

Carefully as the starving shipwrecked mariner reckons his few remaining biscuits, did I examine the condition of the oil in the lamp, and calculated, with feelings almost akin to rapture, that it would burn till day dawned. Heaping such fuel as I could lay my hands on upon the fire, and finding it bitterly cold, my veins laden with ice, and chilled to the very marrow, I resolved upon turning into bed without, however, divesting myself of any of my clothes.

Carefully placing Richard Bentick's confession in my bosom, and grasping the lamp in my left hand, I advanced towards the vault-like door, which gave upon my bed-room. I threw it open with a sudden jerk. The room was small and wainscoted like the adjoining apartment. In one corner stood a gloomy-looking old-fashioned four-post bedstead, with a heavy canopy and faded silken curtains, in another a ponderous wardrobe, elaborately carved. The ceiling, representing some event in mythological history, was black with age, and the ebony furniture seemed fitted for the innermost torture chamber of the Inquisition.

I dashed up the valance, and threw one short, sharp glance under the bed. I thrust aside the mouldy curtains which had been drawn across the window. I flung open the wardrobe doors. There was nothing to inspire other feeling than those of security, ease, and comfort.

Placing the lamp upon a small table close at hand, and shutting the door leading to the outer apartment, I threw myself into the bed, where in a few minutes the extreme cold from which I had been suffering exchanged itself for a burning, feverish heat. To endeavor to sleep was simply a mockery, the words—"To you, John Fordyce, I reveal the ghastly triumph of an unprincipled man over a weak, loving, and defenceless woman," rang in my ears, and repeated themselves in letter of fire on my eyeballs, whenever I attempted to close my eyes.

Why not read Richard Bentick's confession? I would. Taking the document from my breast, I drew the table upon which the lamp stood more closely to the bed. I read the well-known opening words, but ere my eyes could take up the next line, the lamp was extinguished.

The horror of being left in the darkness was something terrible. The horror of feeling that the light had been extinguished by supernatural agency—that awful link between dead and living, that fearful gulf in whose unfathomable depths lay the secret never yet divulged—was exquisitely appalling. Like a frightened child, I was about burying my head beneath the bed-clothes, when, with a bound, all the senses of which I was in possession concentrated themselves in that of sight. My bed faced the door communicating with the room in which I had spent the earlier portion of the night. That door slowly opened. The outer apartment was brilliantly illuminated, not by fire, or lamp, or candle, but by a greenish-grey light, such as is seen once in a life, when the sun, thirsting for a peep at the earth, forces his splendor in one fierce ray through the murky gloom of a sable thunder-cloud. Every object of the room stood forth with unusual distinctness. The table upon which the supper tray had lately stood had been replaced by an elegant *fauteuil*; a small bunch of violets lay upon the floor. I could have counted their petals. Was I dreaming? No. My heart stood still. I felt that the curtain had only risen upon the mystery; that there was much to follow.

Clasping the bed clothes with the clutch of a drowning man, I awaited the *dénouement*.

Although my eyes were riveted upon the interior of the outer room, so that no movement, however slight, could, by any possibility, escape me, a female form burst into being, even while I gazed. She did not walk or glide into the apartment, she burst into being. Her back was turned towards me. She was clad in a black tight-fitting dress, with snow-white collar and cuffs; her luxurious dark brown hair was fastened behind her graceful head in massive plaits. Her figure was the perfection of symmetry.

Suddenly perceiving the bunch of violets upon the carpet, she stooped forward and rapidly lifting it, pressed them thrice to her lips, and then, whilst tenderly placing them in the bosom of her dress, she turned her face towards me. What a face! It is in my mind's eye while I write this.

An exquisite oval, the dark brown hair drawn tight from the ivory forehead, fair as a May blossom; bluish grey eyes, set wide apart like those of a child, with a tinge of the violet, bashful yet wild, full of innocent joy and loving confidence; a delicate nose, slightly *retroussé*; short, curling upper lip, its companion rich, ripe, demure, and pouting; teeth of pearl, and a charmingly rounded chin. I see that face. Would that I had never beheld it, save in the splendid freshness of its piquant beauty. She seated herself upon the *fauteuil*, and from her anxious glances in the direction of the door, and her changing color, it was evident that she awaited the advent of some expected person.

A cloud of anxiety would pass across her fair brow, and her lustrous eyes close as if from a throbbing mental anguish, whilst her tiny white hands would continually clasp themselves in that nervous pressure, by which even strong men with impassive countenances, betray their inward emotions.

