

As the room door closed behind the medico, Olympia clenched her fingers, flung up her arms, and uttered a terrible cry.

She felt that she had been acting awkwardly in the doctor's presence—that her conduct had been that of a guilty woman, and that he could not have failed to observe all her trepidation and all her fears.

The doctor's errand had taken Olympia by surprise; hence the confusion and ungovernedness of her behavior to him.

Olympia was a base woman, but she was far from being a clever one, else she would never have betrayed herself as she had done to Doctor Durgan. Too late she saw her folly—too late she repented of all she had done. Yet could she have laid her wicked hands upon the harmless medico she would not have hesitated in sending him after poor Captain Volderbond.

She sat down to think. She saw the dangers of her position, and she was wondering how she could avoid those dangers—whether she could make another suffer for the awful crime she had herself committed.

She had already darkly sinned in order to gain wealth and freedom from her marriage bonds, and she was prepared to sin still further. She had no real love for any mortal creature: she cared only for her own wicked self.

Suddenly she started; an evil thought had just flashed across her mind. Should she accuse Desmoro of having poisoned her husband—should she throw the crime on his shoulders? She did not exactly understand how she was to do so, but she had no doubt but that she would soon be able to weave a subtle scheme for his destruction.

That day, Olympia did not visit the garden, and Desmoro waited for her in vain. Madame Volderbond was in her chamber, brooding gloomily.

Meanwhile, justice was making her solemn inquiries into the cause of Captain Volderbond's death; quantities of arsenic were discovered in his body, and there now existed no doubt whatever that he had been the victim of unscrupulous hands.

Suspicion pointed to Madame Volderbond—to the beautiful Olympia.

Doctor Durgan who was privately examined concerning the revolting case, frankly stated all he knew about it, and also narrated the particulars of his late scene with the lovely widow, whom he believed to be a woman full of cruelty and wickedness.

Desmoro was amazed to receive a summons from Madame Volderbond to attend her under her own roof. It was the first time she had ever requested his presence there, and he felt there was some meaning in the act, and his senses grew confused, and somewhat troubled as well.

At this time he was completely under the spell of her beauty, and he felt ready to lay down his very life for her. She had fascinated him as many another evil woman had fascinated men, and he was not strong enough to resist her charming powers, which powers she was now about to test in full upon him.

She received him with a saddened air. Desmoro thought she had been weeping.

"Are you ill, madame?" he asked, anxiously. He had never yet had the courage to address her as Olympia.

She did not answer him, but mutely beckoned him to her side.

"Desmoro," she said, after a pause of some few seconds, and looking steadily into his eyes,—"Desmoro, I know that you love me; do you think that you will ever learn to hate me, and curse my very name?"

"Hate you, madame! Curse your name! Oh, never, never!" he cried earnestly.

"Be not too sure of that," she added, leaning her cheek upon her hand, her accents irresistibly sweet and touching. "Can you guess how deeply and fondly I love you?"

He did not answer her: his breast was thrilling with emotion; he could only fall upon his knees before her, and, like a worshipful slave, stoop and kiss the hem of her garment. She was a widow, as free now as himself, he reflected; there was no sin in his adoration, since he was at full liberty to receive it.

He was superbly handsome: not even his humble dress could hide the exquisite proportions of his graceful form.

She bent over him, and laid her velvety cheek close to his. Never before had Olympia done thus much to him. But she knew her game, and was striving to win it.

Desmoro muttered some unintelligible words; he was in a state of ecstasy, and knew not how to fully express his feelings. Had he been in a different position from that in which he now stood, his behaviour on this present occasion might probably have been less reserved towards the woman who was thus caressing him.

"Desmoro," whispered she, in a tremulous voice,—"Desmoro, can you surmise what I have done for your sake—in order that I might one day become your wife?"

He looked questioningly.

"Don't look at me, don't look at me!" she agitatedly exclaimed. "Shut your eyes and let me tell you all! But first promise that you will not spurn me—that you will pity and forgive me."

"Pity and forgive?" echoed he. "I cannot comprehend, madame."

"Call me Olympia," breathed she, in his ear.

Bewildered, he did so: calling her by many a loving epithet beside.

"Desmoro, I am about to be degraded," she went on, gradually breaking to him the frightful tale she had to tell.

"Degraded! How?" he asked, somewhat startled, and still on his knees before her.

"It may be worse even than degradation—oh, far, far worse!" proceeded she. "It may be death."

