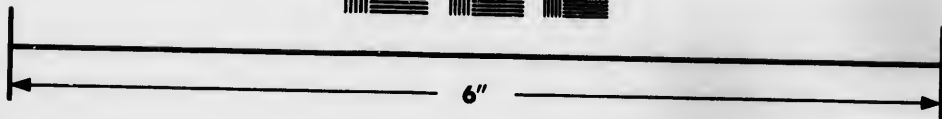
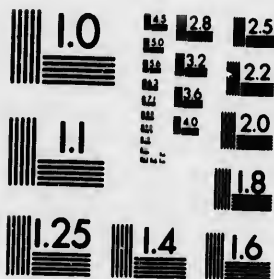


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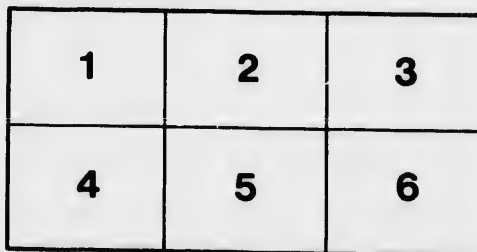
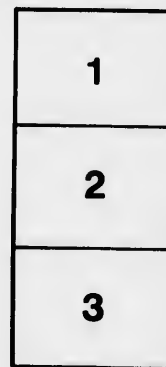
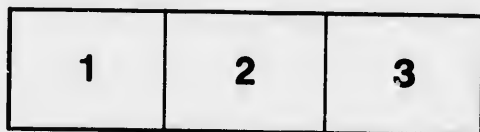
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BY

MRS. GORDON SMYTHIES,

AUTHOR OF

"COUSIN GEOFFREY," "TRUE TO THE LAST,"
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GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY.

CHAPTER I.

"Oh! the heart, like a tendril,
Accustomed to cling,
Will twine round the nearest
And loveliest thing." MOORE.

THE Countess of Rockalpine sat in her elegantly-furnished dressing-room in Park Lane. The soft light of an afternoon in May stole in through the tinted plate-glass, the rose silk and white lace curtains, and the flowers that filled the balcony. The large oval mirror, draped with lace and muslin, looped up with pink ribbons, reflected a still lovely face. It would have been lovelier, perhaps, but that Art had vainly tried to supply the lilies and roses of youth; and a good deal of real beauty—autumnal beauty—thus acquired an artificial gloss, which threw a doubt on what *was* real. Cosmetics of every description covered the toilet table, mixed with jewelry, combs, brushes, and every kind of elegant trifle. The Countess was still handsome, fascinating, thoughtless, vain, and romantic; she had been much handsomer, much more fascinating, but not more vain, thoughtless, and romantic, when, some twenty-three years before, she had been offered up at the altar of St. George's, Hanover Square—a sacrifice to Mammon, in the shape of the cold, stern, rather bald, rather grey, rather elderly, but very wealthy Earl of Rockalpine.

It is a very common sacrifice. At that altar, in her first bloom, crowned with orange-blossoms, veiled and robed in white, were sacrificed the Maiden, Love, Liberty, and Hope, for realities of twenty thousand a year, a countess's coronet, a mansion in Park Lane, Rockalpine Castle, Beech Park, an equipage, an opera-box, and a handsome settlement. Once his, the Earl, who was a proud and disappointed man—having vainly aimed at political influence and senatorial fame, as a Tory of the old school—took her to Rockalpine Castle, and wanted her to live there almost entirely. There *he* was a great man—a solitary star! In London he was only a twinkling light in one of many constellations.

Rockalpine Castle, stern, grey, and bald as himself, was also alone in its grandeur. Hautoville House, Park Lane, was one of numberless town mansions of equal or greater importance.

The bride was timid, and sighed in heart over her enforced

seclusion and solitude. Two sons were born to her in the course of three years, and when they left the nursery and her empire, to cheer her life a little, she adopted and educated as her own *protégée* the beautiful Clarissa Croft, daughter of the lawyer who was the Earl's agent at Rockalpine Castle. It never struck the Countess, for she was thoughtless, nor the Earl, for he was all pride and disdain of humbler people, that Clarissa—a perfect sunbeam of brightness and beauty flitting about the old grey castle—might become a peril and a temptation, in after years, to those young scions of so proud a house.

The bride had been timid and complying—the wife soon had a will of her own. The pleasures of the season in London, which she had resigned in her youth, she resolved to enjoy when she grew older and, as she said, wiser. And now she was forty, and her sons were with her in town. The elder, Lord Hauteville, was twenty-two; the second was a year younger. Clarissa, still by her side was about nineteen.

The five o'clock tea, so universal with fine ladies, was served in the Countess's boudoir. Clarissa presided at the tea-table, and Lord Hauteville and his brother both dropped in, each thinking to steal a march on the other; for both were desperately in love with Clarissa—the elder, with that pure love which a maiden glories to inspire—the younger, with that fierce selfish passion which she blushes to awaken.

"Show Hauteville and Wilfred our dresses for to-night, Clary," said the Countess. Lady Rockalpine and her *clique* were trying to revive the palmy days of Almack's. Clarissa rose and left the room.

"Are you going to take Clarissa to Almack's, mamma?" asked Wilfred.

"Yes! as a lady patroness *I* can give her a voucher; and I'm sure she'll be the *belle* of the room. Nay, more, I think I shall present her at the next Drawing-room."

"Dear, kind mamma!" said Lord Hauteville; and he blushed with delight, for he thought that everything that raised Clarissa in the social scale removed a barrier to his honourable hopes.

"It would be very rash, I think, and might give offence in high quarters. An attorney's daughter!" said Wilfred, growing pale; for the better Clarissa's position in society, the less likely was he to succeed in degrading her.

"An attorney's daughter," said the Countess, "but *my* friend."

Clarissa came in, followed by Finette and Bobbin, who displayed the Countess's gold brocade, and Clarissa's tulle, looped up with apple-blossoms; the gorgeous head-dress of the patroness, the apple-blossom wreath of the *protégée*. The Coun-

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tess was very amiable; she took the greatest interest in Clarissa's dress, and, sooth to say, so did her sons.

"Now go to bed till it is time to dress," said the Countess to Clarissa; "you have dined early; I shall dine at Lady Lofty's grand dinner-party, and come home to dress for the ball. Go fairly to bed till ten, Clary; that is what the De Bolton girls, the Marchelles, the Demodes, and all the young Hebes of fashion do."

"But I am not tired, my lady, and I am no Hebe of fashion."

"You shall be henceforth; so do as I bid you."

Clarissa obeyed, and the Countess was right; it is thus that girls in the *beau monde* contrive to look fresh night after night during the season, and yet to polk till three or four in the morning.

A new cosmetic and a new corset enabled the Countess (as Wilfred in his Oxford slang said) to *take the shine* out of all the wall-flowers.

Clarissa was the *belle* of that, her first and last, ball.

By the evening of the next day the Countess lay a corpse in Hauteville House! The cosmetic contained a preparation of lead, fatal to human life, when used as she had done it, to whiten her face, arms, and bust. The tight corset had probably aided its evil effects. She had always hated the thought of Death—wills, legacies, &c. Clarissa was unprovided for. Hauteville House, Rockalpine Castle, Beech Park, were no longer homes for her. She was in deep grief, and a step-mother reigned in her father's home.

An aunt gave her a temporary shelter in town, and she intended going out as a companion or a governess, when her health and spirits recovered from the blow to her affections, and the ruin of her fortunes. Both brothers obtained access to her. The one was but too welcome; the other, but that he was feared, would have been shunned! Clarissa did not go out into the cold, cold world to gain a living after all? And why? Her aunt could not maintain her. Wilfred felt there was some mystery, but he could not fathom it!

He felt, too, that his attentions, his visits, were unwelcome, and this knowledge only increased his passion.

Sometimes Clarissa went into the country, with her aunt, for months together, and then returned to town, her bloom improved, her spirits cheerful, her beauty greater than ever.

She was in Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, when her two lovers were summoned to Rockalpine, for the Earl required their presence there.

Both were very regretful at leaving London, but only one was regretted.

CHAPTER II.

"Oh! Love, what is it in this world of ours
That makes it fatal to be loved? Ah! why
With cypress branches dost thou wreath thy bowers,
And make the best interpreter a sigh." BYRON.

THERE was a solemn stillness on the purple moors, and in the dark pine-woods of the Rockalpine estates in Northumberland. The slanting rays of the setting sun came down alike on the black spiral tops of the tallest fir-trees of the forest, and on the pink bells of the heather.

A wild brook gleamed like molten gold in those rays; they gilded the grey battlements of the old castle on the heights, flamed and flashed from the windows of the villa of the agent of the lord of that castle, and lighted up the humble roof of the poorest tenant on the estate.

It was a lovely autumnal evening; there was not a creature to be seen, not a sound to be heard, save the distant lowing of the cattle, and the buzz and hum of the insects in the grass.

The moon, wan, dull, and out of place, like an actress by daylight, was looking from her cold grey abode, pale with envy at the radiant *coucher* of the monarch of day—the gold, the purple, and the crimson of his canopy and couch.

Suddenly, a young and very handsome man, in shooting costume, gun in hand, and a dog by his side, bounded lightly across the brook, and entered the wood. His noble and delicate features, fair waving hair, and princely bearing, betokened some one of importance; but yet no gamekeeper attended him, and he had thrust some grouse he had shot into the pockets of his shooting-jacket.

As he passed through the wood, with a birr and a whirr, up rose a noble cock-pheasant; bang went the sportsman's gun, and a quivering bleeding mass of green, purple, and gold, lay at his feet. The sportsman picked up the pheasant—habit hardens the softest heart—he who had just before stepped aside not to harm the beetle in his path, felt no pity for the regal bird.

He walked on musingly, and reloaded his gun, and the word "Clarissa," which was engraven on his heart, rose to his lips, when suddenly a shot startled him.

The blood flew to his noble face. "Poachers, no doubt," he said to himself; and without one thought of peril, or one feeling of fear, he rushed forward in the direction whence the shot came. "Hallo, Wilfred!" he said, recognising his brother, like himself, alone and unattended; like himself, gun in hand, and laden with game; like himself, having just reloaded his gun. "What brings you here, Wilfred?" he asked, good humouredly.

"I might ask the same question of you, Hauteville," replied

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the younger brother, livid with some strong, secret emotion; "only that I can answer that question as well as you can."

"What are you driving at?" said the elder brother (Lord Hauteville, heir of the title and estate of Rockalpine).

"At your secret idol, the hidden Ida of your breast, Hauteville—Clarissa!"

Hauteville blushed like a girl; he laughed, and said, "Nonsense! what has Clarissa" (he spoke the name with the trembling tenderness of love), "what has *she* to do with my taking a stroll through the woods on this fine afternoon, and shooting a brace of pheasants?"

"What has she to do with that? Everything, as she has to do with all your thoughts, plans, and actions, and, sooth to say, with mine too! You want privately to send her a basket of game; you don't want old Ferret, or any one else, to know anything about it; you want no hint of such lover-like and delicate attentions given to our father; and so you steal out like a poacher, and fill your bag on the sly."

"And you?"

"I the same. You know that I love Clarissa, and that till you came home—you, the heir, the future earl, the elder brother—I had reason to believe she liked me."

"No! no! no! thrice no!" cried the young lord; "Clarissa, from our earliest boyhood, preferred me."

"Ah! so your insolent vanity makes you imagine. You fancy, because Fortune has given you many other advantages, that she will give you that too; but I tell you, while you are beating about the bush, and, I dare say, planning to make the attorney's daughter—our mother's hired companion, the low-born Croft girl—your wife, I will steal a march upon you; not that I, my fine fellow, am such a sawney fool as to meditate that greatest of mistakes, an unequal match; but"—

"You dare not meditate anything against the honour of one who was as a daughter to our mother," cried the young lord, fiercely.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the tempter; "and why not?"

Lord Hauteville's blood was on fire; he forgot himself; with the back of his hand he struck his brother across the face.

The next moment he felt ashamed of the indignity he had offered to one of his own proud race.

Wilfred stood before him, livid with rage, for a moment paralysed with deadly revenge. There was foam on his white lip, and his every limb trembled.

"Brother, forgive me!" cried Lord Hauteville. "Strike me across the face in return," and he held his cheek to his brother, "and let us forget and forgive." His tears gushed forth as he spoke. "I will tell you presently why you must cease to follow up Clarissa—why you must think of her with respect, and

speak of her with tenderness, but never dream of love as connected with her."

"You will?—you will tell me why everything worth living for is to be yours? Why all are to bow and cringe before you, and to be 'hail, fellow, and well met,' with me? Why you are to lord it on two thousand, and I on five hundred a-year? Why you are to strike me with impunity, as you would your hound? Why the woman I love is to be torn from my life to adorn yours? And I will tell you in return, that I hate, that I loathe, that I curse you!—yes, from the depths of a broken heart I curse you! And as for Clarissa, I will never give up the pursuit—never, never, never!"

"Yes, you will, now at once, and for ever, when I tell you, when I swear to you by the heaven above us, that she is mine! Come, brother, forgive me! Shake hands, and listen to me. My own Clarissa is"—

As the beloved name passed his lips, the spirit of the first murderer entered the breast of the younger brother.

"How oft the means to do ill deeds make ill deeds done!"

His gun was loaded and cocked. In the fiend-like rage, envy, jealousy, and revenge of his heart, he took aim at the noble, beloved, and beautiful young form before him. Lord Hauteville, with a wild cry, sprang up with a bound, and then fell, in a huddled mass, on the ground, while, from the wound in his breast, the crimson blood welled forth, and a little rill from that red life-spring, his brother's heart, came trickling rapidly down to Wilfred's cold feet. The ground on which Lord Hauteville stood when the fatal shot was fired, was rising ground; and down, down, quickly down, as if in pursuit of the fratricide, came the red life-blood, and Wilfred rushed from the spot with horror. He felt as if that blood would engulf his very soul. Yes, it was done! But was he a murderer? Life might not be quite extinct.

"No eyes have seen, no ears have heard what passed between us!" he said to himself. He thought he could hasten home through the fields, pretend to be about to summon Ferret and his son, and be by Hauteville's side in time to succour him if life were not extinct, and so divert all suspicion from himself if he were indeed dead.

All happened as he had expected. He gained the courtyard of the castle unseen, leaped into his own room at the open window, called Ferret and Joe, his son, the stopper, and saying he wanted to get a brace of pheasants for a friend, he led the way to the Black Wood, as it was called.

Altogether about an hour had elapsed since he had left that spot, with the brand of Cain upon his brow, and the curse of Cain on his life, and on his heart. Twice as he approached the

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dreadful spot a pheasant rose; twice he took aim, and twice he missed his aim; and old Ferret and his Joe marvelled, for Wilfred was what they called a "nailing shot," and seldom missed. At length they reached the little amphitheatre of grass, surrounded by yews, hollies, and ilex-trees.

Wilfred's knees shook; his heart seemed to die in his breast.

"Whatever ails Dido?" said old Ferret; "what's she snuffing so hard at? Lord have mercy upon us! Whatever has been up here? The ground's all stained with blood! Oh! there's been a murder done here!"

"My brother!" gasped Wilfred's conscience against his will. He did not dare to glance where he knew he had left his brother.

"Ay, Mr. Wilfred, it's my lord's gun a-lying here, sure enough; and how it came here, or whose blood's been shed, who's to guess?"

Wilfred, at these words, slowly and nervously turned his head. There was the blood-stained spot; the long grass, bent and clotted with gore, where his brother had fallen; but, alive or dead, the form of his brother was no longer there!

Wilfred was not imaginative—he was not superstitious.

"Some poachers have murdered him," he gasped out, "and removed the body. Let us see if we can track their steps by the drops of blood."

Yes, that terrible track was to be seen, from the spot where Lord Hauteville had fallen, along the path through the wood, across the fields, and to the entrance of the villa of old Croft, the agent. The iron gates were open, the terrible track was on the wide gravel path, and glared frightfully on the broad stone steps, which the tidy housekeeper had carefully pipeclayed.

Wilfred Lorraine was not, at that time, a hardened villain.

His heart was new to the sense of actual crime; and when the parish doctor came downstairs, and not seeing him, said to the gamekeeper, whom he recognised,

"This is a bad job, Ferret. It's all over—he's done for! But whose to break it to the Earl and his brother?"

Wilfred's consciousness forsook him: he fell insensible on the floor. When he came to himself he was lying on the sofa in Mr. Croft's dining-room; the doctor was by his side, and Mr. Croft stood at a little distance, his arms folded, and eyeing him with an expression before which Wilfred cowered.

"Would *your Lordship*," said Mr. Croft, with a curious emphasis on the word, "like to go upstairs and see?"

"*Your Lordship!*" The once envied title sounded like a knell. He had not thought of the fact, that his brother's death made him Lord Hauteville, heir to the earldom—the future Lord

Rockalpine. Bitterly as he had grudged his brother those titles, it was not for their sake he had done that dreadful deed—it was done in the wild height of those bad passions which had long smouldered in his breast, and which the blow he had received, and the announcement that Clarissa was his brother's, had wrought to the highest. But, oh! the vain remorse—the deep and shuddering chill! No coronet could remove the brand of Cain from his brow; no star, no ermine, could lighten his breast of its secret load of crime and anguish.

It seemed that some labourers, returning from their day's work, and thinking what a fine thing it would be to be a young lord, like the heir of Rockalpine, and to have no work to do but to shoot at will over those preserves, where, if they brought down a bird, or shot a hare, they would be punished as poachers, came suddenly on the object of their envy, bleeding to death in the wood, and his dog whining and howling as he watched by his master's side.

They at once suspected that he had been killed in an affray with some desperate poachers who infested the estate, and the name of Rough Rob passed from lip to lip.

While they were disputing what to do, Mr. Croft came up, and directed them to get a hurdle from the nearest fence, and to carry the victim to his house, which was much nearer and more accessible than the castle.

When Lord Hauteville was laid on the bed, and some restoratives had been administered, he rallied a little. Mr. Croft was alone with him, while the men went, some in search of the doctor, others to fetch a clergyman, and to break the terrible news to the Earl.

When the parson and the doctor came, he was breathing his last, and to the questions they put as to who had done the deed, he either could not or would not return any answer.

There was no evidence that he had spoken since he had received his death-wound.

The Earl bore his loss better than could have been expected. He had still an heir left; that heir was his favourite son.

A coroner's inquest sat upon the body—that beautiful and noble body! so lately warm with health and youth, and now cold clay. Many circumstances conspired to throw suspicion on Rough Rob.

Rough Rob's father, also a desperate poacher, had been killed in an affray with an under-gamekeeper of Lord Hauteville's, and Rough Rob had been heard to swear he would have blood for blood. Meantime, he owed the young lord a grudge for seizing his gun and his dog. He could not satisfactorily account for himself at the time of the murder. And all these things coming out at the inquest, the verdict found by the

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jury, and proclaimed in a loud, triumphant voice by their foreman, was one of

“WILFUL MURDER”
against Robin Redpath, commonly called Rough Rob.

Rough Rob was hooted as he was carried off to the nearest magistrate by three policemen, and the crowd that followed the fly in which he was driven would gladly have torn him limb from limb.

CHAPTER III

“Why did she love him? Curious fool, he still
Is human love the growth of human will?
To her he might be gentleness.” BYRON

ROUGH ROB stood in the dock, with a policeman by his side; and even through the bronze of his weather-beaten face, there was a pallor which all present attributed to conscious guilt. There was also a visible tremor throughout his frame, and a huskiness about his voice. He was not an ill-looking man exactly, but he had something of the down-skulking look of the habitual poacher.

His poor wife, with a babe at her breast, was in court, weeping bitterly; she had persuaded him to smooth his shaggy hair, and plaster it down with grease, and to wash his face. She thought his *wild* look would go against him with the magistrate. She was a beautiful, devoted young creature, passionately attached to him. He wore an old velveteen shooting-jacket, with large horn buttons, and, owing to his Mary's forethought, he looked much more respectable, but much less picturesque, than usual.

Rough Rob's examination elicited that, on the day of the murder, he *was* out on the sly with his gun, and a lurcher, which he said had followed him.

