

man who talked about Balliol. Yes, he has a prosperous stall-fed look. The other, Lucius, has too much intelligence. The little Dutchman is too old to spend his substance upon so wild a scheme.

Those observant eyes of the stranger's have nearly completed their circuit, when they suddenly affix themselves, seem visibly to dilate, and kindle with a fire that gives a new look to his face. He sees an object hanging against the wall, to him as far above all the wonders of modern gunnery as the diamonds of Golconda are above splinters of glass.

He points to it with his bony finger, and utters a strange shrill cry of rapture—the ejaculation of a creature who by long solitude, by hardship and privation, and the wild life of forests and deserts, has lapsed into an almost savage condition.

"A fiddle!" he exclaims, after that shrill scream of delight has melted into a low chuckling laugh. "It's more than a year since I've seen a fiddle, since I lost mine crossing the McKenzie river. Let me play upon it."

This in a softer, more humane tone than any words he had previously spoken, looking from one to the other of the three men with passionate entreaty.

"What! you play the fiddle, do you?" asked Lucius, emptying the ashes from his pipe with a long sigh of regret.

"It is yours, then?"

"Yes; you can play upon it, if you like. It's a genuine Amati. I've kept it like the apple of my eye."

"Yes, and it's been uncommonly useful in frightening away the Indians when they've come to torment us for fire-water," said Geoffrey.

"We tried watering the rum, but that didn't answer. The beggars poured a few drops on the fire, and finding it didn't blaze up, came back and blackguarded us. I only wish I'd brought a few barrels of turpentine for their benefit, or petroleum would have been still better. That would meet their ideas of excellence in spirituous liquors. They like something that scorches their internal economy. They led us a nice life as long as we had any rum; but the violin was too much for them. They're uncommonly fond of their own music, and would sometimes oblige us with a song which lasted all night, but they couldn't stand Davoren's sonatas. Tune up, stranger. I'm rather tired of De Beriot and Spohr and Haydn myself; perhaps you could oblige us with a nigger melody."

The stranger waited for no further invitation, but strode across the narrow hut, and took the violin case from the shelf where it had been carefully bestowed. He laid it on the rough pine-wood table, opened it, and gazed fondly on the Amati reposing in its bed of pale-blue velvet; the very case, or outer husk, a work of art.

Lucius watched him as the young mother watches her first baby in the ruthless hands of a stranger. Would he clutch the fiddle by its neck, drag it roughly from its case, at the hazard of dislocation? The surgeon was too much an Englishman to show his alarm, but sat stolid and in agony. No; the unkempt stranger's bony claws spread themselves out gently, and embraced the polished table of the fiddle. He lifted it as the young mother lifts her darling from his dainty cradle; he laid it on his shoulder and lowered his chin upon it, as if in a loving caress. His long fingers wound themselves about the neck; he drew the bow slowly across the strings. O, what rapture even in those experimental notes!

Geoffrey flung a fresh pine-log upon the fire, as if in honor of the coming performance. The Dutchman sat and dozed, dreaming he was in his cuddy at Battersea, supping upon his beloved sausage. Lucius watched the stranger, with a gaze full of curiosity. He was passionately fond of music, and his violin had been his chief solace in hours of darkest apprehension. Strange to find in this other wanderer mute evidence of the same passion. The man's hand as it hugged the fiddle, the man's face as it bent over the strings, were the index of a passion as deep as, or deeper than, his own. He waited eagerly for the man to play.

Presently there arose in that low hut a long-drawn wailing sound; a minor chord, that seemed like a passionate sob of complaint wrung from a heart newly broken; and with this for his sole prelude the stranger began his theme. What he played, Lucius strove in vain to discover. His memory could recall no such music. Wilder, stranger, more passionate, more solemn, more awful, than the strain which Orpheus played in the under world, was that music: more demonic than that diabolical sonata which Tartini pretended to have composed in a dream. It seemed extemporaneous; for it obeyed none of the laws of harmony, yet even in its discords was scarcely inharmonious. There was melody, too, through all—a plaintive undertone of melody, which never utterly lost itself, even when the player allowed his fancy its wildest flights. The passionate rapture of his haggard, weather-beaten face was reflected in the passionate rapture of his music; but it was not the rapture of joy; rather a sharp agony of those convulsions of the soul which touch the border-line of madness, like the passion of a worshipper at one of those Dionysian festivals in which religious fervor might end in self-slaughter, or like the "possession" of some Indian devil-dancer, leaping and wounding himself under the influence of his demon god.