"Olympia!" half shrieked he. "Death?"

"Ay, death, Desmoro!" she answered, solemnly. "Listen," continued she, glancing all around her, and sinking her voice to a whisper. "Captain Volderbond died by my hands; I administered poison to him—"

"Father of heaven!" he cried, suddenly starting to his feet, and shuddering all over. "Olympia, Olympia! recall your fearful words—say that you have not spoken truly!"

"I cannot—I cannot!" she returned, her head bowed upon her breast, her eyes cast upon the ground, as if afraid to raise those eyes. "Don't turn away from me, Desmoro," she pursued. "It was my love for you that led my hand to commit that terrible deed, which has placed my own life in jeopardy."

"Oh, Olympia—Olympia!" he shivered, recalling from her as he spoke, and wringing his hands in bitter anguish of mind. "No, no; it is impossible. I'll not believe the tale!"

"Cease—cease, I entreat you, and hearken to me yet further. Doctor Durgan has been to inform me that, in consequence of a certain rumor afloat respecting the cause of the Captain's death, his body is to be exhumed, and an inquest held upon it. See, now, the awful predicament in which I am standing. I shall be suspected of the crime, accused, tried, and condemned—condemned to death—to die on a public scaffold!"

"Never, never, Olympia!" Desmoro replied, emphatically. "You shall not perish for me. If they accuse you, I will say that I did the cruel and terrible deed—I will say that I poisoned Captain Volderbond!"

"You, Desmoro!" she broke forth with difficulty concealing her delight at his words.

"Yes; I am already dishonored and branded, and now I have but little desire to live. I will die, if they will it so—I will die in order that I may preserve you, Olympia."

"It cannot be, Desmoro."

"It must be! None but yourself can deny the false statement I shall make. Hal now I recollect! I was the purchaser of that poison at different times—was I not?"

She bowed her head affirmatively.

"That fact will be quite sufficient to condemn me," he said, with a resigned air.

While he was yet speaking, Olympia's acute ears caught the sound of carriage-wheels, and her guilty conscience told her that the officers of justice were already coming to drag her forth to answer to the law for what she had done.

She started up, went to the window, and looked through it.

"They are here to seize me. Leave me, Desmoro—leave me!"

He hesitated, scarcely knowing how to shape his actions.

He believed that Olympia had endangered the safety of her soul for his sake; and hence he was ready to make a sacrifice of himself, rather than she should suffer the punishment which was her just due. He felt that he was for ever divided from her; and he was reckless of the future, since that future could not be spent by Olympia's side.

He little imagined with what an evanescent feeling she had inspired him, and how quickly he would learn to forget her and her bewitching, wicked smiles. He did not understand that the passion then holding such strong dominion in his bosom was one that a few days' absence would utterly quench. But Desmoro's knowledge of her late relentless act had already shaken his affection for her; for, despite his fallen position, and all his altered feelings, Desmoro still respected honesty and goodness."

"Leave me," repeated Olympia.

Desmoro answered not a word, but withdrew by the door through which he had entered, and remained in the hall, at the portal of which some one was now loudly knocking.

Desmoro hastily disarranged his hair, and putting on his cabbage-tree hat crookedly, opened the wide door to a couple of constables.

"Holloa!" hiccoughed Desmoro, assuming a drunken, imbecile manner. "What are you two chaps come here for, eh? Now, I'll wager I know—"

At this instant, the butler appeared on the scene, and, surprised to see the two constables in the hall, wanted to be informed what business had brought them there.

"I'll tell you," said Desmoro in the same manner as before, and staggering up to the butler as he spoke. "They're come here on a fool's errand—ha, ha! They're wanting to find out who poisoned somebody, and I shan't say—ha, ha!"

The butler stared at the speaker, and the two officers of the law exchanged significant glances with each other.

"No, no; I'm not going to tell any tales about myself, you may be sure!" added Desmoro.

And once more the constables looked meaningfully at one another; while the butler scratched his chin in troubled silence, unable to understand how, when, and where the under gardener had managed to get into such a state of terrible inebriation.

"Now, I darsay you fellows think to worm a fine secret out of me; but I can tell you that you'll be woefully mistaken! I shall hold my tongue; for the dead can tell no tales, and the old fellow can't come out of his grave to accuse me!"

"Whatever do you mean?" quaked the amazed butler.