When warned that he was not obliged to criminate himself, but that his words would be used in evidence against him, he said, in a tone very meek and subdued for such a ruffian—

“My lord, or rather, your worship—I can't criminate myself, and nobody can't criminate I; I'm as innocent of this black deed as the unborn babe, or as your lordship, which I means your highness. Why, it seems but yesterday that my young lord, and Master Wilfred, and I (poor hunted cretur that is now), wor all lads together. Father wor an earth-stopper then, on the estate, and I kept birds; and I was always a dab at fishing and setting traps and lines and rat-catching, and all manner. And when my young lord and Master Wilfred came home from Eton, the first person they axed for were Rough Rob; and they'd get up o' the dark mornings, unbeknowr, and

slip out, and go rattling along of I. I taught 'em to shoot. They shot with my old gun afore they wor trusted with one of their own: and I taught 'em to fish, and make their own flies! And though I may have spoke a bit threaten'ing or so when my lord took away my gun and my dog—which he done because he wor told a pack of lies about me shooting the hen pheasants, and a-getting partridges out of season—I'd have laid down my life for him, and he know'd it, too!"

Here Rough Rob's voice was broken by sobs, and tears filled his eyes. He mopped them up with his knuckles, and added, "I can't deny I was out with my gun, my lord, for the cupboard was bare—wife with a baby a-sucking and crying at her empty breast, and I out of work; but 'tain't because a man 'ud shoot a hare or a rabbit for his fasting wife's supper, and he's got a little bit of the radikel principle, and holds that wild things is meant for all, poor and rich, that he'd murder one he'd known from a boy, and spent many a jolly day with—one who'd often been a good friend to him and his'n, and who would never have been no other, but for meddling, jealous mischief-makers. If my young lord's spirit's here among us, he knows I speaks the truth, and that Rough Rob, so far from taking his precious life, would have shed his heart's blood to save him. That's all I've got to say, my lord. I'm a poor hunted cretur, but there is'n't a man here more innocent of this crime, nor more cut up about it, than I be."

Rough Rob's earnest and agitated face formed a curious contrast to the bland, incredulous, and jauntily official air of the policeman by his side.

The magistrate, unluckily, knew Rough Rob's face too well. Twice indeed he had been brought before him.

The magistrate had a fine estate, preserved rigidly; and so far from thinking the game laws too stringent, thought them too lenient by far. A poacher, in his opinion, was capable of any amount of crime. Rough Rob had owned that he *was* out in the dark wood with his gun at the very time of the murder. He had owned he had used threatening words, and that he had owed Lord Hauteville a grudge for taking away his dog and his gun. There was no other person on whom a shadow of suspicion fell—no one else was out shooting in that wood at the time—no one else had felt or expressed any ill-will towards the young Lord, who was so deservedly popular, that, but for the vile grudge of one lawless man, he might have called him, in the words of the poet, "Good without effort, great without a foe."

The magistrate made one of his best speeches, for he knew the reporters were busy taking down every word he said; and no one present was at all surprised when, at the close of his

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ing oration, he committed Rough Rob to prison to take his trial at the assizes for the wilful murder of Lord Hauteville. A piercing scream—a heart-rending scream—a wife's, a woman's scream—rang through the court as the magistrate pronounced this sentence; and Rough Rob's pretty young wife, with her babe at her breast, fell in a dead swoon into the extended arms of some kind sympathising woman near her. The young and nursing mother took the poor babe from its mother's cold exhausted breast, and warmed and nurtured it in her own. They tended the poacher's wife as if they had been her sister.

How kind the poor always are to the afflicted, the distressed, the disgraced! And what a sublime lesson do they give the rich, who fly from the lost and ruined, like rats from a falling house or a sinking ship!

Rough Rob was at once removed to the County Jail, and the hissings and hootings, and the execrations of the mob (which had followed him to the police court), assailed him as he left it.

Alas for Rough Rob and his pretty young wife, just recovering to a sense of her misery!

The day of his brother's funeral was a terrible one for the fratricide.

On the plea of illness, both the proud old Earl and Wilfred, Lord Hauteville, had kept aloof as much as possible during the investigations and proceedings, but they could not absent themselves from the funeral.

Rough Rob, on his wretched pallet in Morpeth Jail, innocent of the crime for which he was now committed, was in a state of bliss, of beatitude, compared to the fratricide on the bed of down, that to him seemed full of thorns, when waked from hideous nightmares by the toll of the funeral bell booming on his ear.

He rose and dressed himself hastily, nervously, for the apartment seemed to him full of shades that took his murdered brother's form.

How tedious, how dreadful were the preparations! How gravely officious were the undertaker and his assistants with the hat-hands, scarfs, and gloves!

How horrible the whispers among the guests! for guilt is always afraid of a whisper. How sickening the smell of all the gloves, hatbands, scarfs, and, above all, the funeral cake and wine! The long drive in a mourning-coach was maddening; slow, slow, slow, was the well-trained horses' pace, for they followed the hearse. What a black forest of plumes! How the dark, glossy feathers waved in the sunny breeze,

sporting above the still and solitary inmate! A great crowd followed the funeral procession. The deceased had been so popular—the murder had caused so intense an excitement.

The church and the churchyard were soon filled, so were the lanes leading to it. All the well-to-do were in decent mourning. Even the poorest had rummaged up some bit of crape, brown with time, or an old faded black ribbon. The poor, though no hatbands, scarfs, or gloves were allotted them, were *chief mourners* at the young lord's funeral; he had been their best friend! The fratricide's greatest trial was in the church, as he glanced at the coffin on the tressels, covered by the pall, and thought what it contained, and how it had come to pass; he could scarcely suppress a shriek, but an instinct of self-preservation prevailed; he went through it with all outward decorum, in spite of the hell within! It was over; the young lord was in the family vault—

“And dust to dust was given!”

The crowd dispersed, and the black coach bore the proud old Earl and his son back to the Castle.

The dreadful day was over, and night came at last! The moon was at her full, and her fair round face was mirrored in the large deep pools, and on the crystal shallows of the trout-stream that flowed through the Rockalpine estate. The pine-tree tops in the Black Wood were tipped with silver by her regal bounty, and the wild moors beyond were flooded by her radiance, and seemed almost as bright as by day.

With his hat drawn down over his brows, and an ample cloak concealing his form, Wilfred, Lord Hauteville, glided through that wood on his way to the lone hovel on the moor, once the wretched abode of Rough Rob, and still inhabited by his wife.

Oh! who that knows by his own experience, or will learn from that of others, what terror, anguish, and self-loathing attend on crime—who would not guard his heart from one sinful thought, and his hand from one act of guilt? A week ago, before “the deed that damns eternally was done,” Wilfred Lorraine and his brother had gone out at night, by different roads, in search of poachers, and had agreed to meet at a certain old grand fir-tree in that wood!

Then Wilfred had no fear—for then he had committed no crime. The half-moon shone then on a blooming, handsome, resolute face, a fine manly form, a firm foot. Now, the full moon looks on livid cheeks, eyes seared and hollowed, a figure shrunk and shrouded, a quick, uncertain step. In every breath of the night wind he hears his brother's sigh; every

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oise startles him; every ebon shadow cast by the silver lamp of night takes his brother's form; and the flitting of a white owl from tree to tree seems to him his brother's ghost coming out of the little grassy amphitheatre where he fell, to summon him to follow him to the grave. The Innocent, however hapless, go through a long life, without knowing a tithe of the anguish Hauteville felt in that midnight walk to Rough Rob's hut on the moor. He wildly rushed past the trees that enclosed the scene of the murder, and did not stop till he came out upon the purple moor.

He felt a little less of abject terror on the moor than he had done in the Black Wood, but still there came cold drops on his forehead; his knees shook under him; and he had a horrible sense of being pursued.

He hurried across the wild moonlit moor, and at length came in view of Rough Rob's hovel. It was a wretched little cottage of clay, standing in a patch of potato and cabbage ground, and a gnome-like old thorn and a few furze-bushes close to it. As in all cottages in Northumberland, where coals are so cheap and abundant, a mound of coal-dust and ashes adjoined the house, and a shed full of coal formed part of the hovel.

There was a light in the small window, and through a broken pane came a voice of wild and exquisite sweetness, singing a sort of lullaby.

Hauteville listened. The air was changed to the old nursery lullaby—originally the lullaby of a poacher's wife:—

"Bye, Baby Bunting,
Daddy's gone a-hunting,
Gone to find a pussy's skin
To wrap his precious baby in.
Bye, Baby Bunting!"

"Och hone! och hone!" sobbed the singer. "Och hone! that it were throe, my darlint, then we'd have him soon back with us—but now! Och hone! och hone! Holy Virgin protect my puir Rob! I've lighted a candle till ye; and to you, good Saint Robert, my puir Rob's pathron saint! And so I will though I can ill afford it, for a month to come, if ye'll bring him safe back to me. Och hone! och hone!"

Lord Hauteville pushed open the cottage door, and stood in the only room it boasted. The young wife had just risen from her knees, and stood with a candle in her hand, which she had lighted in true Irish fashion, by thrusting it between the bars, and was just going to fix it in a little tin shrine, in which saint Robert was placed.

The candle threw a strong light on Rob's wife. She was a beautiful young Irish girl, of that type which the inspired

pencil of Edmund Fitzpatrick has immortalised. She was one of that influx of Irish reapers who, in the harvest season, come over to the North of England and fill the golden corn-fields with beauty, mirth, and song. Hauteville thought, as she stood before him, that she only wanted a wheat-sheaf on her head to be the *beau-ideal* of a Ruth, only that there was more of the wild daring of a daughter of Erin than of the meek sweetness of the young Hebrew widow. She was tall, and though she had the strong broad shoulders (mercifully given to the poor, who have so much to bear), yet they had a graceful fall, and her waist "fine by degrees and beautifully less," was marked by a scarlet bodice, while her short blue serge skirt showed her fine leg and neat foot and ankle in red stockings and buckled shoes. A yellow handkerchief crossed her full and lovely bosom. Her head was proudly set on a long round sun-burnt throat; her abundant black hair, gathered under a Pamela cap, was braided in pretty ripples across a fine brow, and formed a soft frame to a face of great beauty; large, wild blue eyes, with long black lashes, and jet eyebrows, a pretty straight nose, a short upper lip of soft red, the under one fuller, and of a brighter scarlet, and both, when she spoke, disclosing white, even, and glittering teeth. The baby, a fine little fellow, lay in a cradle covered with hare-skins, which she had stitched together.

The fire burned brightly, but the cupboard was bare, and Mary had tasted nothing that day but a cup of tea and a cake forced upon her, after Rob was carried off to Jail, by the young nursing mother who had taken charge of her baby when she fainted, and who had compelled her to rest awhile in her poor little lodging and eat a morsel, and share that panacea of the poor, "a cup o' tea."

Mary, when she perceived Lord Hauteville, dropped a very low curtsy, and wiping down a chair with her apron, said,

"Plase your honour to be sated; ye may rest ye in my Rob's poor cabin, my lord, for the blood of yer blissed brother is not on his hand or his sowl! He's bearing the shame and the punishment he never deserved!"

In spite of his passionate and persistent love for Clarissa, Wilfred, or rather Hauteville, had often been struck with the rare beauty of the wild Irishwoman of the moor, and at any other time he could not have refrained from telling the lonely unprotected beauty how splendid a creature he thought her, and from trying at least to lead her into the slippery paths of dalliance; but the consciousness of a great crime sat on the young man's heart, and crushed out all its lighter foibles and vanities.

Beauty was nothing to him now—Love saw nothing. He

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emed capable but of two feelings—horror of his crime, and
ead of its discovery.

He had resolved that Rough Rob should not be brought to
al; no, not if he beggared himself to present it. But this
olve did not spring from the horror of the thought of
other's suffering for his crime; no, *that* had little weight in
determination. It arose from his dread of the searching,
ing cross-examination! The truth, always so great, so potent,
all-pervading and convincing, never seems so irresistible, so
conquerable, as to the guilty man, whose *all* depends on its
oppression.

"Facts are stubborn things," he said to himself, "and if it
true that 'murder will out,' it is at Rough Rob's trial that
me astute and wily counsel for the defence will elicit it."

At this thought the murderer shook as with the ague; but
resolved on his plan of action. He had but one way to avoid
the dreadful trial of Rough Rob, and that was, to effect Rob's
scape from prison; and as it is not easy to escape from prison
these days, although such things have happened, and that
scently, the young lord resolved to try bribery. Yes, he would
be the jailer, whom he knew a little, for he had been in the
rl's service, and had been appointed at the entreaty of Wilfred.
Before going to Rough Rob's cottage on the moor, Wilfred
d seen the jailer, and all was arranged between them. He
d explained his wish to save Rough Rob, by the fact that he
s the chosen companion in boyhood of himself and his mur-
dered brother; and that in spite of appearances, he believed
in innocent, but yet he felt sure he would be found guilty and
nged.

Wilfred, Lord Hauteville, had to bribe very high, for the
ler felt he might lose his appointment; but no matter at
at price, he must be bought over; and he was not to assist
co-operate, but to be blind and deaf.

Rough Rob must be communicated with, and put in the way
making his escape; but he was no scholar, he could not read
iting; and so Wilfred resolved to let Rough Rob's wife into
e secret, and to instruct her how, in an interview with her
sband, to put him the way of escaping, and joining her and
eir infant at a wild rocky creek, where a boat was to be in
adiness to row them to B—, whence an Australian ship
s about to sail for the Land of Promise.

Wilfred had to find them funds, and to pay for their passage;
t he felt that Rob's escape would confirm the impression of
guilt, and that Rob once safe off, he should breathe more
ely.

"What would yer honour please to want wid me?" said Mary.
"I want to know whether, if, for the sake of old times, I

could manage that Rob should escape from jail, you would be willing to go to Australia with him?"

"Would I? Oh, yer honour, wouldn't I go wid Rob wherever God and he plases? But why need he escape? He's innocent as his babe in the cradle there; and why should he flee like a guilty cratur?"

"Because, guilty or not guilty, he's sure to be condemned—circumstantial evidence is so strong against him. Well, as I said before, for the sake of old times, and the love my poor brother once had for Rob, I'll contrive an opportunity for you to see him, and to tell him to loosen a bar of his window. You'll give him this book to wile away the time. It is called 'The Prisoner's Help and Guide;' and so it is, in sooth, for look, in the back is a caseful of tools—you touch this spring, so, and then they appear. Well, tell him to tie his bed-clothes together, and let himself down from the window on the leads, in the dead of to-morrow night, and then to make for the creek, where he will find you, your babe, and the boat awaiting him."

"Oh! yer honour," said Mary, "how will I ever thank yer? But will not my poor Rob be overheard and stopped?"

"No; I've managed all that."

"The Saints and the Blessed Virgin reward yer as yer deserves!" said Nora.

Wilfred winced and shuddered.

"I understand, it's gold is the key as will let my Rob out. And is there no oder hope? If they will find him guilty that's innocent of all but shooting wild things, which, we both thinks, He who cares for the Poor and feeds the ravens sint more for them, than for the Rich; for haven't you yer capons' and yer ducks, and yer noble jints, and hot soups, and sweets, and we almost dying of hunger, agra? Very true, it's against the law; and Rob's being a poacher will set all the judges against him."

"He has no other chance; will you do what I have explained to you?"

"Och hone! och hone!" cried the poor wife. "I'm sorely tempted; but what's to become of his good name?"

Wilfred could not suppress a ghastly smile at the thought of the good name of Rough Rob, the notorious poacher.

"Och hone!" she cried, glancing mournfully at the babe in the cradle. "Maybe, if I consent, the day'll come when they'll up and tell thee, my darlint, that thy dad was a murderer—a base dog, that bit the hand that had often fed and stroked him. And my friends, mather—my lord, I mane—they were dead agin the match; for though I came over here a poor raper, my great-grandmother, on mother's side, rode in her coach and four; and the blood of the O'Rourke, that's fader's side, once flowed in the veins of an ould Irish king, and now to come to

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this! Och hone! och hone!" she cried, wringing her hands; "if I could but see Father Mahoney, he'd advise wid me for the best!"

"You shrink from it, then? You will let Rob stand his trial. Remember, I warn you, he will be found guilty, and hanged by the neck till he is dead! dead! dead!"

"Oh, no, no! It's not that, your honour," cried the wife, wringing her hands, tearing her long black hair, and beating her lovely bosom. "No, no, no, my lord! do not spake them terrible words; on my sowl I cannot bear them!"

"How will you bear the reality, if you cannot endure the idea, woman?"

"I'll go till him; I'll take him the buke and show him the tules. I'll pray to him, for my sake, for our baby's sake; and yet I may not be acting like a loyal, honest wife, for I know him innocent, and yet would have him stale away like a guilty, blude-stained wretch. What will I do! what will I do!"

It ended, of course, in her agreeing to help to promote Rough Rob's escape. And Wilfred went back to the castle, taking a very long circuitous route, to avoid crossing the Black Wood again.

Two days later, the papers were full of Rough Rob's daring and clever escape from M—— jail.

There was great excitement, and great discontent and disappointment about it, and the police were active in pursuit; but no trace was discovered of him, or his wife and child. In fact, it was not till he had been gone twelve hours that the jailer gave the alarm.

Mary's Irish eloquence had prevailed; Rough Rob had agreed to avail himself of the means to escape; and while the police were hunting woods, and groves, and rocks, and chalkpits, little town rooms and country hovels, Rough Rob, with his wife and child, were sailing across the broad Pacific. And Rough Rob's heart was light, for he was innocent; and as they were all the world to each other as long as they were together, he and his Mary cared not whither they went.

But even he could not bear to leave a murderer's name behind, and he made his Mary seek out Lord Hauteville, and exact a promise from him to leave no stone unturned to discover the real murderer, and to do his best to clear, from so black a blot, the name of Rough Rob.

CHAPTER IV.

"So, for a good old gentlemanly vice,
I think I shall take up with avarice." BYRON.

THE escape of Rough Rob left no doubt of his guilt on the mind of any one. It was evident he dared not face the mass of evidence that would be brought against him.

His crafty and daring escape was a nine days' wonder, and then other events occurred to excite and occupy public attention, and Rough Rob sank into comparative oblivion.

Nearly a year had passed, and Wilfred, Lord Hauteville, had hoped that when Rough Rob was far away, and the perils of the trial were averted, he should be able to sleep and rest. Alas! like Macbeth, he had "murdered sleep," and driven rest from his life and soul.

The old Earl had always lived in comparative solitude. He was a lonely being, and had but one passion, almost always cultivated in solitude—Avarice. To hoard was his great delight; the chink of the ruddy gold was the only sound he loved to hear; money-bags and iron chests were his chosen companions.

This vice, for surely it is a vice, and a very mean one, like Moses' rod, swallowed up all others.

As a young man he had been proud, vain, and a great worshipper of beauty, as his marriage proved. He had been ambitious. Now he was nothing but a miser. And he spent as much time, and used as many arts to conceal his hoards and to tell them over, as if the glittering piles were not his own by right, but stolen from others. He had no interest in his son, or in anything but his gold.

And Lord Hauteville's loneliness had become so odious and intolerable—for a bad conscience is a guest never so unendurable as in solitude—that he resolved to marry; to marry some heiress, who would rejoice to barter her wealth for a title and a future coronet, and with whom he could live in the gay world, whose noise, tumult, and din would, he hoped, drown the "still small voice."

There was a lady of fabulous wealth, on whom Wilfred had long cast an eye. She belonged to his own county, and lived in a new but gorgeous hall, some fifteen miles from Rockalpine Castle. Her father was one of the greatest of our princely coal-masters. He was a self-made man; and was M.P. for the northern division of his native county.

Sir James Armstrong was a very fine, manly fellow; but Miss Armstrong, though pretty and accomplished, was, at heart, vulgar, ambitious, and ashamed of her poor relations and low origin, and resolved to obtain that unquestionable rank and position which a grand marriage alone would ensure. She had always intended to be married to *Lord Hauteville*; and though he at whom she had aimed was in his grave, yet a *Lord Hauteville* was still to be had, and she resolved to have him. Worldly as she was, she was only seventeen, and singularly elegant and pretty.

Lord Hauteville, having ascertained that Pride had been so completely swamped by Avarice in his father's breast that he

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was willing to receive the low-born heiress as a daughter-in-law, resolved to wait on the young lady.

He determined to ride over to Armstrong Hall, quietly and unattended. He had now a great dread, a vague but terrible dread, of servants' gossip, and so he would not take a groom. He was too great, and his position too lofty and too well understood, for *him* to care, like a meaner suitor, for pomp or display. No; he would ride over and see the young lady, and, if she welcomed him, he would make very short work of it, and get her to name the day.

