

more guilty than the culprit at whom you aimed, had your shot destroyed him."

The light tone in which Matilda spoke dispelled the seriousness that had begun to shadow the brow of the young commander—"And pray how do you make this good?" he asked.

"Suppose, for instance, the slumberer you preserved had been a being of crime, through whom the hopes, the happiness, the peace of mind, and, above all, the fair fame of the other had been cruelly and irrevocably blasted. Let us imagine he had destroyed some dear friend or relative of him with whose vengeance you beheld him threatened."

"Could that be—"

"Or," interrupted the American, in the same careless tone, "that he had betrayed a wife."

"If so—"

"Or sacrificed a beloved sister."

"Such a man—"

"Or, what is worse, infinitely worse, sought to put the finishing stroke to his villainy, by affixing to the name and conduct of his victim every ignominy and disgrace which can attach to insulted humanity."

"Matilda," eagerly exclaimed the youth, advancing close to her, and gazing into her dark eyes, "you are drawing a picture."

"No, Gerald," she replied, calmly, "I am merely supposing a case. Could you find no excuse for a man acting under a sense of so much injury?—would you still call him an assassin, if, with such provocation, he sought to destroy the hated life of one who had thus injured him?"

Gerald paused, apparently bewildered.

"Tell me, dearest Gerald," and her fair and beautiful hand caught and pressed his—"would you still bestow upon one so injured the degrading epithet of assassin?"

"An assassin!—most undoubtedly I would. But why this question, Matilda?"

The features of the American assumed a changed expression; she dropped the hand she had taken the instant before, and said, disappointedly:

"I find, then, my philosophy is totally at fault."

"Wherein, Matilda?" anxiously asked Gerald.

"In this, that I have not been able to make you a convert to my opinions."

"And these are—" again questioned Gerald, his every pulse throbbing with intense emotion.

"Not to pronounce too harshly on the conduct of others, seeing that we ourselves may stand in much need of lenity of judgment. There might have existed motives for the action of him whom you designate as an assassin, quite as powerful as those which led to your interference, and quite as easily justified to himself."

"But, dearest Matilda—"

"Nay, I have done—I close at once my argument and my philosophy. The humour is past, and I shall no longer attempt to make the worse appear

the better cause. I dare say you thought me in earnest," she added, with slight sarcasm, "but a philosophical disquisition between two lovers on the eve of parting for ever, was too novel and piquant a seduction to be resisted."

That "parting for ever" was sufficient to drive all philosophy utterly away from our hero.

"For ever, did you say, Matilda?—no, not for ever; yet, how coldly do you allude to a separation, which, although I trust it will be only temporary, is a source of the deepest vexation to me. You did not manifest this indifference in the early part of our conversation this evening."

"And if there be a change," emphatically yet tenderly returned the beautiful American; "am I the only one changed. Is your manner now what it was then. Do you already forget at what a moment that conversation was interrupted?"

Gerald did not forget, and again, as they leaned over the vessel's side, his arm was passed around the waist of his companion.

The hour, the scene, the very rippling of the water—all contributed to lend a character of excitement to the feelings of Gerald.

Filled with tenderness and admiration for the fascinating being who reposed thus confidently on his shoulder, he scarcely dared to move, lest in so doing he should destroy the fabric of his happiness.

"First watch there, hilloa! rouse up, and be d—d to you, it's two o'clock."

Both Gerald and Matilda, although long and silently watching the progress of the vessel, had forgotten there was any such being as a steersman to direct her.

"Good Heaven, can it be so late?" whispered the American, gliding from her lover; "if my uncle be awake, he will certainly chide me for my imprudence. Good night, dearest," and drawing her cloak more closely around her shoulders, she quietly crossed the deck, and disappeared through the opening to the cabin.

"What the devil's this?" said the relieving steersman, as, rubbing his heavy eyes with one hand, he stooped and raised with the other something from the deck against which he had kicked, in his advance to take the helm; "why, I'm blest if it isn't the apron off old Sally here. Have you been finger-ing Sall's apron, Bill?"

"Not I, faith," growled the party addressed, "I've enough to do to steer the craft without thinking of meddling with Sall's apron at this time o' night."

"I should like to know who it is that has exposed the old gal to the night air in this here manner," still muttered the other, holding up the object in question to his closer scrutiny; "it was only this morning I gave her a pair of bran new apron strings, and helped to dress her myself. If she doesn't hang fire after this, I'm a Dutchman, that's all."

"What signifies jawing, Tom Fluke. I suppose the