The three men sat and listened, curiously affected by that strange sonata. Even Absalom Schanck, to whom music was about as familiar a language as the Cuneiform character, felt that this was something out of the common way; that it was grander, if not more beautiful, than

those graceful compositions of De Beriot or Spohr wherewith Lucius Davoren had been wont to amuse his friends in their desolate solitude.

Upon Lucius the music had a curious effect. At first and for some time he listened with no feeling but the connoisseur's unmixed delight. Of envy his mind was incapable, though music is perhaps the most jealous of the arts, and though he felt this man was infinitely his superior—could bring tones out of the heart of that Amati which no power of his could draw from his beloved instrument.

But as the man played on, new emotions showed themselves upon his countenance—wonder, perplexity; then a sudden lighting up of passion. His brows contracted; he watched the stranger with gleaming eyes, breathlessly, waiting for the end of the composition. With the final chord he started up from his seat and confronted the man.

"Were you ever in Hampshire?" he asked, sharply and shortly.

The stranger started ever so slightly at this abrupt interrogatory, but showed no further sign of discomposure, and laid the fiddle in its case as tenderly as he had taken it thence ten minutes before.

"Hampshire, Massachusetts?" he inquired. "Yes, many a time."

"Hampshire in England. Were you in that county in the year '59?" asked Lucius breathlessly, watching the stranger with lynx-like gaze as he spoke.

"I was never in England in my life."

"Indeed! Yet you don't speak English like an American," said Lucius doubtfully, and with the same watchful gaze rooted to the other's face.

"Do I not? That comes of a decent education, I suppose, and an ear for music. No man with the latter qualification could talk through his nose, and say 'dew' for 'do.' Besides, I'm not a Yankee. I hail from the Southern States."

"Ah," said Lucius, with a long-drawn sigh, which might indicate either disappointment or relief, "then you're not the man I was half inclined to take you for. Yet that," dropping into soliloquy, "was a foolish fancy. There may be more than one man in the world who plays like a devil."

"You are not particularly complimentary," returned the stranger, touching the violin strings lightly with the tips of his skeleton fingers, repeating the dismal burden of his melody in those pizzicato notes.

"You don't consider it a compliment. Rely upon it, if Lucifer played the fiddle at all, he'd play well. The spirit who said, 'Evil, be thou my good,' would hardly do anything by halves. Do you remember what Corelli said to Strungk when he first heard him play? 'I have been called Arcangelo, but by heavens, sir, you must be Arcidiavolo. I would give a great deal to have your power over that instrument. Was that your own composition you played just now?'"

"I believe so, or a reminiscence; but if the latter, I can't tell you its source. I left off playing by book a long time ago; but I have a reserve fund of acquired music—chiefly German—and I have no doubt I draw upon it occasionally."

"Yes," repeated Lucius thoughtfully, "I should like to play as you do, only—"

"Only what?" asked the stranger.

"I should be inclined to fancy there was something uncomfortable—uncanny, as the Scotch say—lurking in the deep waters of my mind, if my fancies took the shape yours did just now."

"As for me," exclaimed Geoffrey, with agreeable candor, "without wishing either to flatter or upbraid, I can only say that I feel as if I had been listening to a distinguished member of the royal orchestra in Pandemonium—the Pagan of Orpheus."

The stranger laughed—a somewhat harsh and grating cackling.

"You don't like minors?" he said.

"I was a minor myself for a long time, and I only object to them on the score of impecuniosity," replied Geoffrey. "O, I beg your pardon; you mean the key. If that composition of yours was minor, I certainly lean to the major. Could you not oblige us with a Christy Minstrel melody to take the taste out of our mouths?"

The stranger declined no answer to that request, but sat down on the rough log which served Lucius for a seat, and made a kind of settle by the ample fireplace. With lean arms folded and gaze bent upon the fire, he lapsed into thoughtful silence. The blaze of the pine-logs, now showing vivid tinges of green or blue as the resin bubbled from their tough hide, lit up the faces, and gave something of grotesque to each. Seen by this medium, the stranger's face was hardly a pleasant object for contemplation, and was yet singular enough to arrest the gaze of him who looked upon it.

Heaven knows if, with all the aids of civilization, soap and water, close-cut hair, and carefully-trimmed moustache, the man might not have been ranked handsome. Seen in this dusky hovel, by the changeful light of the pine-logs, that face was grotesque and grim as a study by Gustave Doré; the lines as sharply accentuated, the lights and shadows as vividly contrasted.