It was a glorious morning in August. The sun shone as it does in Italy. Its intense brilliancy created a solitude on the moors. Grouse shooting had not yet commenced, and the forests and the woods were cool and pleasant in comparison.

Lord Hauteville rode over to Armstrong Hall. He was kept some time waiting before the young lady appeared. She was making an elaborate toilet. At length she appeared, overdressed, but looking very pretty. She proposed to show Lord Hauteville a new annual in her own parterre. She culled for him a heart's-ease, very large and of a pale lilac, which was called the Annabella, after herself.

Wilfred held, for a moment, the fair little hand which, without a flutter, remained in his, saying,

"Will you make this heart's-ease an everlasting flower, by giving me the hand that offers it?"

The young lady replied,

"If papa consents, I agree."

And thus did the young lord propose, and thus did the young lady accept. They were both young, both beautiful—a blue sky above them, and flowers of every hue at their feet. But this world was too much with them—and their troth was plighted, without a blush on the part of the maiden, or a quickened pulse on that of the suitor.

Lord Hauteville left Armstrong Hall, and, remounting his pony, took his lonely way back to the castle.

As he recrossed the moor, just where it adjoined, on one side, the fields, with their circuitous bridle-road, and, on the other, the Black Wood, he overtook a tall, slight female form, which suddenly sprang up from behind a large furze-bush, and rushed wildly on towards the Black Wood. That form was very wasted, the dress was torn, soiled, uncared for; the long golden hair streamed over the shoulders; there was no hat, hood, or bonnet on the little Grecian head; but there was a wreath of wild-flowers—poppies, corn, and grass, an Ophelia wreath—round the pale brow.

Lord Hauteville grew ghastly pale. He felt, though he did not see the face, and though the once rounded form was so wasted—he felt he gazed on Clarissa!

He had heard nothing, seen nothing, of that hapless girl since his brother's death. He had not dared to seek her, or inquire after her.

He dreaded her anguish, her despair. And there she was, and—oh! horror of horrors!—the sun's rays flamed on something she held in her hand. It was a knife!

Instinctively Lord Hauteville followed her.

On, on she sped; passing unheeded the water, across the shallow brook, she entered the dark wood, and instinctively he followed her. He leaped from his pony, tied him to a tree, and hurried after Clarissa.

Angel of Death! she has stopped where the evergreens fence in the little grassy amphitheatre. Alas! it had been a trysting-place of love!

"She has heard that he died there," said Wilfred to himself, "and there she means to kill herself."

And, at the thought, he darted forward, and, just as she knelt on the spot where *he* had fallen, the fratricide stole behind her, and snatched the upraised knife from her hand.

"Ha, ha! is it you?" shrieked Clarissa, the fire of madness in her eyes. "And you will not let me join him? Hist, hist! do you not know he was mine? Mine through time and through eternity! Ha, ha, ha! I saw it all in a dream. Murderer!—Fratricide!—you have killed my darling!"

"Hush, hush!" said Lord Hauteville, "you are mad! you rave! Let me take you home to your father's house. Are you staying there? Have you escaped? Where would you go?"

"To him! to him! to him!" shrieked the maniac, tearing up the grass, and struggling to get free, and to repossess herself of the knife.

Just at this moment Lord Hauteville heard the voices of Ferret, Joe, and the head groom. He called to them; they came and helped him to bind the poor crazy Clarissa, and to convey her to her father's villa.

Her escape had just been discovered; she had been at home only a few days, and her stepmother and her attendants were in search of her. Mr. Croft was from home. He was gone in search of some asylum where she could be placed in safety, for her malady had been increased by her return to her home.

Mrs. Croft was young and pretty, but a very artful, time-serving, hard woman; she expressed the greatest gratitude to Lord Hauteville, who fully impressed upon her that Clarissa Croft ought to be placed in a private lunatic asylum, as her mind was completely gone. He then took his way home, and the echo of Clarissa's shrieks long rung in his ears.

By degrees she became calm, and so rational that she was allowed to return to the charge of that kind aunt who had been

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as a mother to her. Here her malady took the form of a settled melancholy, varied by occasional affecting intervals of half-crazy, half-frantic mirth. Here, too, she was allowed the solace of the company of her child—a child born in secrecy, a noble little fellow, about three years of age.

Her chief amusement was to twine bridal wreaths and bouquets, and throw a long muslin scarf over her head like a veil, and then, with a garland on her forehead, she would kneel before a couch, as if it were an altar, and place a chaplet on the head of her child, and call him her Hauteville.

One day she was thus engaged in the room appropriated to her—(her aunt was living in a suburb of London, and Clarissa's expenses were defrayed by her father)—when that father, accompanied by his young wife, arrived at her aunt's. Mrs. Miller was not at home, but Mr. Croft at once proceeded to the room where Clarissa was.

As he opened the door, his sly, smiling wife by his side, a spasm contracted his heart and brow.

There was that wreck of beauty, talent, love!

There was Clarissa—poor, crazy Clarissa—veiled, wreathed, kneeling before a couch, which she called the altar, and crowning with flowers the head of the little child, whom she addressed as her "Hauteville." Young Mrs. Croft persuaded her old husband that a private lunatic asylum was the only fit place for the maniac, and that it was very dangerous to trust the child with a crazy mother.

Clarissa, upon this, was removed to a private mad-house, called "The Happy Home," and Mr. Croft took charge of the little boy.

The parting from her child was the overflowing drop in Clarissa's cup of bitters. She did not survive her removal to "The Happy Home" more than a month.

The same day that saw Clarissa laid in her quiet grave at K—— Cemetery, saw Lord Hauteville united to Annabella, only child of Sir James Armstrong, Bart., M.P., of Armstrong Park, and the old Earl chuckling over this addition to the family wealth.

CHAPTER V.

"If thou wilt marry, I will give thee this plague for thy dowry—
Be thou as cold as ice, as pure as unsunned snow,
Thou shalt not escape calumny."
HAMLET.

THERE was a good deal of whispering among the old maids at A—— (the country town nearest to Rockalpine), and scraggy necks were stretched, and quaint old heads met over the tea-

tables, and eyes were cast up and mouths were drawn down; and all this was because Mr. Croft had brought back with him to Croft Villa a beautiful little boy of three years old, whom he called his grandson. This child was in deep mourning, as indeed were Mr. and Mrs. Croft.

The child was named Arthur Bertram, and was introduced as an orphan.

Mr. Croft merely gave out that his daughter Clarissa, while in London, had made an imprudent love-match with a young man called Bertram, who had died suddenly, after they had been four years secretly married; that she had concealed her marriage from fear of the anger of her father and her other friends, but had confided it to her too indulgent aunt; that Clarissa had taken her husband's death so much to heart, that she had been attacked by brain fever, and had fallen a victim to that dreadful malady, leaving behind her one child, this boy, whom he (with Mrs. Croft's sanction) had adopted, and intended to bring up with his own young family.

The second Mrs. Croft had already presented her lord with five pledges of her affection, the eldest of whom was an ugly, unamiable boy of six, when little Arthur was introduced at Croft Villa.

It was about Arthur and his poor mother, the once beautiful and envied Clarissa Croft, that the old maids at A—— were so bitter and so busy. They had formed their own opinions of the parentage of little Arthur. They disbelieved the whole story of the clandestine marriage, and had no faith in the late Mr. Bertram. They said, with a sort of triumph, that they had always prophesied that Lawyer Croft would have good cause to repent letting his daughter be brought up with two young noblemen; and that all had turned out exactly as they had foretold. They considered young Mrs. Croft a great fool for allowing the child to be domesticated with her own; and they thought it was a sin and a shame, as matters had turned out (and as his father had been cut off in his sins, and had made no provision for the little unfortunate wretch), that he was not sent at once to some orphan asylum.

Meanwhile the Earl of Eaglescliffe had grown older, greyer, balder, and colder—more stern, more selfish, and more avaricious than ever. He lived entirely at Rockalpine Castle; and as counting his hoards was his only amusement, occupation, and excitement, and he was exposed to no dangers, no changes of atmosphere, and no risks of any kind, there seemed to be no reason why he should not live on to an extreme old age. Lord Hauteville's marriage with the only child and heiress of Sir James Armstrong had rendered him in a great degree independent of his father's wealth; but as heir to the earldom, he had

the two thousand per annum which his murdered brother had enjoyed, and an estate of considerable value, which his father's mother had entailed on the eldest surviving son of the house of Rockalpine, and which was to be his absolutely on his attaining the age of twenty-five. This estate, which was called Beech Park, was in Berkshire, close to Windsor Forest, and it in due time became the country seat of Lord and Lady Hauteville.

Lord Hauteville was, of course, in his inner self, a miserable man, for the consciousness of guilt sat heavy on his soul, and the possibility of detection often palsied him with fear. But he tried to lose the memory of the Past in political excitement. He entered Parliament, he studied oratory, and became a popular speaker. He applied himself to finance, and became useful to his party. He set charities on foot, promoted the building of schools and reformatories, and the amelioration of prison discipline. His name headed every subscription for the good of the masses. He had a morbid craving for that popular esteem, which he well knew he had forfeited; and he worked incessantly to obtain present power and popularity, and to drown thoughts of the future and the past.

In his own family, he was cold, stern, reserved; but he let Lady Hauteville have her own way, and allowed her to spend as she pleased a considerable portion of the income she had brought him.

There was no affection, no sympathy between them; but then, *à fortiori*, there was none of the jealousy of love, none of its dissensions. Whatever other noblemen (who stood high as husbands and fathers) did by their wives and children, he did; and the world quoted him as a moral man, a religious man, a good husband, and a model father!

"Wise judges are we of each other!" The world little dreamt that the hand so ready with the annual subscription or the large donation was red with a brother's blood; or that the great reformer, who was so anxious about the moral improvement and sanitary condition of our prisons, ought to be himself a prisoner in Newgate, and to cross its threshold only for the scaffold.

Time rolled on; Lord Hauteville stood very high both with the few in power, and with the many to whom they owe that power. He had been for some time member for Rockalpine, when the death of one of the county members gave him an opportunity of offering himself as a candidate for nomination as one of the M.P.'s for North N—. His politics and principles were of the popular kind (then in the ascendant). His family influence was very great; the Rockalpine property was very large; but the election was fiercely contested by two other candidates, of even greater family wealth and influence; and yet Lord Hauteville was returned. His reputation carried it!

So good, so gifted, so useful! A man not merely of such virtuous and noble thoughts and principles, but a man of action, too! A moral man, a pious man, a good churchman. Not a gay man; there were no sad stories afloat about *him*. It was a fierce contest, and a great triumph, and it was followed by a greater still.

A change in the ministry caused three important vacancies. One of them was offered to Lord Hauteville. He had always longed for office—not merely on account of the power it gave him, but for the sake of the absorbing occupation it ensured, the engrossing labour it compelled. These promised a safe and constant refuge from thought.

Of course, previous to his accepting the office, he had to resign his seat, and to be re-elected. He did not feel quite safe and secure of re-election; for not only a guilty conscience made him afraid of everything and everybody, but he had received several anonymous letters, written in a mysterious, a menacing, and to him a very startling tone; warning him that he had a secret foe, and that he had better not carry his head so high, nor look down on better men than himself; that he was *not born to be drowned*, and was better known than he imagined.

To any man of Lord Hauteville's position, blest with "the princely heart of innocence," these anonymous attacks would have appeared as the result of private or political pique, and he would either have burnt them at once, or have put them into the hands of a detective.

But not so Lord Hauteville. They drove the blood from his cheek, they shook him as the ague might have done. They made his flesh creep, his knees knock together, his head swim, and his heart sink.

They might mean nothing; they were couched in the ordinary cant of those meanest of the weapons of vulgar, coward, and vile enmity—anonymous letters. The words "*not born to be drowned*" would have made an innocent man of Lord Hauteville's rank, station, and reputation laugh; but to *him*, the murderer, the fratricide, who knew in his secret heart that he *deserved* to be *hanged*, those words made him feel as if a rope were tightening itself round his throat.

However, after the first servile palsy of fear, he roused himself. He thrust the letters into the fire; and hearing that Lady Hauteville was still asleep (she had been up late at a ball the night before), he set off for Cumbercourt (where he was expected), resolved to do his utmost to ensure his re-election; for of course on that re-election his being in office depended. Mr. Croft, his father's agent and lawyer, had a good deal to do with the election; and as Lord Hauteville had a nervous horror of Croft Villa, he sent for Mr. Croft to the Castle.

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Mr. Croft in his heart owed Lord Hauteville many a bitter grudge. Mr. Croft was a man of very humble origin, and was mean enough to be ashamed of what ought to have been his pride and glory, namely, that he was a self-made man. He had been a charity or blue-coat boy at N—; and when Hauteville was a younger son, and very haughty, insolent, and overbearing, he once forgot himself so far as to remind Mr. Croft of his origin, and that in presence of several strangers. This he did in revenge for Mr. Croft's complaining to the Earl of the young gentleman's breaking down his fences, and treading down his corn.

Mr. Croft was not a noble-hearted man. He never forgave the boyish affront.

However, it was now Lord Hauteville's policy to conciliate Mr. Croft, and Mr. Croft *appeared* to be conciliated. He was always rather stiff and cold certainly; but he professed to be at his lordship's service, while in heart he was as bitter as ever.

On his arrival at Rockalpine, Lord Hauteville, as usual, waited on the old Earl, who, disturbed in counting over some gold, which he hastily thrust into a drawer, paid little attention to his son's plans and projects. While the son was sitting (as a mere form) opposite to his father, Mr. Croft was announced. Lord Hauteville soon arranged matters with him, and the lawyer took his leave. Lord Hauteville then strolled out.

It was a lovely spring day, or rather evening, and Lord Hauteville walked briskly on, to look at the young plantations, and, as he rambled along some newly-made paths, unexpectedly to himself he came to the entrance of the Black Wood. By this time the shades of evening were closing in, and the Black Wood looked blacker than ever.

In spite of himself his eye *would* try to pierce those deep, mysterious shades; and the memory of the dreadful crime he had committed there, came back on his mind with the freshness of yesterday; when suddenly a tall, hooded female form in black advanced to the entrance opposite to which he stood, and beckoned him to follow her into the wood. Mechanically he obeyed. The "Woman in Black" led the way, until they reached the little grassy amphitheatre where the fratricide had slain his brother!

Lord Hauteville recoiled. The woman, who was a little in advance of him, turned back, approached him, seized him by the arm, and half persuaded, half compelled him to enter the enclosure. She then threw back the hood that had concealed her face, and Lord Hauteville recognised Rough Rob's handsome Irish wife, Mary.

"I have bickoned you here, my lord," she said, "because we'll not be interrupted here. The people say the place is haunted, yer honour; and they'll kip clear of it, anyhow."

"But what do you want with me, Mary?" said Lord Hauteville, sternly.

"Rob's wid me," she said.

"Where? and what of that?"

"He repints that he did not stand his thrial, yer honour. He's sure he'd have been acquitted, because he knows he's innocent. And we don't like Australy, noways. We've lost all our childrin; we can't rare a living child noways out 'here, yer honour; and it breaks our hearts to see 'em die, and to have to lay 'em in that unnat'ral soil, so far from home, where the flowers have no swate smill, nor the birds no song. We've thried now many a long year, and we're heart-sick wid it, and that's the blessed truth! And we can't make both inds meet, noways. And you've been the friend in need till us, and so we're come to tell you all, and consult wid yer honour. We've a good chance in Ameriky, where I've kith and kin; but we want a good lump of money, and then Rob could jine in partnership wid my cousin, Mike O'Rourke, and git on a bit, and pay yer honour the money he owes you, back agin when we've got smooth a bit, and aren't drove as we are now. Mike has got a tidy bit of money to invist, and has been unkimmin kind, and spent a sight in bringing us over here, and fitting Rob up decent; but we tould him we'd a good, grand friend, who'd help us, may be, when he heerd the rights on it. And onst up in the world a little, Rob 'ud come over, and shtand his thrial like an innocent man as he is. And he says he'd have all the best lawyers and counsillors in England; and he's certain his innocence would be proved, and the guilty would be detictêd."

Lord Hauteville winced, turned pale, and averted his eyes from Mary's flashing glance and animated face.

"If not, he's for giving himself up to be thried at onst; and I've had hard work to hinder him. But I owns I remimburs yer honour's words, and I dreads the verdict, innocent as I knows Rob to be."

"Where is poor Rob?" said Lord Hauteville, tenderly, and as if he felt deeply for him.

"He's jist hiding up till dark, in the ould cabin on the moor. We found it as we lift it, yer honour. No one has ever thried to live there, because they think it was a murtherer's house, and that my young lord's sperit walks there! Well, Rob's hiding there; and he bade me (for I'd heard you were expicted the day) to be on the look-out to spake wid yer honour, and to say, if you'll lave the library winder opin, as you used to do in the dear ould days, when you and my dear young murthered lord were lads, he'll come round at midnight to spake wid yer honour."

"Tell him I shall expect him, Mary," said Lord Hauteville,

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putting some gold into her hot trembling hand. "And bid him keep close, or they'll nab him; and if they do, innocent though he be, they'll hang him."

The wife turned deadly pale, and hurried off at these words, after dropping a very low, rustic curtsey to his lordship, and calling on the Blessed Virgin and Rob's patron saint to reward him as he deserved; and Lord Hauteville, thrilled with horror to find himself standing on the very spot where his brother fell, slain by him, gazed around him with a glance of terror.

As he did so, the moon came out—the full moon—and lighted up the tree at whose base his brother had fallen. To his horror, he saw that the exact date of the murder was cut in the bark, and his murdered brother's initials, and his own also. They were picked out with red—that sort of raddle with which sheep are marked; and under his brother's monogram was a coffin, and under his own a coronet, while a little lower down, to his dismay, he saw a gallows deeply cut into the bark of the old tree, marked out in black, and the motto, "I BIDE MY TIME!" legibly chiselled above it.

Who had done all that? and what did it mean? Hauteville's heart beat high against his cold breast, as he sped, like one pursued, back to the Castle.

* * * * *

At midnight, a tap at the library window (which he had left partly open) made him start.

He hastened to see who was there, and—though looking older, sterner, stouter, and more respectable than of yore—he recognised Rough Rob. His sunburnt face was pressed against the glass of the window, which flattened his nose, and gave him a strange, ogreish, unnatural appearance.

The interview was not a pleasant one; for when Lord Hauteville, seeing Rough Rob almost decided on standing his trial, started from his chair with assumed fierceness, and called him a fool, a doomed, predestined, obstinate, pig-headed victim, Rough Rob answered angrily, and was about to leave the room, with the words—

"I may be a fool, my lord, and I may be a victim, but I'm not a murderer. And if I don't give myself up like an innocent man now, at onst, and stand my trial, I'll not die till I've done it. And I only gives in now because of Mary being so dead agen it, and a man standing so poor a chance if he've got no friend in his pocket to help him."

"Well," said Lord Hauteville, "Mary has told me of your plans, and, for the sake of old times, I'm willing to forward them. Name the sum you want, and you shall have it. But get out of this neighbourhood at once, or, as sure as you stand there, you'll be taken, tried, and hanged."

"I don't believe it, my lord," said Rob. "I believe my innocence would be made clear as the sun at noonday, and that the Guilty would be brought to justice. That's my belief; but I'll be ruled by you, my lord. Mary's cousin, Mike O'Rourke, he's fitted me up in these clothes. He's helped us back, and he's getting his matters settled to go to 'Meriky; and if I can get three hundred pound, he'll take me into partnership as a farmer."

"Here is the money," said Lord Hauteville, taking out his pocket-book; "and fifty more for your passage. But begone now, in Heaven's name, or you'll be taken, as sure as there's a God in Heaven! Stop! I'll see you safe on to the moor; or stay—I was going to drive over to Armstrong Hall. Go you and await me at the cross-road on the moor. I'll send my groom back on some pretext or another before I join you. We'll then take up Mary at the old hut, and I'll set you down within five minutes' walk of the station."

All was managed as the trembling, anxious culprit proposed; and Rob and his wife got safe off to London by the mail train, joined Mike O'Rourke at his lodging in St. Giles's, and ultimately sailed for America, to the unspeakable relief of the real culprit.

CHAPTER VI.

"She will have just the life she prefers,
With little to wish or to fear;
And ours will be pleasant as hers,
Might we view her enjoying it here." COWPER.