Quicker than thought the form of a man presented itself. He was tall and slight, and attired in full evening dress. He leant upon his arms, which he placed against the chimney-piece, and gazed down into the fire; his back was turned to the girl, and his face was hidden from me by his elbows. The girl started to her feet and timidly approached him, touching him gently as if to induce him to turn

to her. He repulsed her with a shrug. She appeared to address him (no sound reached me) earnestly, beseechingly, with all her heart, with all her soul, yet he turned not. She plucked the bunch of violets from her bosom and cast them into the fire in a frenzy of passion, yet he turned not. She threw herself upon her knees, and with an agonized expression, such as the human countenance only assumes in the extremity of woe, pleaded to him.

Was it for her life? Was it for that which should be dearer than life? God forbid! for there was that in the shrug of the man's shoulder which precluded the faintest glimmer of hope.

She rose slowly, and with despair enveloping every feature as plainly discernible as the writing upon the wall, she turned from him, and was gone. He still retained the same position, his arms against the chimney-piece, gazing down into the fire. He moved his foot, encased in a patent-leather boot, backwards and forwards upon the steel bar of the fender, and then—

Yes, and then he turned, and his eyes met mine. My heart gave one great throb—my brain was on fire.

The man was Richard Bentick, my dead friend.

There was something yet to come. Once more I pulled my quivering nerves together for a supreme effort.

The scene had changed—changed as silently and imperceptibly as the colors in the rainbow. The light was more subdued; the *fauteuil* was replaced by a table—upon the table lay a bundle covered by a sheet.

The same man, or spectre, or demon, stood beside the table. His hair was dishevelled as if he had clutched it in a paroxysm of the wildest passion. His eyes were sunken in their sockets, and encircled with black rims with inner rings of a purple red. His cheeks were livid, and his blue lips drawn tight, showed his white teeth standing out like the skeleton ribs of some animal which had been picked bare by birds of prey.

Thus did he look when his senses were restored a few fleeting minutes ere the grasp of the angel of death closed upon him.

The man, or spectre, or demon, raised a corner of the sheet, and snidderingly cast a hurried glance beneath it.

Slowly, very slowly, and with averted gaze, he removed the entire covering, as if compelled to do so by some invisible power.

Upon that table lay a dead body—the body of a woman—the body of that fair young girl whom he had repulsed with an icy shrug.

Dead—dead—dead. Her long brown hair hung in massive tresses over the edge of the table, almost sweeping the floor. Her beautifully-formed hands were clenched as if the agony of death had been exquisitely bitter. Her violet blue eyes were wide open, staring upwards, and the white lips drawn tightly together, seemed as though she had endeavored to suppress the shriek which bade farewell to earth.

But why did her garments cling so closely to her faultless form? Why did every limb, every curve and contour of that beautiful frame, reveal itself? Why did something drip, drip, drip from her hair, her fingers, her ears, her feet, her clothes, like the tick, tick, tick of the death-watch? It wasn't blood—no, it was water.

The body had been found in the black pool at the edge of the wood. She had committed self-destruction.

Hurling her soul from her, with one bound she had leaped into the valley of the shadow of death.

Poor lost child, that last look of despair was easily translated—that supremity of anguish, that climax of unutterable, unfathomable, illimitable woe.

The man turned and gazed at the body of his victim. Remorse was gnawing at his heart.

Heart; where was his heart, when that fair young creature had besought of him to restore that to her which through him and his devilish fascination she had forfeited? Where was his heart, when in abject humiliation, she flung herself upon her knees at his feet in that very chamber, and prayed for the miserable, pitiful boon of a single loving word? Where was his heart when he allowed her to go from him to her doom, and repaid her life's love, her lost honor, her blanched soul, with a gesture of contempt. That heart was now on fire, on fire with flames from hell.

Yes, the man, or spectre, or demon flung himself upon the lifeless clay. He chafed the inanimate hands—those hands once so soft, and tender, and warm. He glued his ashy lips to hers, as if to inhale some sign that yet might linger near the heart that throbbled so lovingly for him, and him alone. Too late! Awful words, pregnant with tremendous meaning, as is the single word eternity.

The man severed a lock of that dark brown hair, and placed it in his bosom.

Now I knew the black secret that lay like a clot of congealed blood over the heart of Richard Bentick. Now I had the clue to what appeared to me to be the ravings of delirium. Now I could account for the change which altered a bright, joyous, happy nature into a moody, gloomy, reserved, and brutal one. Now the "open sesame" had been pronounced, the mist had been cleared away from my clouded vision, and I saw the goal which drove Richard Bentick from sobriety to drunkenness, from the purity of Sir Galahad to the libertinism of a routé of the Regency—from high principle to disreputable

trickery, from a reverence for the Omnipotent to the sneering incredulity of a disciple of Voltaire.

