

But the old stage-coach had buffeted many a storm, and faced this one nobly. Still the rain fell, still the wind howled through the surging, rocking trees, still blazed the lightning, still crashed the thunder. The road, bad at its best, grew worse and worse. The tossing and jolting were something fearful.

The veiled lady clung to her companion in a speechless paroxysm of womanly terror. That midnight scene was a scene never to be forgotten. The raging tempest without; that quivering old stage-coach making its way along the desolate forest road, through darkness and danger and wildest storm.

"By Heaven!" cried Hollis, springing wildly to his feet, "the coach is going!"

He was right. Blinded by the blazing lightning, stumbling over the broken road, the horses fell with a crash. There was an awful sound of rending and tearing, and then the brave old stage-coach lay a shattered heap on the ground.

One cry alone had rung out, wild and agonized, as it went down.

"Gerald, Gerald, Gerald, save me!"

Then the triumphant tempest had the deafening uproar all to itself, and the lurid glare of the lightning lighted up the desolate forest road, the prostrate horses and men.

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## CHAPTER II.

### BORN IN STORM AND MYSTERY.

AN instant after the overthrow the carriage door was wrenched violently open from within, and a man crawled out from the ruins. He stood on his feet and shook himself, to make sure he was not hurt. A blinding blaze of lightning showed the tall, graceful figure, the handsome, aquiline nose, and bright, dark eyes of the young man who had snubbed Mr. Hollis.

"No bones broken, thank fortune!" he muttered. "The gods that specially watch over fools and scapegraces must have had me in charge this time. Am I the only one left alive in this howling wilderness to tell the tale? No, by all that's lucky, here's another!"

It was the driver, who scrambled up with a very rueful visage and very sore bones.

"Misfortinit, sir, ain't it?" said the driver. "Right here in the very heart of the woods, too, and in this awful storm!"