LADY HAUTEVILLE was intensely ambitious, vain, calculating, and worldly. Her marriage and her money gave her position and power. She longed to be a countess, and to sit, in her coronet and robes, in the House of Peers, on all grand occasions; and she grudged the old miser Earl, at Rockalpine, his protracted existence, and thought it a cruel dispensation that he should live on—on—on! But she resolved to make the most of the advantages she had ensured by her union with a peer's eldest son.

She was a *parvenu*, it is true; but she became popular. The fine ladies of Belgravia and Mayfair said, behind their fans, that "*parvenus* were so agreeable, because they were not exactly like other people;" by which they meant, like their august, high-bred, haughty selves. But Lady Hauteville could be haughty too, and often, by sheer impudence, she compelled them to court her. Lady Hauteville's dinners, "at homes," concerts, picnics, balls, and private theatricals were the rage.

She was pretty, clever, daring, and accomplished. She

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dressed to such perfection—(taking care to get all her things from the milliners and mantua-makers of Eugénie, Empress of the French)—that she set the fashions in England. She knew when to be grand and defiant, and when to be humble and conciliating.

She had a son and three daughters, born in the early years of her marriage; and six years later, a fourth girl came into the world, unwelcome and unwished-for; somehow, her arrival interfered with some fashionable arrangements of her worldly mother's; and as she was rather a delicate, sickly child, and did not possess the regular beauty of her elder sisters, Lady Hauteville from the first treated her rather as an intruder, and took no interest whatever in her.

The pride (which she called maternal affection) with which she regarded her boy, her son, her heir (the future Earl of Rockalpine), and even her three elder girls—had no part in her feelings towards poor little Edith.

To add to this worldly mother's dislike, the poor little girl, left in her lonely, deserted, but once bustling, merry nursery, to the care of servants, met with an accident while the family were staying on an annual visit to the old Earl at Rockalpine.

The doctors decided that the spine was injured, and they announced, in conclave, that they much feared that Edith would be a cripple.

They said she must live entirely in the country, and not far from the sea, and must remain constantly in a reclining posture.

Edith, at this time, was eight years of age. Her three sisters were respectively eighteen, seventeen, and sixteen, and her brother fourteen. As Lady Hauteville had resolved that very spring to present her two elder daughters, Augusta and Georgina, she was not at all disposed to postpone a matter of such "importance"—in her opinion—for the sake of poor little Edith.

At the same time, she knew that Lord Hauteville would not risk the censure of the little world of Alwick and Rockalpine by neglecting the doctor's advice about the poor little invalid. However, diplomacy, and the spirit of manœuvring came to her aid.

Two years before Edith's accident she had made a long stay at Rockalpine Castle (for the air of the north was considered bracing for Edith); and the old miser Lord, hearing that little Edith, who was his favourite, was ordered to spend the summer by the sea, had proposed, as a saving of expense, that she should stay with her nurse at the castle; and, in accordance with his wish, she had been left there for several months with one female attendant.

She had been much courted during her stay at Rockalpine

by the Crofts; and the lonely child had felt very grateful for their kindness and attentions, and had found great delight in the company of the Croft children, and still more in that of Arthur Bertram.

During that long visit of Edith's, the old Earl had at first continued to live almost entirely in his own rooms, with no company but his money-bags; but little Edith, whose loving, pitying nature made her cling even to the stern, grey old man, would sometimes knock at his door with a basket of wild flowers, and coax him out for a walk in the sun, or the woods, or by the sea. And the cold, worldly, lonely old man grew fond of the only thing that sought and liked his company; and a sort of friendship grew up between these opposite natures.

Lord Hauteville, for some reason or other which he never explained, and perhaps could not have defined, was always very civil and conciliatory to Mr. Croft; and Lady Hauteville, in a visit she paid to Mrs. Croft, contrived so adroitly to blend her wish to leave Edith at Rockalpine, with the impossibility of sacrificing her eldest daughter's prospects, or of trusting the little invalid to a servant, that Mrs. Croft offered to take charge of the young lady, and to give her every possible advantage, and the greatest care and most attentive and tender nursing.

Mrs. Croft did not say a word about any pecuniary arrangement, as connected with this matter; but she was very fond of money, and had an eye to the main chance in the proposal she made. Mr. Croft, who was a most hen-pecked husband in every other respect, was still, as yet, sole and supreme master of his cheque-book and purse. And Mrs. Croft contrived so that whatever was paid for the board and lodging of Edith should be received by herself, so that she might be enabled to indulge in every expensive whim of her own eldest son, her idol and her pet, Roger.

Roger was at Eton; and while his father's object was to bring him up to the Church (Lawyer Croft had a living ready for him), Roger himself, and his fond mother, had other views. Roger wished to be a man of fashion, and to mix with noblemen; and even at Eton he tried hard to acquire the reputation of wealth and liberality.

Lord Hauteville was very well pleased when his lady told him of Mrs. Croft's proposal. He agreed to the payment of a handsome stipend for Edith's board and lodging; and though he never went to the Villa—for he had a great horror of the spot in which his brother had breathed his last, and of ascending those door steps which had been blotted with that brother's life-blood—he got the old Earl to consent to his inviting Mr. and Mrs. Croft to dinner at the Castle, for the purpose of

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completing the final arrangements about the abode of Edith at Croft Villa.

"Well, my dear Augusta," said Lady Hauteville to her eldest daughter, after Edith had been carried off in Mrs. Croft's brougham, to reside at Croft Villa for an indefinite period, "well, I'm very glad that's settled. It would, indeed, have been a sad thing if your presentation and Georgina's had been delayed on account of poor Edith; and yet, if Mrs. Croft had not so kindly offered to take her, what could have been done?"

"I suppose she must have remained here with grandpapa and her nurse, mamma," said Miss Augusta, very coldly. "It would have been too absurd to keep Georgina and me back on account of that little carrotty cripple!"

"I think," said Miss Georgina, "much too great a fuss is made with Edith! a little, sickly, ugly thing!"

"She has not your beauty, certainly, my dears," said Lady Hauteville; "and, I own, I do not like her disposition or her manners. She has no dignity, no proper pride, no lady-like reserve, no necessary little feminine artifice; but I beg, my loves, you will not forget she is your sister, and an invalid, and that it is bad taste not at least to *appear* to feel an affectionate interest in her!"

Bad taste! It never struck Lady Hauteville that it was very bad feeling—that she cared little about.

But were the cold, proud young beauties right? Was Edith Lorraine "a carrotty cripple," and a "sickly, ugly, little thing?" Her hair was certainly of a very red auburn, and ill-nature might call it carrotty, but it was most silken, profuse, and rippled; and was just of the hue to ripen into the colour of the horse-chestnut or the pheasant's-breast.

Her elder sisters had fine long hair of a pale flaxen, and to them Edith's rich tresses were odious. They had regular features, slightly aquiline, a delicate bloom, and light blue eyes.

Edith had a broad full forehead, fine deep-set dark eyes, full of fire and feeling, and looking at that time much too large for the little pale, pointed face to which they belonged.

With regard to her figure: it was very small for her age, and threatened to be deformed by a curvature of the spine, and the shortening of one leg. And even the doctors could not decide positively what the result of the accident she had met with would be. A great accession of health and strength might enable her to recover entirely.

As it was, she was doomed to spend the livelong day on a reclining-board. And this necessity, which shut her out from all the pleasures and occupations of other children, would have been intolerable to her, but for the sympathy, companionship, and devoted kindness of Arthur Bertram, Mr. Croft's grandson.

The Croft children, headstrong, selfish, and quarrelsome, took little notice of poor Edith, who could not in any way contribute to their amusement.

But Arthur Bertram would sit by her reclining-board the livelong day, reading to her; for when Edith went to live at the Crofts' he was four years older than herself, very precocious in intellect, but rather a proud, sensitive boy, who preferred the company of the grateful and bright little invalid to that of the rude, jealous, bullying young Crofts.

Mrs. Croft was as good as her word; little Edith had every care and attention. She was made a great deal of, for she was the Earl of Rockalpine's granddaughter, and had no little influence with the miserly old recluse, who, to please her, as she gained strength and was able to sit up and drive out, would invite her and her chosen friend Arthur to spend weeks together at the Castle; and Edith would sometimes get one or other of the Croft children included in the invitation, and induce her grandpapa to let Roger and some of his Eton schoolfellows, whom he invited during the holidays (always selecting the sons of the rich and affluent) to fish or shoot in the Rockalpine preserves.

Edith was fast growing straight, strong, rosy, and very pretty; and a more charming little couple than Edith Lorraine and Arthur Bertram could not be found. And while they grow together in grace, goodness, and beauty, we must inquire what Lady Hauteville and her handsome daughters are doing in town; and how the presentation of the Misses Lorraine went off at her Majesty's Drawing-room.

CHAPTER VII.

"So full of dismal terror was the time,"

SHAKESPEARE.

"With scores of ladies, whose bright eyes
Rain influence, and adjudge the prize."

MILTON.

WE have said that at the first Drawing-room of the season held by our beloved Queen (then a proud wife and a happy daughter), Lady Hauteville intended to present her two eldest girls, Miss Lorraine and Georgina Lorraine.

Miss Lorraine was eighteen; and seventeen (which was her sister's age) is that which Fashion has fixed for that ceremony, which is, as it were, the inauguration of young English ladies of the "upper ten thousand" into fashionable life.

It is an anxious and important event to all mothers and daughters. Of course it is much more so among the aspiring classes (whose predecessors in the female line have not had the

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honour of bending the knee to, and kissing the hand of, the queens of other days) than it can be to those "born to tread the crimson carpet, and to breathe the perfumed air," and to whom presentation at Court comes as a natural event, and almost as a birthright. But still, even to the loftiest, it is an event of importance. The young beauty, whom the wise Belgravian mamma has so carefully kept from the eyes of those whose fiat decides her rank as a belle, lest the great charm of novelty should be worn off, is now exhibited for the first time to the world of Fashion, and that in the searching glare of the mid-day sun; and bare-headed, and her neck, her arms, and shoulders uncovered—in short, in her evening dress, which a wag once severely called almost a dress of Eve—is, as it were, put up in the matrimonial market.

For what else in reality is this introduction into society? And what are all the rich old beaux (whether widowers or bachelors), "who from sordid parents buy the loathing virgin," but bidders—the highest bidders, perhaps—in that market, and those to whom the youngest and loveliest are sure to be "knocked down?"

Lady Hauteville was, as we have said, a *parvenu*; and though a very clever one, and a very adroit imitator of the calm self-possession and high-bred indifference of the fair patricians around her, she was not, as they were, exactly what she seemed. In reality, she was very much excited at the idea of presenting her daughters.

She was in an inward fever about their dress, their appearance, and the effect they would produce. Her eldest was rather backward, both in the development of her person and her mind; while the second was precocious, at least as far as the former is concerned. And therefore it was that Lady Hauteville had decided to give Miss Lorraine the advantage of another year, hoping she would fill out into greater roundness, and have more manner, and more to say for herself, and be even then not more of a woman than her sister at seventeen.

She had acted wisely. Miss Lorraine, who at seventeen had been lank and scraggy, with very thin arms and red elbows, a very flat bust, and a tendency to purple arms and a red nose, shy, nervous, silent, and awkward, at eighteen was a well-rounded, graceful creature, with white hands and a white nose, easy manners, and plenty to say.

It was a very gay Drawing-room. Victoria, every inch a Queen, although those inches be not many, but looking taller than she is, stood with her noble Consort close at hand, the soft spring sun sparkling in her jewels, and a bright light and a soft beam in her large blue eyes, whenever any fair young *débutante* bent tremblingly before her.

Fair Queen! the Angel of Death had not then left the shadow of his dark wings on her heart or hearth; she had never known a real woe. Alas! alas! how has she wept since that bright day! May He who sent the dread, fierce sorrow enable her to bear it, and in His mercy temper the wind to the shorn lamb.

But to our tale. Lady Hauteville, although all rich brocade and gorgeous colours, and flashing gems herself, was well aware that an elegant simplicity best becomes the spring-time of beauty. Autumn has her gorgeous velvet dahlias; spring has her pale primroses, her snowdrops, her soft lilies.

Among those presented at that Drawing-room, the Misses Lorraine were pre-eminent for that fair, delicate, proud, patriotic beauty, which is almost peculiar to our young female aristocracy. They were—as *débutantes* always should be—in pure white; their *glacé* silk trains were ornamented with bouquets of lilies of the valley, white roses, and stephanotis; their many-skirted tulle dresses were looped up with the same. They wore no ornaments but pearls; long and ample white tulle veils hung like a soft vapour about them; a pearl tiara was on each fair brow; a plume of white feathers waved gracefully from each blonde head, and drooped on to the white shoulder. The excitement of the occasion flushed their cheeks with a becoming and delicate rose tint; and they had been so well tutored and trained by Monsieur Le Zephyr their dancing-master, that they made no mistake of any kind, but backed adroitly and gracefully out of the Queen's presence, having taken with precision and success their first step in high life, and having been, in fact, *presented*!

Lord and Lady Hauteville, who, as he was a minister, had the privilege of the *entrée*, joined their fair daughters in the lobby.

Lord Hauteville was always silent, pale, reserved, and pre-occupied. He went through his part at the Drawing-room like an automaton. His thoughts were far away; perhaps they were hovering round a certain little, grassy amphitheatre, fenced in by firs and other evergreens, in a dark wood, three hundred miles away. Perhaps a certain fir-tree, with some deadly, and to him, appalling symbols carved on its bark, rose on his mental vision. Perhaps certain withered and discoloured patches on the soft, green sod that carpeted the spot, forced themselves on his memory, and brought with them maddening recollections of blood—a brother's blood! Perhaps that scene recalled a *levée* at which, twenty years before, his elder brother, then Lord Hauteville, and himself, had been presented.

Quite against his will, and in spite of himself, all the past might have come back upon his mind; and the late noble form of his brother—his fine face, full of life, and hope, and love—

have come before him, and shut out his gorgeous, triumphant wife, those fair and proud young beauties (his daughters), and all the young, meaningless, and blooming, and the old, haggard, and worn-out faces of those who crowded round to congratulate, to admire, or to criticize.

Among those who pressed round to admire were the old Earl of Richlands, a childless and almost childish widower; the young Marquis of Malplaquet, a red-haired, long-backed noodle, with a hollow roof and a hollow heart; Sir Joseph Brownlow, a millionaire, who had made his fortune by speculation, and who was of low birth, red face, vulgar person and habits, sordid mind, and middle age; but yet was an object of constant aim and vivid interest to Belgravian mammas, and—alas! that we should be obliged to own it—to their daughters, too!

There was, also, a very handsome, dark, moustachioed count, tall, slender, looking like a hero of a novel, who, from a little distance, was shooting dark glances at Miss Lorraine. He was an Italian, who called himself Romeo de Roccabella. He had been presented at a *levée*, by an English nobleman, with whom he had been intimate in Italy, and to whom he had rendered some service, and therefore he found no difficulty in getting to the Drawing-room.

This Italian had constantly met the Misses Lorraine taking their early morning walk in the park, before breakfast, with their governess. He had been struck by their beauty, and had followed them home.

He had made inquiries, and had ascertained who and what they were; and they, on their side—with the curiosity of their age, the love of any sort of excitement that belongs to a life of enforced seclusion, and the romance that lurks even in the coldest female breast—had begun to anticipate meeting him in their morning walk—to speculate about him—to count up the times they had seen him—to comment on his looks and dress, and to interchange signs and whispers about him, when the weary, pale governess had dropped asleep, or had left the school-room for a few minutes of blessed quiet, freedom, and seclusion from them.

The inquiries of Count Romeo de Roccabella ended in his hearing an exaggerated account of the wealth of the Hauteville family, and, what interested him still more, that the two elder Misses Lorraine had each a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, left her absolutely by her millionaire grandfather, Sir James Armstrong, and which became her own on her attaining the age of twenty, or on her marrying, with the consent of her parents, before.

After this, the Count never once missed the morning walk in Kensington Gardens or Hyde Park, in which he was sure to

meet the little, pale, dark, neat governess, and the two tall, blonde, fair young girls.

Nor was this all. He haunted the neighbourhood of their house. He prowled about the iron railings of the square, in which they sauntered with poor little Miss Lindley, their governess, every evening. He even contrived to borrow, against all rules, a key of the square gardens, from a friend whose mother lived in the square.

Georgina Lorraine thought he was her admirer. Augusta fancied it was she who had made this grand conquest; and even poor, little, dark, pale Miss Lindley, with her square face and spectacles, but with a neat little figure, and a pretty foot and ankle, and full of novels, in which governesses were the heroines, such as "The Life of a Lover," "The Daily Governess," "Jane Eyre," "Ann Sherwood," etc., etc., thought that she herself might, after all be the attraction, and indulged in day and night dreams of a handsome husband, a home in some Italian palace, and freedom from the wearying, enervating drudgery of teaching.

The Count had contrived, by the offer of an umbrella (one day that it rained), and by picking up a book (perhaps purposely dropped), to scrape a sort of slight acquaintance with the young ladies and their governess. He had found out which was the elder of the two—with a view, we fear, of knowing which had the longest time to wait for her twenty thousand pounds.

And the result was, that all his dark glances were in future aimed at Miss Lorraine—and she, of course, fell desperately in love with him.

Lady Hauteville was overjoyed to see that the Earl of Richlands and the young Marquis of Malplaquet were, after they had been introduced by herself, paying assiduous court to her youngest daughter; while the millionaire, Sir Joseph, strained his round blood-shot eyes, and short, apoplectic neck, and rose on tip-toe (for he was very short), to address some vulgar personal compliments to Miss Lorraine. But she had no eyes nor ears except for the sighing, glancing Count, and answered Sir Joseph Brownlow with brief monosyllables and great incoherence. He, a vain, purse-proud old fool, attributed all this to timidity, and to the consciousness of being the object of the admiration of one of the greatest catch-matches of the season.

Lady Hauteville was in an inward ecstasy. She had already quite settled it in her own mind that her eldest daughter should become Lady Brownlow, with an almost fabulous fortune; and that her Augusta should be allowed to choose between the old Earl of Richlands and the young Marquis of Malplaquet.

The arrangements at St. James's are, as it is well known, anything but judicious. There is a terrible crush, and great

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destruction of finery, before getting into the royal presence; and the same passions agitate an aristocratic mob that excite a democratic one. Self reigns supreme, and elbowing is the order of the day.

That ordeal over, there is another and a very protracted one, and which a little management might greatly mitigate—that of getting your carriage. Bare-headed, bare-necked belles, of all ages, stand, closely jostled together, by the hour, just outside St. James's Palace, awaiting the announcement, by the Queen's footmen, that their servants are in attendance, and ready to announce their carriages. Beaux become very anxious, fussy, and busy, and are perfectly useless.

The broad daylight out of doors is very trying to the temper and the complexion of all but the youngest and most gentle.

Lord Richlands looked much more made up, old, and grim, in the broad glare of day, than he had done in the softened light inside the palace.

Both he and the young Marquis were very officious about Lady Hauville's carriage; and Sir Joseph Brownlow was in a perfect fume.

But yet it was a very long time before the burly coachman, in his wig, and the tall footmen, with their powdered heads, gorgeous liveries, gold-headed sticks, and huge hothouse bouquets, appeared in view.

And all this time the fair young beauties gained in reputation for loveliness, for no daylight can reveal grey hairs, or wrinkles, or hollows, or rouge, or *Poudre Impératrice*, or false ringlets, or artificial charms of any kind, where they do not exist; and the Count de Roccabella, as he hovered near Miss Lorraine, and saw the love-light in her large blue eyes, and read messages from the heart, written in blushes on her cheeks, began to find Interest and Inclination unite in his determination to marry her.

Sir Joseph Brownlow said to himself, "I've made an impression on that young beauty. No girl ever looked and blushed like that, unless something was busy at her heart, for the first time; and I won't stand shilly-shallying, either, till she's got a bevy of young coxcombs about her. I'll strike while the iron's hot; before a week passes over my head I'll propose—and in a month I'll show them a Lady Brownlow worth looking at!"

"Well, the girls *have* made a triumphant *début*, Hauteville," said my lady, the Belgravian mamma, as soon as they were safely shut into their splendid new carriage, and were slowly progressing back to Belgrave Square.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Why looks your grace so heavily to-day?"

SHAKESPEARE.