"Ask him no questions," said one of the con-

ables, with an expressive nod. "He's a government man, isn't he?"

"Yes," answered the butler.

"And he's in a state of intoxication?" added the agent of the law.

"Well, so he appears to be," returned the butler in perplexity; "though I cannot comprehend how he's contrived to get in such a condition. He was sober enough half an hour ago, when he went in to talk to Madame—"

"And who says that I am otherwise than sober now, eh?" interrupted Desmoro, reeling up to the domestic, who was a little man, as broad as he was long, and as arrant a coward as ever was born. "Do you dare to say as much, old corkscrew?" continued our hero, doubling up his fists, and squaring up to the butler, who turning at once, retreated behind one of the constables, crying out, "There—you are witnesses that he's threatening me! Seize him—seize him! I give him in charge, the ruffian!"

Desmoro now assumed violent manners, and the constables laid hold of and secured him.

Then the two servants of the law drew apart, and held counsel with one another.

"We've tumbled across the right man," said one to the other. "He sent the old captain out of the world, depend on't! Madame herself had nothing to do with the affair."

"But we have a warrant for her arrest, and we shall have to do our duty, and carry her before the magistrate," replied the other.

"Well, we shall have to do that much, just for form's sake; but we can relax the severity of our orders a little, and let her follow us in her own carriage, for she's an innocent lady, as she'll soon be proved."

"Very well; I'm an older man than yourself, but you're higher in office than I, and in this case you'll take every responsibility."

"Of course—of course; I am fully aware of that fact," replied the sergeant, who now turned to the butler, and requested to see Madame Volderbond for a few moments.

Mystified now more than ever, Mr. Milnes, with a face full of importance, hurried away to inform his mistress that two members of the police force were desirous of holding a few moments' converse with her.

Olympia, who was fully prepared for this announcement, received it with the utmost calmness. She felt safe now, for she was relying on Desmoro, and on what his devotion would lead him to do for her worthless sake.

Of course, Olympia appeared much surprised at the constables' visit; she could not do less, you perceive, but she maintained her self-possession admirably; and when they told her that she must accompany them, in order to answer certain inquiries which the magistrate wished to put to her relative to her late husband's death, she agreed to attend them forthwith; and, ringing for Milnes, ordered her carriage.

Olympia shed some hypocritical tears, and uttered many sorrowful exclamations about her "poor, departed captain;" and the gallant sergeant, impressed with her beauty and his heart softened by the cunning waters of her eyes, drew her aside, and informed her that they had already secured a rascal who had half confessed to having poisoned Captain Volderbond.

Olympia's bosom bounded at this intelligence, and she asked a score of questions, each and all of which she put with the assumed innocence of a child. She was very weary of all her words and looks now; she had schooled herself thoroughly—every inflexion of her voice, every glance of her eye, was studied.

Dressed in her widow's weeds, looking pure and lovely as a flower, Olympia was conducted to the court-house, where she was shown into a private apartment, there to await the time when she would be summoned before the sitting magistrate.

But the sergeant, who was most anxious to spare the lady every annoyance and trouble, had taken the seemingly-intoxicated Desmoro before the bench, and made known to the magistrate all those particulars with which you are already fully acquainted.

At the period of which I am writing, there were many irregularities practised in the law-courts of the colony; and no wonder that such was the case, for both the magistrates and the judges there had much to learn before they could dispense justice properly.

But the colony was in its infancy then; and we do not expect wisdom to emanate from a cradle. And Desmoro stood a confessed criminal—the poisoner of his late master, Carl Volderbond.

He told the magistrate that he was a guilty man; but his statements were all so bewildering that but little credence was placed in them at first.

"You appear to be particularly anxious to place a halter about your neck, young man," said the magistrate, an old man much given to snuff-taking on the sly. "This is really a most extraordinary case—a most extraordinary case, indeed," shaking his head at Desmoro, and secretly conveying to his own nostrils a pinch of tobacco-dust. "But where did you procure the poison, eh?"

"From a chemist's, in Hunter Street," answered Desmoro, without the slightest hesitation.

"Yes, yes; we have here something about arsenic being bought on several occasions at Doctor Neilson's shop, in Hunter-street. A most singular case—a most singular case, indeed."

But wherefore should I further tax the reader's patience by narrating tedious particulars concerning Desmoro's examination and trial. Dr. Neilson proved that poison had been frequently procured at his shop by the prisoner, and that fact, aided by his own willing avowal of guilt, condemned him.

