My friends are in Canada," she broke out impetuously. "Plenty of friends who could speak for me, if I could only bring them here."

As a place of reference—mentioned in the capital city of England—Canada, there is no denying it, is open to objection on the ground of distance. Horace was ready with another shot. "Far enough off, certainly," he said.

"Far enough off, as you say," Lady Janet agreed.

Once more Julian's inexhaustible kindness strove to obtain a hearing for the stranger who had been confided to his care. "A little patience, Lady Janet," he pleaded. "A little consideration, Horace, for a friendless woman."

"Thank you, sir," said Grace. "It is very kind of you to try and help me; but it is useless. They won't even listen to me." She attempted to rise from her chair as she pronounced the last words. Julian gently laid his hand on her shoulder and obliged her to resume her seat.

"I will listen to you," he said. "You referred me just now to the consul's letter. The consul tells me you suspected some one of taking your papers and your clothes."

"I don't suspect," was the quick reply. "I am certain." I tell you positively Merry Merrick was the thief. She was alone with me when I was struck down by the shell. She was the only person who knew that I had letters of introduction about me. She confessed to my face that she had been a bad woman—she had been in a prison—she had come out of a refuge."

(To be continued.)

A huckster in Stamford, Ky., has the following warning displayed over his stall:—"Any Man or Boy that takes One Apple Without Leave is a BIL ROGE in his heart."

The *Nouvelle Presse Libre* has an advertisement which runs as follows:—"A young man of twenty-five, well brought up, and of good family, wishes to be adopted as a prince by a foreign or native prince. Address, Edouard, A. M. Rodolphe Mossu, Vienne Bellestrasse, No. 3."

Scene—A Galloway farmer's kitchen. *Dramatis Personæ*—Joan, the nee lass, holding the purritch; Jock, the farm servant, Jock coming in from his day's work and throwing himself wearily into a chair—"Jean!" "Weel, Jock?" "I think I'll marry ye, Jean!" "Man, I wad be muckle obleeged ta ye if ye wud." Honest, at least.