The stranger's eyes were of darkest hue; as nearly black as the human eye, or any other eye, ever is; that intensest brown which, when in shadow, looks black, and when the light shines upon it seems to emit a yellow flame, like the colored light which radiates from a fine cat's-eye. His forehead was curiously low, the hair growing in a peak between the temples; his nose was long, and pronouncedly aquiline;

his cheek-bones were rendered prominent by famine. The rest of his face was almost entirely hidden by the thick ragged beard of densest black, through which his white teeth flashed with a hungry look when he talked or smiled. His smile was not pleasant one.

"If one could imagine his Satanic majesty taking another promenade like that walk made famous by Porson, and penetrating to these hyperborean shores—and why not, when contrast is ever pleasing?—I should expect to behold him precisely in yonder guise," mused Geoffrey, as he contemplated their uninvited guest from the opposite side of the hearth. "But the age has grown matter-of-fact; we no longer believe in the pleasing illusions of our childhood—hobgoblins, Jack and the Beanstalk, and old Nick."

Lucius sat meditative, staring into the fire. That wild minor theme had moved him profoundly, yet it was not so much of the music that he thought as of the man. Five years ago he had heard the description of music—which seemed to him to correspond exactly with this—of an amateur whose playing had the same unearthly, or even diabolical, excellence. Certainly that man had been a pianist. And then it was too wild a fancy to conceive for a moment that he had encountered that man, whom he had hunted for all over England, and even out of England, here in this primeval forest. Destiny in her maddest sport could hardly have devised such a hazard. No, the thought was absurd; no doubt an evidence of a brain enfeebled by anxiety and famine. Yet the fancy disturbed him not the less.

"Unless Geoff stalks another buffalo before long, I shall go off my head," he said to himself. He brooded upon the stranger's assertion that he was a Southern American, and had never crossed the Atlantic; an assertion at variance with the fact of his accent, which was purely English. Yet Lucius had known at least one American citizen whose English was as pure, and he could scarcely condemn the man as a liar on such ground as this.

"The description of that man's appearance might fit this man," he thought; "due allowance being made for the circumstances under which we see him. Tall and dark, with a thin lissom figure, a hooked nose, a hawk's eye; that was the description they gave me at Wykhamston; I had it from three separate people. There is no palpable discrepancy, and yet—bah, I am a fool to think of it! Haven't I had trouble of mind enough upon this score, and would it do any good to her—in her grave, perhaps—if I had my wish, if God gave me the means of keeping the promise I made five years ago, when I was little more than a boy?"

So his thoughts rambled on as he sat looking into the fire, while the stranger sat beside him on the rough settle, with brooding eyes fixed, like his, upon the flare of the pine-logs.

"By the way," said Lucius presently, rousing himself from that long reverie, "when my friend yonder spoke of Balliol, you pricked up your ears as if the place were familiar to you. That's odd, since you have never been in England."

"I suppose there is nothing especially odd in my having had an English acquaintance in my prosperous days, when even Englishmen were not ashamed to know me. One may be familiar with the name of a place without having seen the place itself. I had a friend who was a student at Balliol."

"I wonder whether he was the man who wrote 'Aratus sum' upon one of the tables in the examiners' room after they ploughed him," speculated Geoffrey idly.

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Stranger," said Lucius presently, struggling with the sense of irritation caused by that wild fancy which the stranger's playing had inspired, "it's all very well for us to give you a corner in our hut. As good or evil for us brought you this way, we could hardly be so unchristian as to refuse you our shelter; God knows it's poor enough, and death is near enough inside as well as outside these wooden walls; but even Christianity doesn't oblige us to harbor a man without a name. That traveller who fell among thieves told the Samaritan his name, rely upon it, as soon as he was able to say anything. No honest man withhold his name from the men he breaks bread with. Even the Indians tell us their names; so be good enough to give us yours."

"I renounced my own name when I turned my back upon civilization," answered the stranger doggedly; "I brought no card-case to this side of the Rocky Mountains. If you give me your hospitality," with a monosyllabic laugh and a scornful glance round the hut, "solely on condition that I acquaint you with my antecedents, I renounce your hospitality; I can go back to the forest and liberty. As you say, death could not be much farther off out in the snow. If you only want my name for purposes of social intercourse, you can call me what the Indians call me, a sobriquet of their own invention, 'Matchi Mohkamarn.'"

"That means the Evil Knife, I believe," said Lucius; "hardly the fittest name to inspire confidence in the minds of a man's acquaintance; but I suppose it must do, since you withhold your real name."