The thread that held the sword of Damocles had broken. Ruin, body and soul. Ruin, here and hereafter.

Richard Bentick's confession has never been read by me, and never shall be. That awful revelation wrote the ghastly story in livid letters.

I entered Wyvern Hall young, vigorous, active. I quitted it at day dawn aged, sapless, withered, having lived a life, ay, a thousand lives, in a few horror-laden hours.

When I close my eyes at night, the spectral scene presents itself with all its appalling details, and these words engraven upon my very soul, haunt every waking moment:

"To you John Fordyce, I reveal the ghastly triumph of an unprincipled man over a weak, loving, and defenceless woman."

THAT POOR DEAR CAPTAIN LAMBSWOOL

A Tale of the Martyrdom of Man.

BY GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA.

His name was Lambswool—Hercules Samson Agamemnon Lambswool—at least it was thus, with the suffix of "Gent.," that I read of his being gazetted to a cornetcy *vice* the Honourable Atkinson Truitt Rimmelsbury, commonly called Viscount Doubledummy, retired. What year was that in? That in which Plancus was consul? Scarcely; Plancus and his confounded consulate have, thank the Olympian deities, long since been "played out." At all events, it was some time between the termination of the Crimean war and the beginning of the campaign of 1866. He (Lambswool), at the period when this history concerns itself with him, stood six-feet-two in his stockings; and he was a captain in the Royal Horse-guards Blue.

Does that announcement startle you? Does it give you the *chair de poule*? Does it "fetch" you? It surely should. It has made me quake almost as I penned the words. For ere, like the Shepherd in Virgil, I grew acquainted with Love, and found him a native of the rocks; and ere, to put the case another way, I had been through the mill, and seen the elephant, and wandered generally behind the scenes of Life's theatre, even to the tapping of the cocoa-nut for the milk I dreamed was there, but finding nothing but a smooth deceptive hollowness—hollow and smooth as a garden-party within—I used to look on a captain, nay, on a lieutenant or a cornet in the Blues, as an awful being.

Some portion of my dread for these terrible cavaliers may have been due to the grim stories my nurse used to tell me of the days when the Blues were hooted at by the mob as the "Piccadilly Butchers"—when they sabred the Great Unwashed in front of Sir Francis Burdett's house (the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, bless her charitable heart! lives there now), and thwacked the multitude with the flat of their swords at the funeral of Queen Caroline. At all events I feared the Blues. "Injuns," according to Artemus Ward, "is poison;" the effect produced on my senses in youth by the Blues more nearly resembled the action ascribed to the upas-tree. They fitted me with a deadly fascination. The aspect of a subaltern in the foot regiments of the Household Brigade I was able to support with tolerable equanimity; and I never, so far as I can remember, fainted away at beholding an officer in the First or Second Life-guards, even in the fullest of "figs;" but come to the Blues, and the case was altered. Madam, I regarded those warriors with sensations in which deep reverence and enthusiastic admiration were mingled with unutterable consternation. I shivered and "felt bad" when I encountered an officer in that distinguished regiment. He was so tall, so haughty-looking, so much—physically and morally—above poor little me. Did you never, my dear, thus secretly regard your governess, or the family lawyer, or, in particular, the dear, dear clergyman when the liturgy was over, and he, having exchanged his surplice and hood for a Geneva gown, came rustling and creaking up the pulpit-stairs, and ere he read out the text, looked so angelically round the church and up at the sounding-board, that you almost wonder that one of Grinling Gibbons's little cherubs—say that you went to church at St. James's, Piccadilly—did not fly to settle on his head, or hang a wreath of fruit and flowers, beautifully carved in oak, round his precious neck? Yet as you admired you feared him. He seemed to be able to discern your inmost thoughts—to know all about you; that there was a letter left for you at the circulating library last Friday—a letter which your mamma never saw; that you had at that moment an ounce and a half of almond-rock in your pocket, wrapped up in a fragment of the *Family Herald*; that you had commenced to suck those comfits before the second lesson, and intended to finish them comfortably during the sermon.

So, two thousand years ago, haply, might some humble Roman "pleb"—some harmless poet, who hung about the *therme* in the hope of getting a smile and an invitation to supper from an affable patrician—some poor creature of a scribe, who scraped up his living by gravating epigrams on his waxen tablets, have "felt bad," even to the thongs of his sandals, when he met, thundering along the Via Triumphalis, a centurion of Prætorian Guards. It

must be owned that our Blues are not privileged to sell the Empire to the highest bidder. They are not even—poor fellows!—allowed to buy and sell their own commissions. This is not a digression.