LORD HAUTEVILLE was by his lady's side in the front seat of the "Clarence;" the two Misses Lorraine were in the "beauty seat," *alias* the back seat. Miss Lorraine was in a sweet reverie; Augusta was enjoying the admiration of the "outsiders." Both were too much self-engrossed to notice that, although their father mechanically answered, or rather echoed, Lady Hauteville's remark in the words, "Very triumphant, indeed, my dear," there was a hoarse quaver in his voice, and that his face, always pale and stern, was positively livid; that his eyes glared wildly, as if he had seen a ghost, and that his white lips were compressed, as in great pain, while the lace ruffles of his Court dress quivered with the ague-like shiver that ran through his frame.

And what had the great man seen, to cause this abject terror? Simply a bronzed, weather-beaten, rough-headed, sturdy fellow, with his wide-awake pulled down over his bushy brows, and his coloured choker drawn up to his mouth, but with enough of his dreaded, well-known face uncovered, for Lord Hauteville to recognise "Rough Rob;" while in the tall, elastic form at his side, and the face, and air, whose native beauty, character, and dignity, would have well become a train, a tiara, and a plume of feathers, and, so set off, would have eclipsed many of the proudest beauties he had just left behind, the pale, trembling Hauteville recognised Rough Rob's handsome Irish wife, Mary!

Lord Hauteville had hoped and believed that Rough Rob was by this time, far away—that he was on the broad Atlantic, at least, if he had not already landed at New York, with the friends who were to join him in the speculation for which his lordship had furnished Rough Rob with the funds.

What could have detained him in London? And what could induce him to show himself in the broad light of day, and in so dense a crowd, risking detection, apprehension, trial, and the scaffold? At the thought Lord Hauteville shook like an aspen leaf.

Rough Rob, innocent, and therefore fearless, took no precautions but those which his Mary enforced. He had still a great hankering after giving himself up, and standing his trial like a man. He was strong in a conviction that God would not allow an innocent man to be found guilty and to be hanged, nor the real murderer to escape the punishment of his crime.

"What if I be tooked and tried for my life, Mary!" he would say; "there's One above who cares even for a poor hunted cretur like I, and I ought to have trusted in Him, and have

stood my trial like a man, and not have skulked off like a guilty wretch."

"Och hone!" his Mary would reply; "och hone, och hone! why will ye not be advised, Rob, whin the best frind ye has in the wide world says ye'd be hanged like a dog! Surely my lord must judge better than the likes of you. Ye'll break my heart wid yer daring ways, ye will. It 'ud kill me dead to have ye dragged to the gallows, and I'd never know a minute's pace after I was onst a widow—no, not if I lived till a hundred. I'd never recover the shame; and my people, how they'd cast it up to me, that I ran away and got married to a gallows-bird. Och hone, och hone!"

With these and similar arguments, Mary induced Rough Rob to keep indoors a good deal (a great trial to the wild man of the woods), and when he could not bear to stay in, to conceal his person as much as he could.

An inevitable delay in the arrangements of Mike O'Rourke, had kept Rough Rob and his wife in St. Giles's. But they were to set sail for America on the very night of the day on which the Queen held her first Drawing-room for that year at St. James's.

Now, Mary had a cousin, who had bettered herself—had married a rising man, who had met with great luck in life; and a letter from Ireland brought the news that Mary's cousin, once her equal, her playfellow, her confidante, Nora O'Halloran, who had married Lawyer O'Hara, now Sir Miles O'Hara, was to be presented at Court, "and wear a long thrain and fine feathers, and jewels, and all to knale down before the Queen, and kiss her Majesty's hand."

Mary felt no envy of her cousin Nora's prosperity, although the contrast in the lot of the two beauties, who had been girls together (and Mary much the handsomer of the two) would force itself on her mind; but she felt a great desire, an intense curiosity, to see Lady O'Hara in her Court dress; and Rob, finding out this, her secret wish, overmastered her fears, and resolved she should see all that could be seen, by early taking up their place in St. James's Street. And Mary did see her cousin; Mary, the head of her grey cloak drawn over her bonnet, and her features concealed as much as possible; Mary, in her Irish peasant costume, much the worse for wear, clinging with love's strength to Rough Rob, the suspected murderer, the escaped prisoner, for whose apprehension a thousand pounds was offered, Rough Rob with a price upon his head, and Nora, sparkling with jewels, her white plumes heaving in the breeze, looking all pride and triumph, with a little, mean-looking, sly, ugly old man by her side, on whom she looked down, for she was much taller than he was, and who was

jealous of every man that glanced at her, and seemed in a very ill-humour. And in spite of her jewels, her feathers, her rich white satin train, and her pride, there was a dreary discontent in Nora's face, and she answered her jealous lord sharply, and there was cold scorn in the glance with which she met his suspicious scrutiny; and seeing this, Mary clung more closely to Rough Rob, and looking up into his eyes, with tears of tenderness in her own, she said,

"Och, Rob! Rob! there goes Nora in all her splendour, her jewels, and her feathers, her thrain and her cooch; and for all that, I'd not change places with her! She can't love the little, jellous Hop-o'-my-thumb by her side. He distrusts her, and she despises him. I'd rather stand here on fute, wid my own poor, innocent, wronged, and hunted Rob, and feel I'm all the world to him, and him to I, than be a grand lady, going to Court in my cooch, by the side of the likes of Lawyer O'Hara."

It was while Mary spoke thus—her fine grey eyes full of tears, raised to Rough Rob's face, and his, moist, too, with dews from the heart, bent down upon her—that the Hauteville equipage moved slowly by them, and thus they did not see his lordship—their "best friend and noble pathron," as they called him in the ignorance and simplicity of their hearts.

It was a great relief to Lord Hauteville that they did not see him. But the sight of them disturbed his peace by day, and his sleep by night. For many a long day after, when in his lonely chamber, he woke from a troubled sleep, in which his hot breast seemed to be trampled on by the sharp hoofs of a whole stud of nightmares, to lie in a cold perspiration, shaking the stately bed, with the velvet hangings, surmounted by a coronet. A scaffold would weave itself into the coats-of-arms on the velvet and on the chair backs; and the Past would rise on his memory with all the freshness of yesterday. He would see the little grassy amphitheatre in the Black Wood, and his brother, with the life-blood purpling the grass, and that small, spectral, scarlet rill that would trickle down the gentle slope, and, as it were, give him chase. And then Fancy dissolved that view, and he saw a dark mob of countless heads, and heard low groans of execration, and shouts and yells, and he was mounting, with ice-cold feet, the steps of the scaffold; and the white cap was drawn over his face, and the cord was adjusted round his neck, and all was over in this world. But the next? Oh! Fancy dared not picture the eternity of the fratricide.

And while her lord, in his lonely chamber, was suffering the tortures of the damned, Lady Hauteville, in her soft lace cap, with its pink rosettes, and her richly-embroidered night-gear, was smiling in her sleep, as she dreamt of the gay weddings of

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the future Lady Brownlow, and that of the Countess of Richlands, or the Marchioness of Malplaquet, she did not care which, for if the Marquis was a grade higher in rank, the Lord of Richlands had finer estates, the handsomer town mansion in Grosvenor Square, and the more splendid family diamonds. Besides, he had been married, and knew what a lady of fashion required, and had been very liberal, in every way, to the late countess; while the Marquis of Malplaquet, though so young, and a *roué*, was a sordid one. He was known to be mean; indeed, his stinginess about settlements had caused the breaking off of a match between him and a belle of the preceding season.

And after all Lady Hauteville did not care which of these two noble and ignoble suitors led her fair Georgina to the altar, but lay on her bed of down, smiling in her sleep, under the influence of the spirit of fashion, which

"Oft in dreams invention may bestow
To add a founce or change a furbelow."

And so this time the partner of her life—he whom she had taken for better, for worse, and had sworn to keep in sickness and in health, in weal or woe, till death did them part—lay, in a room separated from hers only by a dressing-closet, lying on that rack which a guilty conscience spreads upon every bed of "stubble or of stubble-down;" cold drops of sweat upon his brow, "the worm that dieth not" feeding on his heart, and the fire that is not quenched scorching his brain.

Oh! who that could count the cost would ever stain his hands with blood, and sell his soul to the great enemy of mankind, who is ever at hand, first to tempt to crime, and then to exult in the anguish it entails, and the hideous penalties it enforces?

CHAPTER IX.

"Oh, there's nothing half so sweet in life
As Love's young dream." MOORE.

ONCE fairly launched in the world of fashion, the Misses Lorraine, like all the other belles of Belgravia and fair of Mayfair, resolved to drain the cup of pleasure to the dregs.

They were reigning belles. They dressed, danced, rode, flirted, to perfection; they waltzed or polked all night, and yet were in their cold baths at eight, and in the parks betimes in the morning, riding in search of the roses of health.

They ate like troopers at that substantial early dinner which the gay world calls a luncheon. They sipped their cheering, refreshing five o'clock tea, with its relays of delicate toast and thin bread-and-butter, in Lady Hauteville's boudoir; and talked over their own conquests and charms, and the failures and

faults of their rivals, and decided what dresses they should wear, and in what style their hair should be done; and then they were able at an eight o'clock dinner to pretend to live upon air, and, not to offend the refined taste of some high-bred exquisite, by any display of a natural appetite, to confine themselves to nibbling a bit of chicken, or trifling with a *soufflé*, a jelly, an ice, or some choice fruit.

The Count di Roccabella, although never invited by Lady Hauteville to any *soirée*, or "at home" at her own house, contrived to meet Miss Lorraine at balls and parties; and, all insolent, haughty, and self-possessed as she had become (taking her tone from the society in which she moved), she could "bate her proud looks" to him, even though the Earl of Richlands had proposed and been accepted. Lady Hauteville had laughed her daughter out of all scruples, all objections to the *ci-devant* Adonis, old enough to be her father. The liberal settlements, the wedding presents, the *trousseau*, the jewels, the equipages, were the talk of the *beau monde*, and the envy of the belles.

The Count looked despair and suicide.

Lord Richlands wanted an early day fixed, but Miss Lorraine was resolved not to put on the galling golden fetters till she had enjoyed one season in town; and the wedding was to take place at the end of June. Meanwhile she gave herself up to dissipation, perhaps to silence the "still small voice" that will be heard in solitude.

Sir Joseph Brownlow and the young Marquis of Malplaquet had not come forward as Lady Hauteville had expected they would. A new beauty—a sparkling, lively little brunette—had made her *début* since the "Lorraine girls," and the old Earl and the young Marquis forsook the blonde, inanimate Augusta.

Lady Hauteville would have been in despair but for Georgina's splendid prospects. And now the last grand *fête* at which the bride-elect was to appear before that brief seclusion which approaching wedlock entails was about to "come off" at Lady Louisa Seymour's villa at Twickenham. It consisted of a *matinée*, which began at three p.m., a dinner party, and a ball.

The weather was exquisite, and the heat intense. The gardens were illuminated by coloured lamps, and still more by the silver moon. Lady Hauteville, who was confined to her room by a cold, accepted for her daughters the chaperonage of the Duchess of Snowdon. Lord Richlands to his great grief, could not escort his bride-elect; business connected with his marriage had summoned him to Richlands Park.

Georgina's heart beat high, for she knew—but how we cannot reveal—that Count Romeo di Roccabella was to be at this *fête*.

Oh! wretched, weak, guilty girl, victim of a false and heartless system! She, the bride-elect is in a secret tumult of joy,

because the Count will be present, and her intended will be far away.

The *matinée* passed off wearily to the bride-elect, nor less so to Augusta Lorraine, who was doomed, in spite of a new and most elegant toilette, to see the old Baronet and the young Marqu's devote themselves to Brillanté de Beauvoir, the sparkling brunette, with so much to say, and so much *à la mode*, who had brought dark beauty into fashion, and without a tithe of the personal charms of the blonde Lorraines, had, with her saucy little Roxalana nose, put the delicate aquilines of Augusta and Georgina quite out of joint, as the Earl would have said, only that he, at least, poor fellow! was faithful to fair beauty, for he was really in love with a blonde.

Poor Georgina! she was beginning to feel very sick at heart. The dinner passed heavily off; the ball began, and still he came not. The Duchess of Snowdon, the Lorraines' chaperon, sat down to whist; the company, in the intervals of the dance, spread over the grounds. Georgina's impatience and disappointment became unbearable. She watched her opportunity, and just as the dance recommenced, she slipped out at a glass door, and hurried away, to hide the tears she could not repress, in a dark shrubbery that skirted the river.

She had not been there long when she heard the splashing of oars, and a voice, that made her heart bound and her cheeks glow, sang *A te, o cara*, in a voice which—

“—Music to the ear,
Became a memory to the soul.”

“He is come! he is come!” she whispered to herself, wildly clasping her hands. “I will see him! I must speak to him! I must tell him my heart is his, although I am compelled to give my hand to another!”

She rushed out of the shrubbery, and found the Count who had just landed from a boat, standing near a marble urn.

“You are come,” she said; “come at length!” and there were tears in her voice.

He drew her arm in his, and led her back into the shrubbery. There, in language full of passionate eloquence, he told her that he adored her; he painted to her a life of misery with her intended—of purest happiness with him. He told her he was there, not to see her for a moment, and then to leave her forever, but to bear her away with him to his own sweet, sunny Italy, there to devote his whole life to love and her!

“My mamma!” faltered the distracted girl.

“Mamma!” he cried. “Why, she would sell your youth, your beauty, and your warm, young heart, for gold. I have arranged all. I have a licence ready. To-morrow, before a registrar, I will make you my wife—my countess—the

Countess di Roccabella! and the ceremony in our respective churches can be performed abroad."

"But I am not of age! A marriage will not be valid, will it, Romeo?"

"Oh! yes. No one will dispute it; when it is once done, they will make the best of it; and we shall be far, far away. I have a boat and two men close by; they will bear us to a spot where a carriage-and-four awaits us. Nay, nay, I will hear no objections, no scruples, *carissima!* If you refuse, you do not love me, and I will die."

"I love you too well!" sobbed Georgina.

"Then prove it, angel! Queen of my soul! idol of my heart! Come! fly with your Romeo—like a second Juliet, fly with me!"

So saying, and using a gentle force, the Count led the pale, bewildered, weeping, but enraptured girl to the boat, with one hand clasping her white arm, and another half encircling her waist; he got her to the boat just as some ladies among the guests, who had failed to secure partners, came out to look at the moon and stroll about the grounds.

They did not recognise the lovers, for Georgina Lorraine had thrown a scarf over her head, and of her tall graceful figure they only saw the back; but there was an earnestness in the dark-mantled, pale-faced, moustachied cavalier, which arrested their attention and interested their feelings; and so from a little distance, they watched what they little suspected was the elopement of the envied bride-elect of the millionaire, the Earl of Richlands, with a penniless Italian adventurer, who, though he admired her beauty, and felt flattered by her love, was chiefly urged on by the thought of the twenty thousand pounds which in less than two years would be hers, and therefore his.

It was not till the ball broke up at 4 a.m., and Miss Lorraine could nowhere be found, that these ladies began to understand what they had seen. And then, not wishing, as they said, to be brought forward and get into trouble, they decided on saying nothing that could throw any light on the mysterious disappearance of the bride-elect, Miss Lorraine.

CHAPTER X.

"Alas! that this should ever be—
Gold thus o'er Faith and Love prevailing;
Great curse! where shall we flee from thee,
Since even Woman's faith is failing?" L. E. I.

BITTER indeed was the disappointment of the haughty *parvenu*, Lady Hauteville, when it became known to herself, and

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to that world for which alone she lived, that her favourite daughter (on the eve of becoming an English Countess) had eloped with an Italian adventurer.

Her grief was not the natural grief of a tender mother, ruthlessly robbed of a beloved and loving child, trembling for her dear one's fate, dreading the retribution always in store for a disobedient and ungrateful daughter, and the punishment generally inflicted by the very hand which has led her astray! No; her grief was made up of rage, wounded vanity, mortified pride, disappointed ambition. She had so revelled in her anticipated triumph over Belgravian mammas of higher birth, and far more thorough-bred feelings and manners than herself, whose daughters "hung on hand" (as the match-makers say), and who, having passed through the cold spring, the sunless summer, and the gloomy autumn of their charms, saw the "winter of their discontent" coming on with their eight-and-twentieth year. For the career of an unmarried belle in the world of fashion cannot be allowed to exceed ten seasons, after which time she dwindles into a "has been," and is fairly, or rather unfairly, shelved. We say unfairly; for many women are lovelier and more loveable at seven-and-twenty than at seventeen. But there must be *mind*, to replace the first lustre of youth in the eyes; feeling to animate the cheeks with blushes dearer than the rosy tints of dawn; a riper loveliness must enrich the form, to atone for the loss of the sylphide beauty of girlhood; and the expression, manners, and conversation, must have gained in grace, dignity, and sympathy what they have lost in sprightliness, *naïveté*, and archness.

Lady Hauteville's distress was all the deeper, and the more unbearable, on account of the hollow, sham condolences, and ill-veiled exultation of those who had angled in vain for the rich old Earl of Richlands, for their own daughters.

Then, too, Augusta was no longer the fashion, and Ida was not yet out. Of Edith, the worldly, ambitious mother only thought as "the carrotty cripple," who had better live on with the Croft family, a cripple in childhood, youth, womanhood, and old age, if it were not wisely decreed that she should be removed from a world in which (as her cold mother said) her existence was a burthen to herself and her friends. For what a blighted being must a carrotty cripple be! For *her* there could be no "season," no presentation at Court, no introduction into the world of fashion.

A letter from Mrs. Croft was lying on the breakfast-tray, which had just been brought to Lady Hauteville's bedside. The miserable Belgravian mamma had not been able to summon energy to rise.

"Send Miss Augusta to me, Leno," she said to her maid; and she began to dip her strips of toast in her chocolate.

Miss Augusta knocked at the door.

"Come in," said Lady Hauteville, languidly. "Leave us, Leno. I will ring when I want you."

Leno retired, but only into a closet, where, concealed behind some ample dresses, she could hear all that passed.

"Good Heavens! how pale and sallow you look, Augusta!" exclaimed the mamma; "and how frightfully your hair is done!"

"Céleste has dressed my hair exactly as you directed her, mamma. I own I thought it very unbecoming; but she said she had your orders, and of course they were her law and mine."

"Of course; but now I order you and Céleste to return to your former style. That lovely brunette, Brillanté de Beauvoir, looked so exquisite with her glossy black hair, à l'*Eugenie*, and the Marquis of Malvoisin—and, in fact, all the best men—were so smitten with her, I thought if you adopted that style it might bring you a few of her rejected suitors. But I see it won't do. Your forehead is too high, your nose too sharp, and your features too marked for it; besides, your eyes are red, and you look positively haggard."

"It is now three days and nights since Georgina went away," said Augusta, her eyes filling with tears, "and nothing has been heard of her. And there are reports, I find from Céleste, that this Italian is an adventurer, and no Count at all; and that he has eloped with Georgina for the sake of the fortune grand-papa left her. And—"

"Pray don't bring me all the tittle-tattle of the servants'-hall, and, perhaps, the kitchens. If true, your ungrateful, treacherous, and worthless sister is rightly punished. I have driven her from my thoughts—my heart" (and the lady pressed her white hand to the bosom of her embroidered night-dress, on the vacant place where a heart should have been), "and I command you to do the same."

"But we were always together. From my birth I never was a day or night away from Georgina, until that dreadful *fête*. If I knew that she was happy, I could bear it better."

Here the poor girl's sobs got the better of her fear of her mother, and she walked to the window, and hid her face in her handkerchief. She was startled presently by her mother's voice, in its angriest tones.

"Augusta," she said, "let us understand one another. Your sister has acted basely, cruelly, vilely, both by me and by her noble intended; and if you, instead of doing all you can to console me, and to atone for her degrading choice, by making a brilliant match yourself, are going to fret yourself into a frightful red-eyed spectre, about a sister who never loved you, but who was very jealous of and spiteful to you—say so; and I

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shall not remain in London to witness such insane folly. I shall go at once down to Armstrong Hall or Rockalpine; and there you can weep away to your heart's content. Ida, as you well know, cannot be introduced till next spring, and she is getting on so well at Hyde Park House, that I shall not remove her. I have no daughter, then, to comfort me but you; and unless you promise me to forget all about your unprincipled sister, and to try all you can to make a brilliant match, to atone to me for this disappointment, I shall leave town to-morrow for Armstrong Hall."