"I'm sure you are welcome to our pasteboards," said Geoffrey, yawning; "I have a few yonder in my dressing-bag—rather a superfluous encumbrance by the way, since here one neither dresses nor shaves. But I have occasionally propitiated ravenous Indians with the gift of a silver-topped scent-bottle or pomatempot, so the bag has been useful. Dear, dear, how nice it would be to find oneself back in a world in which there are dressing-bags, and

dressing-bells, and dinner-bells afterwards! And yet one fancied it so slow, the world of civilization. Lucius, is it not time for our evening pemmanic? Think of the macaroons and rout-cakes we have tramped under our heels in the bear-fights that used to wind up our wine-parties; to think of the anchovy toasts and various devils we have eaten—half from sheer gluttony, half because it was good form—when we were gorged like Strasburg geese awaiting their euthanasia. Think how we have rioted, and wasted and wallowed in what are called the pleasures of the table; and behold us now, hungering for a lump of rancid fat or a tallow-candle, to supply our exhausted system with nitrogen?"

#### CHAPTER II.

##### HOW THEY LOST THE TRAIL.

The slow days pass, but the guide does not return. Geoffrey's sporting explorations have resulted only in a rare bird, hardly a moulted for one of the four starving men, though they divide the appetising morsel with rigid justice, Lucius dissecting it with his clasp-knife almost as carefully as if it were a subject.

"To think that I should live to dine on a section of wood-partridge without any bread-sauce," exclaimed Geoffrey dolefully. "Do you know, when I put the small beast in my bag I was sorely tempted to eat him, feathers and all. Indeed I think we make a mistake in plucking our game. The feathers would at least be filling. It is the sense of a vacuum from which one suffers most severely: after all it can't matter much what a man puts inside him, so long as he fills the cavity. If there were a roof of pasture uncovered by the perpetual snow I should imitate Nebuchadnezzar, and go to grass!"

Vain lamentations! Vainer still those long arguments by the pine-log fire, in which, with map and compass, they travel over again the journey which has been so disastrous—try back, and find where it was they lost time—how they let slip a day here, half a week there, until the expedition, which should have ended with last September, occupied a period they had never dreamed of, and left them in the bleak, bitter winter: their trail utterly lost sight of, alone in a trackless forest, the snow rising higher around them day by day, until even the steep bank upon which they have built their log-hut stands but a few feet above the universal level.

From first to last the journey has been attended by misfortune as well as mistake. They had set forth on this perilous enterprise fondly hoping they could combine pleasure for themselves, with profit to their fellow-creatures, and by this wild adventure open up a track for future emigrants—a high road in the days to come from the shores of the Atlantic to the Pacific—a path by which adventurers from the old world should travel across the Rocky Mountains to the gold fields of the new world. They had started with high hopes—or Lucius had at least cherished this dream above all thought of personal enjoyment—hopes of being reckoned among the golden band of adventurers whose during has enlarged man's dominion over that wide world God gave him for his heritage, of seeing their names somewhere in that grand muster-roll which begins with Hercules, and ends with Livingstone. They had started from Fort Edmonton with three horses, two guides, and a fair outfit; but they had left that point too late in the year, as the guardians of the fort warned them. They were entreated to postpone their attempt till the following summer, but they had already spent one winter in camp between Carlton and Edmonton, and the two young men were resolutely set against further delay. Absalom Schanck, much more phlegmatic, would have willingly wintered at the fort, where there was good entertainment, and where he could have smoked his pipe and looked out of window at the pine-tops and the snow from one week's end to another, resigned to circumstances, and patiently awaiting remittances from England. But to Lucius Davoren and Geoffrey Hossack the idea of such a loss of time was unendurable. They had both seen as much as they cared to see of the trapper's life during the past winter. Both were eager to rush on to fresh woods and pastures new, Geoffrey moved by the predatory instincts of the sportsman, Lucius fevered by the less selfish and more ambitious desire to discover that grand highway which he had dreamed of, between the two great oceans. The star which guided his pilgrimage was the loadstar of the discoverer. No idle fancy, no caprice of the moment, could have tempted him aside from the settled purpose of his journey; but a mountain sheep—the bighorn—or a wild goat, seen high up on some crag against the clear cold sky, was magnet enough to draw Geoffrey twenty miles out of his course.

Of the two guides, one deserted before they had crossed the range, making off quietly with one of their horses—the best, by the way—and leaving them, after a long day and night of wonderment, to the melancholy conviction that they had been cheated. They retraced their way for one day's journey, sent their other guide, an Indian, back some distance in search of the deserter, but with no result. This cost them between three and four days. The man had doubtless gone quietly back to Edmonton. To follow him farther would be altogether to abandon their expedition for this year. The days they had already lost were precious as rubies.

"En avant!" exclaimed Geoffrey.

"Excelsior!" cried Lucius.

The Dutchman was quiescent. "I sine you lent me to my deaths," he said; "but a man