There have been seasons when the spectacle even of a private in the Household Cavalry talking to a nurserymaid in Kensington-gardens, or swishing his off-spur with his riding-whip—why do cavalry soldiers, who are not allowed to use whips when they ride, always carry those *frustra* when they are on foot?—has made my teeth chatter in my head; but a gentleman in the Blues, bearing her Majesty's commission! Let me draw a veil over the picture of pusillanimity which I then presented. The ineffable Entity used, ere I had seen the elephant, to terrify me as direly as the spectre of the Commendatore frightened Don Juan's valet. Leporello, you will remember, got underneath the table (just as Mrs. Bencroft is accustomed to do so cleverly in *Caste*) when the phantom statue came clumping—can't you hear the clang of his horrible stone boots now?—into the supper-room; but there is no table beneath which you can crouch, say, in the Mall of St. James's Park, when her Majesty, attended by the Yeomen of the Guard and escort of the Blues, goes by on her way to open the session of Parliament—used to go by, I should say, perhaps.

I have seen him thus—our splendid and vallant Captain Hercules Lambswool—in attendance on his royal Mistress in the good old times, ere Shillibeer and the directors of the Necropolis Company became the chief gentlemen-ushers and masters of the revels at the Court of England. I have seen the captain riding by the carriage-window of Royalty, and I have trembled. Gigantic yet serene, puissant yet languid, beautiful, august, and terrible, yet "mild as the moonbeams." Look at his helmet; sure, no one save with the eye of Mars, to threaten or command, and the front of Jove himself, could presume to don that shining casque, with its towering plume of blood-red horsehair. Look at those flashing bunches of bullion on his shoulders—Lambswool was in the Blues ere the vile Prussian tunic came in and epaulettes were abolished. Regard that glittering cuirass, and ponder on the undaunted heart which must be throbbing beneath. I entreat you to survey, finally, his sumptuous sash of mingled gold and crimson strands; the emblazoned housings of that sable charger, which neighs and paws and prances, ready at a moment's notice, I will be bound, to cry among the captains "Ha, ha!" Then, look at the sheepskin adornments to the saddle; his gleaming gauntlets—gauntlets, being pipe-clayed, don't gleam, by the way; still, it is as well not to lose a chance of invoking alliteration's artful aid—and, in particular, I adjure, I implore you to look upon his boots—Boots whose blackness the Ethiop might envy; for I suppose that black men think the most obnoxious niggers the handsomest; boots, to give a superlative polish to which might have driven Warren to despair, and caused drops of emulative anguish to distil from the souls of Day and Martin. Can you not see, have you not seen, Captain Lambswool, or the contemporary types of the Lambswool race, under these gorgeous but somewhat overpowering circumstances? I have beheld him many a time and oft; and my heart, shivering with admiring awe, has descended into my civilian bluchers. Suppose the terrible being were to make a cut at me with his shining sabre! It might be only in fun, you know—the young giants must have their sports, and their favorite pastime at present is, I am given to understand, Polo—but what, I should like to know, are likely to be the feelings of a fly when the giant Hurliothrumbo's son and heir "plays" with him; and what should I do, cloven from the crown to the chaps by one swashing blow from the Excalibur brandished by Captain Lambswool? Suppose he were to ride me down, where should I be? Where? Why, mashed under the hoofs of the terrible black charger with the flowing mane and tail, and the continually foaming bit. I should be lying trampled, squelched, and bleeding in the dust of the Mall; while, in the remote distance, Captain Hercules Lambswool still urged on his wild career as rapidly, at least, as the sober pace of the eight cream-coloured Hanoverians which drag—which used to drag, I mean—the state coach would permit him to urge it. And yet, at the very period when I was enabled to look upon Captain Lambswool without shaking, I happened to be—having recently returned from Paris—on intimate terms with a live sous-lieutenant in the *Cent Gardes*. This affable Colossus, who far exceeded six feet in stature, but who was somewhat weak at the knees, would absolutely permit me to treat him to ab-in-the and three-soon cigars at the Café de Helder. Fancy such a liberty being taken by a civilian with Captain Lambswool! He would have annihilated the "cad," as crazy Edward Irving threatened to annihilate the pew-opener.

I am not at all certain in my mind but that Captain Hercules was as terrible-looking in plain clothes—"muff" is, I believe, the correct term for civilian garments with gentlemen of his profession—as he was in full uniform, or in his splendid undress military garb; the blue frock with the abundant frogs and braiding; the forage-cap with the gold laudband, and the white waist-belt, with the sabre clattering at his spurred heels. He was the heaviest of heavy "swells," and consequently fearful to look upon, in his Poole-made surtout—Smallpage had not come to the front in those days—with a rose in his button-hole, an "all-round" collar, and his wide check trousers with a broad stripe down each outside seam. I saw him once in a