Augusta, though she had some natural feelings left, was still a belle of Belgravia. "The season" was everything to her. The solitude of Armstrong Hall, with her bitter, taunting, and exasperated mamma as her companion, was intolerable. She had not even the governess to turn to, for she had been discharged when Augusta had completed her seventeenth year.

"I will do my best to obey you, mamma," she said, drying her eyes; "I know Georgina has acted very shamefully; I will try to atone to you for her disobedience."

"Sensibly spoken," said the mamma. "What's done can't be undone. I hope, for the family credit's sake, things may not turn out so bad as they seem. If the man is really an Italian count, even if he is (as of course he must be) a fortune-hunter, and, to some extent, an adventurer, all we can do is to make the best of it; but until we hear from the wretched fool herself, we can know nothing about it. Your papa was for pursuing and separating them, as she is a minor; but those things never answer—they make a great *esclandre*; parents have a disgraced and dishonoured daughter thrown back on their hands; no one else will marry her; and thus she is for life an eyesore, a dead weight, and a great expense. No; I have decided to let matters take their course. And now, what say you, my love, to the Earl of Richlands for yourself?"

Augusta shuddered and turned pale. Lady Hauteville did not appear to notice the effect of her suggestion.

"The dear old fellow once told me," said the mamma, "that it was quite a chance which of the *belles blondes* he proposed to; for he thought you like two lilies on one stalk—two pearls in one bed of cotton. Now, I think that a little sympathy at this crisis would bring him to your feet, and the triumph and delight of the Rosevilles, the Belmonts, the Roscommons, the Irelings, and the Fitzarthurs, would be turned to woe and envy. They are all spreading their nets already. Write him a little note, my love, and ask him to come and dine quietly with mamma and yourself, and then go alone with us in a private box to see Charles Kean in his great character of *Othello*. Richlands will take it kind; and I think if we don't do some-

thing of the sort, Lady Elfrida Belmont, or that sly Rhoda Roscommon, will get hold of him, and he'll be engaged to one of them before he knows what he is about. So write, my love, one of your pretty little coaxing notes; my darling knows exactly what to say."

Augusta bowed her head, and, with a heavy sigh, was about to leave the room to do her mother's bidding, and write to the old earl, when that lady, holding back the crimson velvet curtains of her bed with her delicate hand, said:

"Don't leave me just yet, my Gussy! You can write presently; but now I want you to read me this letter from Mrs. Croft. I suppose it is something about Edith—some new irons, or fresh doctor, or backboards, or systems to be tried. At any rate, I must know what it is; so read it to me."

Augusta took the letter and read as follows:

"CROFT VILLA, NEAR ALNWICK, NORTHUMBERLAND,
"November 12th, 18—.

"MY DEAR LADY HAUTEVILLE,—First allow me to congratulate you on the brilliant marriage which I see by the *Morning Post* and the *Court Journal* Miss Lorraine is about to contract. I have no doubt her lovely sister, Miss Augusta, will soon follow so good an example, and that the fair image of yourself, the beautiful Miss Ida, will, in due time, introduce a third coronet into your noble family. And now to business. I know you will rejoice to hear that your delicate darling and ours—sweet little Edith—is daily gaining strength and health. No remains of curvature of the spine are now apparent. The darling young lady can walk with ease and grace; but of course we do not allow her to indulge in any exertion which might produce relapse. Miss Edith is now, as you know, fourteen; and I have attended to her education as much as her delicate health permitted. But I am going to take my family abroad for three years. We shall embark from Sunderland in a yacht, which Mr. Croft has purchased at the sale of the late Duke of N—. We intend visiting Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, during the summer. We shall winter in Italy. I mean, during our stay abroad, to visit, with my family, all the cities of Europe, and make such a stay in the principal ones as will enable the young people to master the French, German, Italian, and Spanish languages.

"Dr. Bliss says that such a tour, as the one we propose, would be the very best thing possible for Miss Edith; and I now write to ask you and my Lord Hauteville to allow her to be of the party. With regard to the outlay, Mr. Croft will communicate with my lord; but we shall travel so economically, that I think the liberal sum you now kindly remit quarterly will very nearly cover Miss Edith's expenses.

"Lord Rockalpine, who continues in his usual health, and takes great interest in the welfare of Miss Edith, highly approves of our scheme, and says, if he were a younger man, he would be of the party.

"Should your ladyship agree to our plan, we shall set off by water from Sunderland, on this day week; and if not, I must beg you kindly to

send a competent person to take charge of Miss Edith, as I cannot delay my departure.

"With best respects to the fair young bride-elect and her sweet sister,

"I remain, my dear madam,

"Your ladyship's most devoted servant,

"ANN CROFT."

"Of course I shall agree at once," said Lady Hauteville.

"What could I do with the poor little carrotty cripple? What competent person have I got to send for her? And where would she reside? No; I think it's a capital plan."

"But, mamma, if she has no remains of the curvature, and can walk with ease and grace, she cannot be a cripple now."

"Nonsense! She is, and was, and always will be a cripple. Dr. Dulcibel said so, and he never makes a mistake. That's all boast and bravado of Mrs. Croft's, just to exalt herself, and the care she has taken of poor little Edith. Let me see; Ida will be seventeen next spring, and Edith is now fourteen. Not that Edith's age matters—I could never introduce a cripple—but Ida's does; and you, my darling, must contrive to get off before Ida comes out; for she's very pretty, and so much in your own style that you wouldn't have a chance. But now, for a short time, you've the field to yourself; so play your cards well, my love."

"What cards have I, mamma?"

"Youth, beauty, position, and, that queen of trumps, a sensible mother, my pet. And now go, write to the Earl, as I suggested; and then write for me to Mrs. Croft, and say that I highly approve of the Continental scheme, and shall be very glad to let Edith be of the party. We must dine at six. Tell the Earl to be in time for 'Othello'; and do you come down to tea with me at five, and I will advise you what to wear. So cheer up, my love; you are my only hope and comfort now, and will be till next season, when Ida comes out; and all the presents I had meant for your ungrateful, treacherous sister shall be yours. I have in that drawer some such exquisite things, which I will show you at our five o'clock tea! Are you going to ride to-day?"

"I hate riding alone, mamma. I have no one to ride with."

"Never mind; go and take a country ride, and when you come in, have a bath, and go to bed for a few hours; you will then get up as fresh as a rose. Or, suppose you ask Miss De Belton to ride your sister's horse, and canter off to Clapham, and order some flowers from Acre. Not that it matters about a companion, with such a steady, experienced groom as James. But, do as you like, only do take your ride, your bath, and your festa. And mind Céleste does your hair in the usual style. Richlands likes to see it waving round the face, so let it down again."

The obedient daughter left the Belgravian mamma to finish her breakfast, and repaired to her *escritoire*, to write to the Earl and Mrs. Croft, and then, with a sigh, sent to offer Georgina's horse to Miss de Belton for a country ride. The offer was gladly accepted. Augusta returned cheered and rosy from her long canter, and found on the hall-table a note in a tremulous hand from the old Earl, gallantly accepting the invitation to dinner and to escort the ladies to the play.

Augusta, full of Miss de Belton's aspirations after a coronet, and her wonder at Georgina's romantic folly, began to enter fully into her mother's plans. Augusta was imitative and impressionable; and the worldly maxims of Miss de Belton, a Belgravian belle of five years' standing, had quite turned the current of her thoughts. Georgina's love match had tinged them with romance, but now they were all worldly.

She took the bath and the siesta prescribed by her mamma, and again the softening influence of her silken blonde hair (its ripples touched with pale gold, and two love locks on her shoulders) was lent to her delicate, aristocratic, and now blooming face.

When Augusta entered her mother's boudoir to partake of her five o'clock tea, Lady Hauteville thought that her daughter's white tulle, many-skirted dress over white glacé, and adorned with blue convolvuli, while a wreath of the same encircled her head, forming a diadem on her fair brow, and heightening the beauty of her light hair and fair complexion, were so perfect in taste and in effect, that she could suggest no improvement; only when Augusta produced the few tremulous, slanting lines of the old Earl, her mother went to her drawers, and, taking out a jewel-case of maroon morocco, displayed an exquisite set of sapphires and pearls; and calling Leno to put in the earrings, and to fasten the necklace, bracelets, and brooch, she said, embracing her delighted daughter (Leno having retired to her closet),

"I meant these for the future Countess of Richlands, and I fancy, in giving them to you, my love, I have about hit the mark."

Everything turned out as Lady Hauteville had planned and expected.

The old Earl's heart, unlike our Crystal Palace season tickets, *was* transferable. He was bent on marrying a young beauty. He was anxious to have an heir, to disappoint a nephew who had caricatured him. Augusta was quite as eligible in his eyes as Georgina.

The whole matter was kept very close, for Lady Hauteville had an acute sense of the fitness of things, and a great dread of ridicule, and this sudden transfer of the old Earl from one

daughter to another would be, as she well knew, while the matter was still pending, a standing joke at the clubs and in the *salons* of Belgravia and Mayfair. Once done, all would be anxious to pay their court to the young Countess of Richlands. Lady Hauteville, therefore, kept her own counsel.

The marriage was a very quiet one. It took place at Armstrong Hall, and the *beau monde* knew nothing about it, until one morning in July, when most people had left town, and the flies were buzzing about the bald heads of the old heroes of the "Rag and Famish," the papers announced the marriage of the Right Honourable Felix, Earl of Richlands and Ross, to Augusta, second daughter of Lord and Lady Hauteville, and grand-daughter of the Right Honourable the Earl of Rockalpine. The *Court Journal* entered into greater details, and said the marriage ceremony was performed at Bagshot Church, that a few select friends and relatives partook of an elegant *déjeuner* at Armstrong Hall, the seat of Lord and Lady Hauteville, and that soon after the collation the happy pair set off for the Continent, *viâ* Folkstone, intending to spend the honeymoon in Switzerland, and at the German spas.

CHAPTER XI.

"But sweeter far than this—than these—than all—
Is first and passionate Love. It stands alone,
Like Adam's recollection of his fall.
The tree of knowledge has been stripped—all's known,
And Life yields nothing further to recall
Worthy of this ambrosial sin, so shown,
No doubt, in fable as the unforgiven
Fire Prometheus filch'd for us from Heaven." BYRON.

THE time upon which Mrs. Croft had fixed for her Continental tour was that of the midsummer vacation at Eton.

Her eldest son, it is true, had left school, and had matriculated at Oxford; but Clarissa's boy, Arthur, Mr. Croft's grandson, was to be of the travelling party; and he, too, was an oppidan at Eton.

To Mrs. Croft, and to all who interested themselves in Mr. Croft's affairs, it seemed very absurd in him to give to the poor boy whom he had adopted out of charity (the offspring of an undutiful daughter's clandestine marriage) the advantages which many gentlemen are obliged to deny even to their eldest sons—an education at Eton and Oxford. But on this subject Mr. Croft was immovable, and, indeed, he had sternly forbidden Mrs. Croft to meddle in matters she did not understand; while to officious visitors who presumed to disapprove, he coldly remarked that "every man was the best judge of

his own affairs, and that when he needed advice he would ask for it."

After this, no one presumed to express an opinion, or to offer any advice as to the education of young Bertram. They contented themselves with casting up their hands and eyes, and with whispering two very unpleasing and disparaging words, in reference to the poor departed Clarissa, and the beautiful and noble boy whom she had left to her father's care.

Nothing could exceed the delight of Edith Lorraine at the prospect of visiting all the beautiful countries and noble cities of which they had read together, in company with one whom she had always loved as a brother, until, with her fifteenth year, stole into the maiden's heart a feeling more subtle, more vague, more enchanting, than sisterly affection.

Arthur, nearly three years her senior, and consequently seventeen, had only just begun to feel his heart leap in his bosom at the sound of her voice, and his blood ebb and flow at the accidental touch of her little hand.

But the heart of woman ripens much sooner than that of man; and the maiden and her unacknowledged lover felt at the same time the influence of him who "will be lord of all."

But as yet no suspicion of the power that bound them (as with a spell) had entered the heart or the mind of either. No thought of the Future, no plans, no prospects, no doubts, no fears, intruded on them in that freehold each young heart has, in the fairy land of Hope and Love. Indefeasible inheritance!—our little all of the Eden we lost through Sin, and which passes away from us as soon as Sin steals into the fairy bowers of Love, and the innocent heart of Youth.

Mrs. Croft had said truly, that there were no remains of the curvature of the spine, which had threatened with deformity the graceful shape of Edith Lorraine; no vestige of lameness remained, and her health and strength were entirely restored.

Mrs. Croft's cue was not, as Lady Hauteville imagined, to make Edith appear better and stronger than she was; but, on the contrary, to affect to consider her still as in a great degree an invalid, who might relapse into a cripple, and for whom change of air and scene was a great boon.

Mrs. Croft found the handsome stipend, which Lord Hauteville paid so regularly into her own hands, an inexpressible comfort and help, both to herself and to that aspiring youth, her son, whose great object was to be considered "fast"—an object not to be attained without a very great outlay.

The day before the departure of the Crofts, and of Edith Lorraine and Arthur, the old Earl of Rockalpine called at Croft Villa, to take leave of his grand-daughter, and to make her

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what, for him, was a magnificent present, namely, an old travelling-bag, which had been his mother's, curiously fitted up with toilet requisites of nearly a century back, and with silver and ivory handles.

When the old Earl arrived at Croft Villa, Arthur and Edith were roaming about the woods, taking a fond leave of scenes where they had been so happy. But Mrs. Croft received his lordship in her best drawing-room; and, while she went in search of Edith Lorraine, she proposed that her youngest child, a show-off, of the name of Gloriana, who was supposed to be a great musical genius, should entertain my lord by an exhibition of her talents on the piano. The old Earl had a keen sense of the ludicrous, and watched the little precocious caricature, at the piano, with a smile which the proud and enraptured mamma construed into admiration.

The old Earl of Rockalpine was come to take leave of his favourite grandchild Edith. He had listened with great patience to Gloriana's grand sonata, and had delighted both Mrs. Croft and the precocious young musician by his praises, and by a present of a sovereign to the young lady, to buy a keepsake in memory of himself. But when Edith came running in, out of breath with haste, and rosy as the Dawn, the Earl begged to be allowed to see his grand-daughter in private, and Mrs. Croft and Gloriana left the room.

Edith, although with the prospect of all the delights of novelty, change, new countries, and new people before her, and that, dearer still, of Arthur by her side to double and share every joy, could not choose but weep when the old Earl, with a softness and a feeling very unusual in one whose only affection for many years had been for his gold, took her in his arms, and stroking her bright, glossy, auburn head with his old withered hand, said,

"Farewell, my sunbeam!—my love!—my darling! I wish I were ten years younger, and then I would be of your party, my little one; for, indeed, the glory of poor grandpapa's sunset fades with your bright face and sunny smile, my precious little girl!"

"Oh! why cannot you come now, dear, dearest grandpapa?" said Edith, throwing her white arms round the old man's neck, and pressing her roseate cheek to his parchment-yellow and wrinkled face, sore with age.

"No, my child. I am too infirm, too aged. Old trees, my pretty one, do not bear transplanting. And now, do not weep, my Edith, if I say that I fear I shall not see you again; but should it prove so—if the darkness that now and then overshadows my path, is, indeed, cast by the wings of the Angel of Death—if the rushing of those wings causes the chill, the

shudder that occasionally thrills through me, icing the blood in my veins—then, my child (nay, do not sob) you will not see me on this earth again!”

“Oh, I *will* not go!” sobbed Edith; “I *will* stay with you—I *will* read to you—pray with you—sing to you—comfort you! How *can* I go away, and leave you to live and die alone?”

“Edith,” said the old Earl, smiling, “I have read and re-read the little book you gave me; indeed, I know many of its hymns by heart. Now, listen.

“Why should we faint and fear to live alone,
Since all alone—so Heaven had willed—we die?
Nor even the tenderest heart and next we own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh?”

“Each in his hidden sphere of joy or woe
Our hermit spirits dwell, and range apart;
Our eyes see all around in gloom or glow,
Hues of their own, fresh borrow'd from the heart!”

“And well it is for us our God should feel
Alone our secret throbbings: so our prayer
May readier spring to Heaven, nor spend its zeal
On cloud-born idols of this lower air.”

I know the hymn all through, my pretty one,” added the Earl, “and I learned it to please you; but there is no time to say it now, for you have much to do, and I must return to the Castle; but before I go, sweet child, take an old man’s thanks, an old man’s blessing. Edith, till I knew you, and heard those truths which are hidden from the learned and the wise, proclaimed by you, then almost a babe, a suckling, and listened to hymns and prayers from your lips, I was living without God in the world! I had made an idol of gold, my love, and I worshipped it; but Heaven sent an angel, without wings, in your shape, my child, to lead me from darkness into light. Edith, I *was* an infidel—I *am* a believer, a penitent believer, and through you! So do not weep, my pretty one, your mission here is done. You have said, ‘Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life.’ Do you remember where we were when you read that text to me, Edith?”

“We were sitting on some rocks by the sea,” said Edith, very gently, looking up from the old man’s bosom, on which her head was laid, and soft tears trickling down her cheeks. “There had been a terrible storm, grandpapa, and we had taken shelter in a cave, deep, deep in the rocks, and we had heard the thunder roar and reverberate through the caverns, and we had seen the forked lightning flash, and the rain beat down in torrents, and we drew closer together. It was so grand, so terrible, so awful a storm! And by degrees it

abated. The rain ceased, the winds were hushed, the sun came out in all his glory; the rocks and the sands were soon dry, and a glorious rainbow spanned the sky. Its arch began on the horizon and ended on the keep of the castle tower; and we left our cave, and sat down by the sea on some masses of rock. They were warm in the sun, and countless beautiful shells and delicate sea-weeds had been cast up by the waves, and I filled my basket with them, and I have them still. Oh, grandpapa, that storm and that heavy, awful darkness, and the fury of the elements, as we shrunk into the darkest corner of that cave, I never can forget; nor yet the heavenly calm that followed, the glorious sunshine, and that brilliant, beautiful rainbow!"

"Edith," said the old Earl, "I never told you before, but, on the eve of a long parting, I tell you now, my child, that that storm, that darkness, that calm, that sunshine, that rainbow, were symbols of what was passing in my soul at that time. Darker than that darkness had been my benighted spirit, when I entered that cave; fierce as the war of those elements was the contest going on within me; sudden as the gush of sunshine that followed, was the light of Grace shining into my soul; and bright and beautiful as that rainbow in the sky, was the bridge of penitence, pardon, and faith, by which my spirit was to mount to Heaven. When you prayed in the fervent piety of your pure young heart—when you prayed for deliverance from the perils of that storm, *I prayed too*; and when you returned thanks *I joined you*. Edith, since I was a child at my mother's knee, until that hour in that cave with you, I had neither prayed nor thanked God for anything! And now prayer is my great solace; now I 'search the Scriptures,' as my little one told me I must do; now I live a new life; and now, instead of heaping up riches without knowing who shall gather them, I think night and day how I can bring a blessing on others, by the gold I have hoarded, and I mean to leave to Edith the power of dispensing my wealth for the good of the poor and needy."

"Oh, don't talk so—you will break my heart!" sobbed Edith, putting her little hand on his lips.

"Nay, you must hear me," said the Earl, kissing her fingertips:—"you are my heiress, my sole executrix, my residuary legatee—everything that is not entailed, goes to you, my child! And if in the days to come, when you are a woman, my Edith, you wish to marry one worthy of you, in all but this world's dross, and friends would oppose and part you, and try to unite you to some vain, godless worldling who is rich and great, you can say, 'No; my grandpapa foresaw the trials that awaited me. He felt that I should wish to give my hand, where my

heart had long been given; that I should prefer a good, noble Christian lover, whom I had known from childhood—(for had we not grown up together?)—who loved me for myself, to some titled coxcomb and spendthrift, who wedded me for connection or wealth. And he has empowered me to raise that dearest, truest one to my own level, and to select from the world, the Christian man of my heart to be the husband of my youth and the sharer of my good fortunes!’ Ah! darling, never blush about it! Has old grandpapa discovered the dear delicious secret, scarcely known to her own heart, and never, never whispered to his?”