But he was not sentenced to death, as he had expected to be. In consideration of his youth, the judge sent him to a chain-gang for seven long years.

Olympia had escaped. Desmoro had preserved the wretched woman, and sacrificed himself.

Doctor Durgan shook his head and groaned, when he heard the sentence pronounced; for, despite Desmoro's confession, he felt convinced that Madame Volderbond was the guilty one.

CHAPTER XX.

Dressed in that hideous patchwork garb of grey and yellow, with his head closely shaven and his limbs heavily ironed, Desmoro was now herded together with hundreds of fallen men, breaking stones on the highway.

To death—even the death of a malefactor—Desmoro would have submitted in silence and resignation, but he could not do so to the countless horrors of the chain-gang.

Was he to drag those heavy fetters along with him for seven long, weary years?

Oh, no, no!

Desmoro's brain was cooler now: his passion for the wicked Olympia was over entirely, and he was reflecting on her only with loathing and dread, such as she was deserved.

Once, again, he was a victim—a woman's victim, at the present moment. He had suffered his thoughts to sin; and even that offence had brought upon him a severe punishment.

What was before Desmoro now? He was surrounded by a whole host of horrors which, to contemplate, nearly drove him mad.

He lay on his miserable pallet at night, meditating an escape from his bondage. His feet, like his hands, were singularly small; he felt certain that he should be able to work off his leg-irons, could he but find an opportunity of so doing; then, hey for the bush, and a life of reckless, lawless freedom!

One day, while at work on the road, guarded by soldiers, with fixed bayonets, Desmoro pretended to be suddenly seized with a fit of illness, and one of the overseers was called to his side.

"It's the effects of the sun," said the overseer, looking carefully at Desmoro. "Here, two of you fellows, carry him into the shade for a while. Now, look alive there!"

Accordingly, two of the prisoners lifted Desmoro from the ground, and carried him to, and left him in, a small canvas tent, at a short distance from the spot where the men were engaged at work.

Desmoro was alone. This moment was full of hope and likewise of peril. If he were discovered in this attempt, a hundred lashes would be his.

After listening for some few seconds, Desmoro began his task. His boots were large, hence it was that the smallness of his feet had never been remarked.

Desmoro threw off the coarse unwieldy boots then he worked and worked, and squeezed and squeezed, until both his feet were liberated from the iron rings.

Now, what was he to do? His heart was beating loudly. He crawled out of the tent unseen, and entered a tenanted house close by. It was ruinous abode, full of all sorts of rubbish.

Desmoro looked up the chimney, but there was no place of concealment for him there. Then he examined a large oven and a water-butt, but rejected them both. He looked around. Every instant was most precious to him.

"I'll tell you where to hide," said a squeaking voice.

Desmoro turned suddenly, full of alarm, feeling ready to sink to the floor.

"It's only me, Billy Nedly, the orphan. I shan't tell you, mister," spoke the owner of an unkempt head from behind a heap of wood, bricks, and mortar. "Here, you get under all these, and I'll lie on top o' you."

"You'll betray me!" said Desmoro, in doubt how to act.

"If I do, I wish I may be hanged. I once helped another fellow to run away, and he got off capitally. Oh, I aren't so silly as I look, only at times, just after I've had a fit or two, them I'm rather queer in my ed, that's all."

"Hark! I hear footsteps!" cried Desmoro.

"Hide, hide!" returned Nedly, making a great hole in the rubbish. "I shall tell 'em I've gotten a awful fever, and then they'll not come near me."

Desmoro uttered not a word, but slipped into the hole. Then the lad—such he was—half-covering our hero with all sorts of things, laid down upon him, and calmly awaited the advancing footsteps.

Presently, the overseer and two soldiers entered the building.

"Anybody here?" asked the overseer, glancing all round, the soldiers behind him.

"Yes, me!" answered Nedly, from his resting-place.

"And who's me?"

"Silly Nedly—you knows me—who's just getting better of a awful fever—a ketching one—the tiths, I think they call it!"

At this, the overseer immediately slunk back, so also did the soldiers.

The overseer now spoke from the door. "Have you seen any one, Nedly?" he called out.

"How's it likely any one would come anigh me, and me bad with a awful fever, sir?"

"You're a fool!"

"So every body tells me, sir."

"Did one of the gang, a confounded runaway, come in here just now? If you'll tell me, I'll give you a shilling."