Edith, smiling through her tears, hid her face in the old man’s breast. The Earl hugged her up, and continued:—

“They say there is a sort of second-sight given to those who are not long for this world; and I fancy I see my little Edith’s future spread before her. And that noble youth, Arthur; I see he loves you, Edith, and I see that you love him; and whatever Worldliness may say about the disparity of birth and station between you, if you wed him you have your grandfather’s blessing, for I see he is a true-hearted, noble-minded youth, and I see, too, in the distance, a halo around his head, independently of you, my Edith. That youth will be a great man; I cannot tell how or when it will come to pass, but I do clearly see a coronet on your Arthur’s brow. Perhaps he is to achieve greatness; but be that as it may, I feel that he will be great, and that, in the end, those who have opposed and condemned will congratulate and approve. And now I go, my love; but not as of yore, to a dreary solitude, with no companions but inanimate money-bags. No; my home now is the home of a Christian. Each hour has its pleasant Christian duty. In my Bible I have an inexhaustible source of comfort and interest, and this little book, this ‘Christian Year,’ your gift, is its fit companion—its handmaid. My solitary halls are no longer dark and dreary—the light of Grace is there; and I am no longer alone, for Faith is ever by my side.”

Edith, still sobbing, slipped from the old Earl’s breast, and fell on her knees before him.

“Don’t weep, darling,” he said, raising her, “but listen:—your portrait, my Edith, stands on my table; your sweet face smiles on me, and your raised finger seems at one time to beckon, at another to warn. So do not weep, as if I were still the godless old miser going to count his hoards; I am now the aged Christian awaiting his summons. And now let me give you a sum I have brought with me, and out of which you can distribute your farewell charities to those poor pensioners of whom you have often spoken to me; and if you will send me a list of their names, my darling, my steward shall visit

and relieve them in your absence." So saying, he put a purse into Edith's hands, who took it with a fresh burst of tears.

With these words, the old Earl clasped the wildly weeping girl in a long embrace, and tore himself away. She rushed out, and saw him enter his carriage, to which Arthur, who was in the garden, was assisting him. She heard him say, "God bless and prosper you, Arthur—take care of my Edith;" and then she saw no more, for the Earl threw himself up in a corner of the carriage, and hid his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XII.

"Child no more! I love, and I am woman!" RICHELIEU.

As soon as the old Earl was fairly off, Edith hastened to her own room to think, to pray, to weep, and then to wash away the traces of her tears, for she had to repair to Mr. Croft's library, to complete some calculations, accounts, and book-keeping (which, as she was an excellent arithmetician, she always managed for him).

Edith longed to be once more in the woods and fields with Arthur, for it was exquisitely fine; but she promised Mr. Croft to complete all she had undertaken, and Edith never broke her word. Since we saw him last, Mr. Croft had been to Paris, and a French hair-dresser had persuaded him to adopt a curly ventilating peruke. It gave him a jaunty, perky air, by no means natural to the staid old attorney; and as he sat in his easy chair by the fire, conning his Murray's Handbook, and glancing approvingly at Edith, his pretty book-keeper, pondering over a total at her own little writing-table, a more cheery home-scene could not have been designed.

By the time Edith had finished her work, Arthur had entered the drawing-room in search of her.

They had agreed, as it was their last day at Rockalpine, to pay farewell visits to some poor cottagers living on the moor. "Duty first, and pleasure afterwards," was Edith's motto; and now, with loving hearts, they wander forth together, bathed in the rich sunset, hand-in-hand, on their errand of mercy,—silent, but yet happy; for them it was the Spring-time of life—the Dawn of Love—the fairy-land of the heart; and they wanted nothing to make them blest but the dear delight of roaming together through Nature's wild scenery—silent with that silence which is more eloquent than words, and a soft sigh occasionally proclaiming a happiness far deeper than that which translates itself into smiles and words.

Mrs. Croft's eldest son was, as we have said, to be of the continental party, and a young fellow-Etonian, Lord Pontecraft,

eldest son of a great Northumbrian nobleman, the Marquis of Dunstanburgh, was also to be of the travellers.

Mrs. Croft's son was a very forward, vulgar young fellow, with a great deal of the "fast man," and the "gent," or rather snob, about him. He affected to be a great admirer (in a patronising sort of manner) of "little Edith," as he was in the habit of calling her; but in his heart he felt a great reverence for Edith Lorraine, as the grand-daughter of an earl—an earl, too, so powerful in his native county as was Rockalpine—and, in all human probability, soon to be the Lady Edith Lorraine, daughter of the Earl of Rockalpine.

At Eton, young Croft had learnt the full value of rank, title, power, hereditary influence, wealth, and position; and very early had he and his worldly mother planned his securing by marriage what had been denied him by birth. But then, on the other hand, Lord Pontecraft showed alarming symptoms of love for Edith, although it had been hoped that one of the Misses Croft would have had power to attract him—for they were very pretty, dressed well, and were highly accomplished. But Edith had that peculiar charm—that something—which no heart of man can resist. It was not merely beauty—in point of beauty, the Misses Croft might have contested the palm with Edith—it was that rare union of grace, expression, sympathy, feeling, humour, fascination, nature, which occasionally *do* form one irresistible whole, and make the woman in whom they centre, the Queen of Hearts, even if endowed with a much smaller share of beauty than that which fell to the share of the pretty, delicate Edith.

Both young Croft and Lord Pontecraft were jealous of Arthur. A close league existed between them; they both had very "varmint" propensities; both loved smoking, drinking, betting, racing; both had triumphs to record in the way of clandestine visits to casinos, and conquests far more disgraceful than defeats!

Both were very disagreeable to the delicate taste and refined susceptibilities of Edith Lorraine. But Edith hated to give pain, and often concealed the dislike and disgust she felt, rather than wound the maternal affection (or rather vanity) of Mrs. Croft, who took an intense interest in her son's success as an *élégant*, and was extremely anxious that Lord Pontecraft should find sufficient attraction in the home-circle about to remove abroad, to secure his following them in all their peregrinations.

While the young Lord Pontecraft, and his crony, Croft, were strutting together up and down the broad gravel walks of the grounds of Croft Villa—their glazed hats cocked on one side, their costume nautical, and prepared for the yacht—smoking their cigars, and boasting of their adventures in odious slang, plentifully seasoned with what they called "bounces," "crams," and "wops," the Misses Croft were busy with the milliner and

maid, in devising the most becoming yachting costumes, with a view to captivate Lord Pontecraft; and Mrs. Croft, a great allopathist, was intent upon her medicine-chest, and a glass jar of leeches, travelling companions with whom she could not possibly dispense.

Meanwhile, Arthur and Edith walked on, hand-in-hand, across the fields golden with buttercups, and fragrant with cowslips, over the stiles, across the shallow brooks, through the Black Wood (of such terrible memory in this tale, and which even they could not pass without a shudder, for they knew its dark story), and came out upon the purple moor.

A poor old cripple now lived in that hovel which had once belonged to Rough Rob and his Irish Mary.

In their long rambles, Arthur and Edith had come upon this poor old cripple, and had more than once helped him with small sums of money, and had taken him tea, sugar, broth, and other nourishing things.

And now they had resolved to pay a last visit to poor old Juke, and to leave with him a share of the sum the Earl has left in Edith's hands to distribute in farewell gifts to her poor pensioners.

The sun was setting as the young lovers crossed the purple, buoyant, and fragrant moor.

"Look! what is this, Arthur?" said Edith, just as they left the Black Wood, stooping down to examine a little feathery bundle of mauve and green and gold, fluttering in the heather.

"A wood-pigeon!" said Arthur, "a wounded wood-pigeon! Ah, doubtless, one shot by Lord Pontecraft or Roger Croft, when they were out with their guns this morning. See, it is bleeding."

"Is it much hurt?" said Edith, growing pale. "Oh, the cruel, cruel sport! to wound a bird is much worse than to kill it."

"I do not think its wing is broken, although it is bleeding," said Arthur. "Shall we try to save it, dear Edith?"

"Of course, Arthur; we could not leave it to die."

"Stop, then," said Arthur, "I will make a sort of basket of heather for it, and we will carry it home."

"And I," said Edith, "will bind up its wing with my handkerchief; for I think, in fluttering as it does, it keeps the wound open."

Arthur, who had helping hands, soon wove some branches of heather into a sort of nest or basket, and Edith adroitly bound the injured wing, and then she lifted the poor wood-pigeon into the nest, covered it over with Arthur's pocket-handkerchief, and walked on with it towards the hovel on the moor.

Arthur and Edith had proceeded as far as an old thorn, which stretched its gnome-like and distorted trunk across their

path, and which at this season of the year was covered with brilliant and luxuriant tufts of snow-white blossom, of most nutty fragrance, when, from behind its shelter, a gipsy, in a dark red cloak, with a hood, from beneath which blazed a pair of fierce black eyes, suddenly came forth and confronted them. Both Arthur and Edith had occasionally seen this weird woman before.

She was held in great awe, and even dread, in that part of the country. She was a genuine gipsy, and Superstition endowed her with the power of telling fortunes, foretelling events, casting evil eyes, blighting, baning, and doing every possible evil, if offended, but often proving a good and valuable friend where she "took to people," as the country folk had it. She was a singularly powerful, picturesque, and remarkable woman; and her elf locks of raven black hair, large jetty eyes, her very brown skin, scarlet lips, and glittering white teeth, had a sort of wild beauty and captivation about them.

"Cross my hand with silver, young gentleman," she said, in the professional whine of her tribe, "and I'll tell you your lucky fortune."

"No, I thank you, Madge," said Arthur, "I had rather not know it."

"Well," said Madge, "there's that in it would scare the bravest."

"Oh, don't say that, good Madge!" said Edith, turning pale.

"Never fear, pretty lady," said Madge; "a stout heart in his breast, and a true maid by his side, will help him through. But let me examine your palm, young gentleman, and I'll tell you more, and may be much that it concerned you to know."

"Do, Arthur, let Madge look at your hand," said Edith, giving the gipsy half-a-crown.

And Arthur laughingly agreed, for he never refused a request of Edith's.

"You are not what you seem," said the gipsy.

"Am I better or worse than I seem, Madge?" laughed Arthur.

"Both! You've in your veins some of the noblest blood in the land; and straight before you in your path of life, a coronet, and a castle await you."

Edith started; the gipsy's prophecy tallied with that of the old Earl.

"What! am I to gain distinction at the bar, Madge?" said Arthur; "am I to be a judge—a law lord?"

"No; the coronet I mean is yours by right of birth."

"Ah! you're out there, Madge, at any rate," said Arthur.

"Edith Lorraine!" said the gipsy, "when it comes to pass —when he is the recognised heir of a noble house, and sits in

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his coronet and ermine in the House of Lords—remember Madge the gipsy foretold the event."

"Shall I be happy in love, Madge?" said Arthur.

"The course of true love never *did* run smooth," said Madge; "but constancy on both sides will conquer at last. 'Faint heart never won fair lady.' See that yours faints not. You'll have crosses and foes, and 'whispering tongues, that poison truth,' will be busy between you and about you; but trust each other; be true, be faithful; and when you take your seat in the House of Peers in coronet and ermine, young man, a countess's coronet shall grace her brow, and a peeress's robes shall hang about her form. And now listen; you are bound for Rough Rob's hovel on the moor; turn back your footsteps—go not thither."

"But we promised to go," said Edith.

"Rash promises are better broken than kept, pretty lady," said the gipsy. "It is late—it is getting dark—hasten back to the villa."

She ceased, and hurried off in the direction of the village.

"Shall we obey her?" said Edith.

"I should say no, dear Edith," said Arthur; "I have no fear—not I; let us hasten on. These gipsies often pretend there is peril in order to show their power. Besides, what does she know of our Past, Present, or Future? She must be a mere pretender—an impostor. Did you hear her nonsense about noble blood in my veins, and a coronet and a castle in my path of life? I quite see through that; she has heard that Pontecraft is here. These gipsies trade on gossip. She fancied I was Pontecraft, and with that idea, of course a coronet and a castle might well be in my path of life, and noble blood in my veins. She's done for herself, in my opinion, by such rubbish as that. So come, dear Edith, come!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"Some flowers of Eden we still inherit,
But the trall of the serpent is over them all." MOORE.

HAND-IN-HAND the young lovers glided on, through bowers of fragrance and verdure, and "over yellow meads of Asphodel."

Lovely and innocent as the first pair, ere Sin found his way into the groves of Eden, they were as loving and as happy too.

There was something so noble, so manly, so protecting in Arthur's tall well-knit form, and in the frank, handsome face, rather sun-burnt (for Arthur was no Sybarite), that was bent down to her clear, upraised eyes with looks of such confiding, such unutterable love. The birds were singing as if to welcome

them; the flowers seemed to spring up to deck their path; the slanting rays of the setting sun were reflected in Arthur's dark eyes and on Edith's chestnut hair as they glided on.

Since the time when Rough Rob had inhabited the cottage on the moor, great changes had taken place; a branch railway (concealed by a ridge of hills) passed at no great distance; and a cottage, belonging to one of the railway officials, had been built, about ten minutes' walk from Rough Rob's old abode. But no trace of this residence was to be seen.

The place looked, indeed, as wild, desolate, and lonely as it had done ten years before.

Edith and Arthur then proceeded to the hovel, and there fulfilled their promise and performed their errand of mercy.

The cripple was not alone—three down-looking, savage, ragged men, of muscular frames and murderous countenances, were smoking in his room; and Edith, as she took out the purse in which was the sum her grandfather had given her for her farewell charities, shuddered to see the eyes of these men exchange rapid glances, and then fasten with an evil and rapacious glitter on the purse in her hand. Shortly after this they rose, and with a muttered good night took their leave.

The cripple, old Juke, was full of thanks and benedictions; but there was something that struck both Edith and Arthur as canting, hurried, and unreal in what he said. He was Irish, and so were the stalwart fellows smoking, who had lounged off, and who had certainly been drinking, for a strong smell of whiskey pervaded the hovel. Juke invoked "ivery saint in the calendar to bliss his binifactors" (as he called Edith and Arthur), and implored the "Blissed Virgin to make their bed the night!" But he did not look them in the face as he spoke; and they were glad to leave the close hovel, that smelt so strongly of smoke and spirits, and to breathe again the fragrance of the purple heather and the nutty-scented thorns.

"I am so glad to be out of that hovel, Arthur," said Edith. "I did not much like old Juke to-day, nor those savage-looking men."

"Nor I," said Arthur; "let us get back as fast as we can, Edith."

Edith, clinging to Arthur's arm, hurried on with him, and insisted on carrying the handkerchief in which the wounded pigeon and his impromptu nest were tied up. They have reached the old thorn where they had met Madge, and Edith paused for a moment to take breath.

"I wonder," said Arthur, "where those three ill-looking fellows went. I am certain they were ruffians."

He had scarcely uttered those words, when a blow with a heavy stick on the back of his head made him turn round, and

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he then perceived that the three ill-looking fellows who had left Juke's hovel before them, and who had been lying in wait for them behind the old thorn were upon them.

Wildly poor Edith screamed, and brutally one of the men pressed his rough, black hand upon her mouth to silence her.

At the sight of this outrage, Arthur, his blood on fire, wrenched the bludgeon from the hand of the wretch who had assaulted him, and with a well-aimed blow brought Edith's assailant to the ground. But the contest was an unequal one. The two other villains fell upon Arthur, who, in spite of a valiant resistance, was overpowered, stunned, and forced to the ground, which was soon bathed in his blood. Edith's pockets were rifled of her purse, and every valuable she possessed was taken from her; while she, paralysed with alarm at Arthur's fate, sank fainting by his side.

After robbing Arthur of his watch and his purse, the villains made their escape; and it was not till a quarter of an hour later that a young railway official, on his way to his mother's cottage, came suddenly upon the ghastly spectacle of Arthur, stunned and bleeding, on the moor, and Edith in a dead swoon, her head on his breast.

The young man lifted the light form of Edith Lorraine in his arms, and bore her, still insensible, along the pathway across the moor, and into the neat little parlour, where his mother and sisters were awaiting him. He, at the same time, despatched two labouring men, who had been working in the garden, and were waiting for their day's wages from him, with a gurdle, whereon to place the wounded Arthur. By this time it was almost dark.

Great was the surprise and alarm of Mrs. Parker, the official's neat, tidy mother, and of his two pretty sisters, when Dick came in, bearing in his arms the apparently lifeless form of Edith.

Her hat had fallen off as she entered, and her long, glossy, auburn hair fell in dishevelled beauty over his arm. Her sweet face was perfect in its marble beauty; but Mrs. Parker, who knew Death well, for out of eight children she had but three left, saw that the "fell serpent's" unmistakable mark was not on that brow, and said to her son,

"She's only fainted, Dick, and my camphor julep will soon bring her to."

Patty Parker, the eldest sister, picked up Edith's hat, and hastened to her assistance, adding her eager queries to those of her mother and sister Jessy. But Dick had no time to enter into particulars. He only said,

"Stand out of the way, that I may lay her on a bed; and do you, mother dear, and you, my sisters, try to revive her. I

think with you, mother, that she has only fainted. I will be back directly."

So saying, he carried Edith into an inner room, and placed her on a bed, and then darted back to the spot where he had left Arthur, to assist the labourers in bringing the wounded youth to his mother's cottage.

Dick Parker, the railway guard, arrived at the spot where he had left Arthur, in time to superintend his removal to the cottage. Gently and carefully the wounded youth was placed on a hurdle, the wood-pigeon, whose terrified flutter in its heather nest, and under the silk pocket-handkerchief, had attracted kind Dick Parker's notice, being carried by himself.

Dick Parker was a fine, handsome young fellow, with "a heart that could feel for another," even if that other were only a wounded wood-pigeon; and very tenderly the young man carried the poor bird, and very warmly was the pretty flutterer welcomed and caressed by the two neat blooming girls, his sisters.

Edith had recovered from her swoon by the time Arthur was brought in, and at the sound of men's voices she sprang from the bed on which she had been placed, and hurried into the little parlour, calling aloud on her "Arthur!—her dear, dear Arthur!"

Mrs. Parker, who had seen, as we have said, a great deal of sickness and death, and was not only a capital nurse, but, in her own simple ways a very clever surgeon, prepared to do her best for Arthur, until the village doctor, for whom she had sent, could reach the spot.

Arthur was stunned and faint from loss of blood, but not seriously nor dangerously hurt. The colour returned to Edith's lips and cheeks when Mrs. Parker assured her of this; and, with singular presence of mind and dexterity, she helped the good, motherly woman to wash the blood from Arthur's pale face, to cut away the clotted clusters of hair from the wound, to bind it up, and to administer some simple restoratives, which soon enabled him (with a faint smile of recognition) to extend his hand to Edith, who, her heart and soul in her eager eyes, was kneeling by his side.

"He will do very well, my dear young lady," said Mrs. Parker; "let us be thankful, bad as it is, that it is no worse."

"Now that I feel a little easier in my mind," said Edith, "I will tell you how this came to pass, and who and what we are."

She then, as simply and succinctly as possible, related the adventures of herself and Arthur, from the time of their meeting with the gipsy Madge to that of the savage attack made upon them by the three ruffians who had hidden up behind the thorn, evidently to await their coming.

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"I never had any opinion of old Juke myself," said Mrs. Parker, "and so I've told Dick scores of times. He's too full of blarney for me, and he has always some ill-looking fellows hanging about his wretched hovel. However, the police will now be set to work, and I hope these ruffians will be sent out of the country. But don't you think, miss, we'd better contrive to let your friends know of the accident?"

At this moment one of the labourers returned, saying that Dr. Fussell would be there as soon as possible; and, after he had imbibed a pint of beer, this same man was despatched to Croft Villa to apprise Mr. and Mrs. Croft of what had happened.

Dr. Fussell soon made his appearance. He was a little, red-faced, bright-eyed, bald-headed man, in top boots; he was a clever, skilful surgeon, and was full of gossip and jokes—a very gallant old fellow, a great admirer of beauty, rather a flirt, but extremely kind to the poor, often giving them out of his own kitchen and pocket that help which the more stingy guardians denied them. He was always in disgrace with the "Board" for the expenses to which his benevolence put them; and he had a running joke which he cracked at all the meetings of the guardians, about the feeling and sympathy to be expected from a board.

The gay widows and the trim spinsters of Alnwick and Rockalpine had long and vainly set their caps at Dr. Fussell. He attended their parties when he could, liked a rubber and a nice little hot supper at Christmas, was ready as a partner in Sir Roger de Coverley, but *never offered his hand for more than one dance.*

There was a very wealthy old spinster, who lived at a dull place called Moor House, and who was a prey to countless diseases, both real and imaginary. Her name was Miss Trumpington—the Honourable Melissa Trumpington. She was so very fond of the little gallant, bright, jocosely, and clever doctor, who had always so much gossip wherewith to amuse her, that many people believed she would marry him. She had a pretty, pale, patient companion, a very distant relative, who had been in close attendance upon her from sixteen to thirty-two, and for whom she was expected to provide; but although she had a heart disease, which might at any moment carry her off, she did not appear to have made any will or in any manner to have provided for Miriam Moss.

Dr. Fussell undertook the delicate task of reminding the Hon. Miss Trumpington of the destitution that awaited poor Miss Moss if unprovided for in her patroness's will.

Miss Trumpington very haughtily replied, that she was quite competent to the management of her own affairs, and wanted no hints from any one—that if Miss Moss was not satisfied she was at full liberty to go; and there the subject ended. Dr.

Fussell never alluded to it again, and for a few days Miss Trumpington did not send for him. But ere long some sharp, bodily pains conquered pride, and he was reinstated. He was on his way to Moor House, when the labourer met with him, only he had to call first at a cottage where a poor man, who, in chopping wood, had cut an artery, would have bled to death but for his timely aid.

Dr. Fussell started when he recognised Edith Lorraine in the young lady kneeling by the wounded youth's side. Edith had more than once been under his care. Arthur, too, though generally healthy, had been his patient in the case of two or three childish maladies. Both were favourites with the good little doctor.

"Ah! fair Edith of the swan neck!" he said, offering his warm hand. "What, bending over Harold? Not slain, I hope? No, no! Never say die! Come, how are we now?" and he sat down by Arthur's side, took his hand with a professional air, and felt his pulse. "Very low and fluttering," he said; "Mrs. Parker, have we a little good brandy in our cupboard?"

"Yes, sir; I have some French brandy."

"Very good. Now let's have some boiling water, and a glass, and some lump sugar. This spirit, fair Edith, which does so much evil, does sometimes a great deal of good. It has often brought Sin and Death into the world, but sometimes the life of a dear one is owing to its potency. Now then, here we are. Take a sip yourself, fair Edith. You need it, for you are much shaken, and we know who will think the cordial all the sweeter, if those pretty lips touch it:

"But leave a kiss within the cup,
And I'll not ask for wine,"

he sang in a little, squeaky falsetto.

Arthur, to whose lips Dr. Fussell placed the glass, drank and as he did so his colour returned, he opened his eyes, he smiled kindly on the cheery little Fussell, and said in a faint voice,

"I don't think I'm much hurt, Doctor. Do tell Edith so—she's frightened to death."

"Hurt! no, not a bit of it! She's not frightened; not she. Pretty girls like a little blood shed in their veins. There isn't a woman in the world who doesn't like a young fellow all the better if he's got a bloody costard in her service. There, now, take another pull at this mixture here," and he poured some into two other glasses. "Now then, Edith fair; now then, Prince Arthur; now then, Dr. Fussell—a long pull and a strong pull and a pull altogether! There now, we're twice the men we were. Mrs. Parker, Dick, my boy, and you, Jessie and Patty, come and try this prescription; you all look frightened to death."

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After every one had partaken of the brandy and water, and Arthur had held out his hand to Edith, who took it unconscious of aught but the rapture of seeing him restored to life and to her, the little Doctor said,

"And now to business. Now we must see what's the extent of the damage. Mrs. Parker, you'll be my best assistant here; hold a light, if you please. It's an ugly cut, and a deep one; but it's doing well, as well as can be expected! Very neatly dressed indeed! Now, have you a bed, my good Mrs. Parker, which you can spare for our young Squire here? Darkness, quiet, and a composing draught, that's all we can do for him; and all we have to exact from our womankind is a miracle—but Love does work miracles—namely, Silence! They *must* hold their tongues, for when once the patient has taken this anodyne, all will depend on rest—entire rest. There's a little tendency to fever; and that's the only thing we have to fear. Show me the bed he can have."

Mrs. Parker led the little Doctor into the inner room, and showed him the bed on which Edith had been placed,

"The very thing. Now then, young ladies, if you will leave the field, we'll get our wounded hero to bed; and when he's quite comfortable, I'll come upstairs and ask Edith fair to give me a brief account of the 'moving accident by flood and field' that led to this disaster."

Arthur, upon this, held out his hand for Edith's, which he pressed to his lips, and with a mutual "good night" and "Heaven bless you!" they parted.

In about half an hour the little Doctor and Mrs. Parker came upstairs to hear from Edith that account of the disaster which she had already given to the Parkers. While she related it, a carriage drove up to the door, and, pale and trembling, Mr. Croft was ushered up to them.

A little of the Doctor's magic brew did him a world of good. He agreed not to disturb Arthur; and he consented to Edith's passionate wish to remain where she was that night, Jessy having offered to give up her little bed to the young lady, and to lie with her mother and sister.

Mr. Croft then left the cottage, with the comfortable assurance on the part of the little Doctor, that in all probability Arthur would be well enough to return to the Villa the next day.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all."

SHAKESPEARE.

WHILE the worldly *parvenu*, Lady Hauteville, is preparing with such pride and triumph for Augusta's marriage with the

Earl of Richlands, and while Edith—whom in her hard heart she had doomed to the perpetual spinsterhood that so often awaits a cripple—is enjoying all that happiness that Love and Youth can bestow on Innocence, there were hearts in which the proud Lorraine blood was chilled by dread, or fevered with anguish and despair. Lord Hauteville, in spite of his success in public life, in spite of Popularity, Reputation, Office, could never shake from his soul that nightmare, the consciousness of Crime, and that ever-haunting, chilling terror that attends the dread of Detection.

Rough Rob and his Mary were in Canada; but things did not go well with them there, not any better than they had done in Australia. Mike O'Rourke, from Mary's account, was a rash speculator and an inexperienced farmer, and had led them to the verge of ruin. Mary was the scribe of the party, and *would* write to Lord Hauteville, although the sight of her handwriting, and her square letters, and her thimble seal, caused him an ague of fear and anguish, and though he sent large sums to keep Rough Rob abroad; for he was haunted by an impression, so vivid as to seem almost a *presentiment*, that if once Rough Rob were taken and tried, the long-hidden and terrible truth would come to light.

Augusta, on her side, could not stifle with wedding finery the yearnings of a young and not unfeeling heart. She dreaded to be alone—she dreaded to think; she studiously avoided all *tête-à-têtes* with her intended, the wigged, padded, rouged old Earl, with his glittering false teeth, so out of keeping with the thin blue lips of age; his blackened eyebrows and whiskers, so harsh and unnatural when contrasted with the wrinkled parchment of his cheeks and brow, and which the silvery locks of age would have softened; and his stiff gait, so ill suited to his assumed juvenility.

Alas! poor shrinking bride elect! If thou so drest a few minutes alone with thy lord elect, how wilt thou endure the close intimacy, the forced companionship of wedded life—the unbroken seclusion of that honeymoon which will so soon tear thee from all but him at whose tottering steps and squeaky falsetto thy cheek grows pale, and the young blood dancing in thy veins grows icy cold? Happier—oh! ten thousand times—beautiful and stately Augusta! bride elect of an Earl! is little Edith (the carrotty cripple). Carrotty cripple, indeed! why, Hebe might envy the golden auburn of her rippled tresses, and Psyche could ask no form more perfect and more sylphlike. Yes, ten thousand times happier, is Edith, with her young, adoring, but unacknowledged lover by her side, though he is the grandson of Attorney Croft, adopted out of charity, and, in the world's opinion, as far beneath thee as Attorney Croft

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is beneath the great Lord Hauteville, the popular orator, the Cabinet Minister, the man whose reputation is without a stain or blemish, and who, if there were an order of Virtue and Merit, would be a Knight Grand Cross of that Order, and wear its priceless star on the breast of—a fratricide!

In about a week from the time of the assault and robbery on the moor, Arthur was sufficiently recovered to embark on board Mr. Croft's yacht, the *Water Lily*, in company with the happy party going abroad for the first time.

The police had made every possible effort to discover and apprehend the ruffians who had committed the assault and theft; but all their endeavours proved abortive. Old Juke had left his hovel, and was gone none knew whither; and thus one great chance of detection was lost.

A reward of a hundred pounds was offered by the Earl, and another to the same amount by the parish authorities, for the apprehension of the culprits; but in vain. Our party embarked without any progress having been made in the detection of the ruffians.

Edith spent the last day of her sojourn in England at Rock-alpine Castle, with her grandfather. It was a happy day, for his love and tenderness were proportioned to the great boon which he felt he owed to his little Edith.

The delay in the departure of Mrs. Croft and her party enabled the former to receive before she embarked the wedding cards of the Countess of Richlands. Yes, Augusta had consoled the forsaken suitor of her sister; the sacrifice was complete. She had wedded her eighteen summers to the Earl's sixty-eight winters; and so quietly had it all been managed, that the London world of fashion was taken quite by surprise; and before Slander, Gossip, and Ridicule could make a feast out of their engagement, Interest silenced all three; for Augusta was a Countess, and the Countess's robes covered up all the vanity, avarice, and ambition of such a match.

Lady Hauteville, although for a time her occupation was gone, as she had no daughter to marry, continued in town for the remainder of the season, she so thoroughly enjoyed the envy, malice, and discomfiture of high-born matrons, with daughters of many seasons still on hand.

The young Countess had promised that her absence should not extend beyond the honeymoon, and then she was to return to town, be again presented as a bride—the Countess of Richlands—to glitter at the Birthday Drawing-room, give some superb dinners and *soirées*, and a *fête* and ball hitherto unapproached for magnificence, at Richlands House, Park Lane, and to display her diamonds and her *trousseau* before admiring or envying eyes, to the delight of Lady Hauteville, who scarcely

ever now gave a thought to her once favourite Georgina, or to "that poor little carrotty cripple, Edith," so completely was she absorbed in the contemplation of the splendid match her Augusta had made.

However, Lady Hauteville, who had the wit "to assume a virtue, if she had it not," had written a very civil letter to Mrs. Croft, and a few slanting affectionate lines to Edith. To the former she said:—

"MY DEAREST MRS. CROFT,—You will receive by this post the wedding-cards of my sweet Augusta, now the Countess of Richlands. The dear girl in her first season, and, as you know, only eighteen, has carried off a prize for which high-born and fashionable mothers and daughters have long contended in vain. In the midst of her tumultuous happiness she did not forget to ask me to send her cards and those of her Richlands to you and our poor little suffering Edith; and she rejoiced with me to hear that our afflicted darling has the chance of change of air and scene, and that, owing to your maternal care, she is in a state in some degree to enjoy the tour you propose to make. Lord Hauteville is more than ever absorbed by politics, and the duties entailed on him by office; but he shares with me in the comfort we feel in our Augusta's happy marriage, which, indeed, is the more to be rejoiced at, as our eldest darling, in marrying a foreign nobleman, consulted her own tastes, not ours, and is, I fear, in a great measure lost to us.

"I much wish I could have visited Rockalpine before this, to have embraced my darling Edith, and to have thanked you, her second mother, for all your care; but since his brother's dreadful death, Lord Hauteville has never been happy at Rockalpine, and never visits the place, unless when duty to his father compels him to do so.

"You said in your last that you perceive no change in the Earl, my father-in-law. What a wonderful thing that, at his age, he should be so hale and strong! Northumbrians are like Scotchmen—they live for ever.

"Adieu, my dearest Mrs. Croft. Embrace my poor Edith for me, and believe me ever yours most faithfully,

"GEORGINA HAUTEVILLE."

To Edith, her mother wrote:—

"MY DEAREST EDITH,—I am grieved to the soul at not being able to see you, and clasp you to my heart, before you set out on the delightful tour which dear Mrs. Croft has so charmingly contrived for you. I am enchanted to hear from her, my poor love, that you are in all respects stronger and better in health than you were when I last saw you. Perhaps when you return from this long sojourn on the Continent, you will be grown so much I shall hardly recognise you. I hope at that time to introduce you to your new brother-in-law—the Earl of Richlands. I am certain you will like him, he is so kind! Augusta is a very fortunate girl.

"Adieu, my darling Edith. May all good angels watch over you, by sea and by land, prays your devoted mother,

"GEORGINA HAUTEVILLE."

Mrs. Croft was very proud of such an affectionate and communicative letter as that she had received from Lady Hauteville. Great as was the distance *now* between the wife of Lawyer Croft and Lady Hauteville, the time had been, before Sir John Armstrong became a baronet and a millionaire, when Miss Armstrong and Miss Clutterbuck had attended the same drawing and dancing schools at Alnwick, and had been rival beauties at the dancing master's ball. And now, her father's success in life, and her own ambition, had raised the one so far above the other, that the slightest notice was an honour that could not be too highly appreciated.

And what has become of the rash, the misguided, the unhappy Georgina? Has the veil fallen from her eyes? Has the spell of passion outlasted the honeymoon? Alas! it seldom does so. Nor is Georgina's case an exception to the general rule.

Romeo di Roccabella had already succeeded, by the aid and advice of some crafty pettifoggers, in getting a considerable part of Georgina's twenty thousand pounds advanced—that is to say, he has sold the reversion to a very Shylock, and he has insured her life for double the amount; and, armed with the money obtained by the sale of her reversion, he has repaired to the German States to endeavour to quadruple it, for Romeo di Roccabella is a desperate gamester.

He has all a gamester's moody, fitful tempers. He has gained his object—the money is his! What little passion or fleeting fancy he had for the wretched victim of his cupidity is quite sated. She is in his way; she is an encumbrance, an expense, a reproach! She is discontented, too, unhappy, jealous, watchful.

Alone during the long days and the sleepless nights, which he spends at gaming-tables, how bitterly the poor young wife repents of that one false step! How she pines for pardon, and for restoration to her home and her sister!

In vain, in vain! All the letters she writes are returned unopened; and Romeo di Roccabella, exasperated at her despair, her tears, her misery, commands her, on peril of his dire resentment, to write no more! To add to her wretchedness, her health and strength fail her, her beauty vanishes like a dream. A sickness as unto death constantly oppresses her, making life a burden; she wastes to a shadow, and hopes—poor wretch!—she *hopes* she is about to die!

Her Romeo, when she tells him so, does not weep; through the affected concern of his false face, the miserable wife detects a glitter of joy in his eye, and a half smile on his moustachioed lip. However, he insists on her having advice, and the opinion of the first physician in Homburg.

Georgina watched him closely while the doctor expressed his opinion, and the cloud that darkened his brow cast its cold shadow on her sinking heart. The doctor, an old *bon vivant*, and a laughing philosopher, rubbed his hands, chuckled, and congratulated the Count and the Countess, saying, "You'll be worse before you're better, my dear Countess; it's life, not death, that causes all these symptoms. In due time a little stranger will atone for all these sufferings."

Unhappy Georgina! there is no joy, no sympathy, in his eye, and yet he is thy husband—he is the father of the child to be born of thee! To him the news is gall and wormwood. He does not clasp thee to his heart, and bless and cheer thee. He leaves thee alone in thy new and perplexing position; but even *he* cannot chill the glow with which woman first learns that she is to be a mother! No! he cannot rob thee of that strange, mystic rapture! And he sees thee, with an evil, mocking eye, taking care of thy feeble health for the sake of the unborn—he, who so wishes that death would claim both the branch and the fruit, for he has insured thy young life for twenty thousand pounds.

CHAPTER XV.

"O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea,
Our hearts as boundless and our souls as free;
Where'er the winds can waft, the billows roam,
Survey our empire, and behold our home."

BYRON.

MR. CROFT, although his wife had induced him to purchase that splendid yacht, the *Water Lily*, was by no means nautically disposed. He, as he said, did not know a rope of the ship, and was a wretched sailor; but he was far too sensible to pretend to be what he was not, or to undertake what he could not achieve, particularly when his doing so would have endangered the lives of others. He wisely hired a thoroughly competent and experienced captain and crew; and soon after embarkation, both he and Mrs. Croft, their daughters, Roger Croft, and the young Lord, were all lying on their backs in their berths, in all the depressing unbearable agonies of sea-sickness, all wishing for nothing but to be once again on *terra firma*; all resolving, that if ever such rapture were theirs, nothing would ever again induce them to enter a yacht, or to do anything in that way, but crossing back to England on a very calm summer day, *via* Calais and Dover.

However, the voyage, which was such misery to all the rest of the party, was enchantment to Edith and Arthur. They were not in the least ill; on the contrary, they were in unusual health and spirits (as those who are not afflicted with sickness always are when at sea). The wood-pigeon, now quite recovered

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and very tame, was their constant companion, and was a pet with all on deck. The colours of the rainbow touched with gold shone in the sun, as its rays lighted the bird's neck, and its coo had a melancholy not at all unwelcome to the ear of Love.

They were always together, were Edith and Arthur. At early morn they loved to see the sun rise in his glory and illumine the ocean; at noonday they reposed side by side in the shade, Arthur reading some enchanting sea-novel of Marryat's or Cooper's aloud to Edith. When it was calm they were happy in the soothing repose of the soft undulation; when the breeze freshened they loved to ride the crested waves, and be now wasted on high, now plunged below, but always together.

Edith would fain have sacrificed herself and the dear delights of the deck to the horrors of the cabins and berths of the sufferers below. But their tempers were so soured by their long suffering, and they so envied her the enjoyment of what was such purgatory to them, that she met with no encouragement to prolong or renew her visits. Mrs. Croft and her daughters, never very amiable, were now all spleen, lamentation, and unjust reproach. Arthur did not fare much better in his attempts to comfort Mr. Croft, Lord Pontecraft, and Roger Croft. The former was really very ill; the two latter kept up the sea-sickness by vain attempts to smoke, to drink champagne and brown stout; and Arthur could scarcely be expected to give up Edith, and the open sea, the fresh air, and the beautiful sky, for the thankless, jeering, sulky victims of tobacco, brown stout, and champagne. But at length the paradise of Edith and Arthur, and the purgatory of all the others, came to a close.

They landed one fine evening at Elsinore, in Denmark; and in a few days, all the sufferers, including Mr. Croft, were able to enjoy the beauty of a spot so associated in every English mind with Shakespeare and his great "masterpiece, Hamlet."

The Misses Croft began now to set their caps, or rather their pork-pie hats, in earnest at the young Lord; and young Croft disgusted the young Danish ladies by strutting about, his cigar in his mouth, his hands in his pockets, staring them out of countenance. One day, the eldest Miss Croft, who began to despair of making any impression on the young Lord, asked Edith and Arthur to accompany her on a visit to some ruins of great interest a few miles off. She had met unexpectedly at Elsinore (indeed at Hamlet's tomb) with a gentleman who had paid her a good deal of attention during a visit to an aunt in London.

This person, a Mr. Horton, was a young barrister, rather sneering, and jeering, but well-dressed, with moustaches, a good figure, and a handsome face, although the expression was sinister and rather sly. Still Miss Croft, who was very weary of

the thankless task of courting the young Lord, was very glad to meet with any one at all disposed to court her, and she hoped in this excursion to bring him to the point.

Mr. Horton and Arthur were to row Edith and Miss Croft to the ruin. Mrs. Croft and the rest were to go in a carriage, and meet them at the old castle with luncheon, etc., etc. It was a lovely day; the skies were of a deep turquoise blue, the water smooth as glass, was rich in water-lilies and lotuses, and the banks were so beautifully enamelled with wild flowers, that at Edith's request the boat was put in, and they landed, that the ladies might gather the wild hyacinths and the wood strawberries with which the place abounded.

Miss Croft and Mr. Horton, hanging back, did not seem disposed to leave the fairy spot; but Arthur, who had promised Mrs. Croft not to keep the party waiting for luncheon, took Edith by the hand to help her into the boat. And as he stood, with his oar in one hand, and the other clasping Edith's to help her into the boat, his animated face looking up into hers, and she blushing beneath his ardent gaze, her auburn hair braided back under her little turban hat, her slender form arrayed in a simple white muslin dress, with pearl buttons, and a black silk mantilla on her low, graceful shoulders, you might have sought the world over, without finding a more interesting or a handsomer pair.

But though Edith was so pretty and so graceful, and Arthur was so handsome and so noble a youth, it was the love-light in their eyes, and the "celestial rosy red, love's proper hue," on their blushing cheeks, that gave such a magic charm to both of them, and made them form such a contrast to the pale, calculating, mercenary coquette, and the interested French-looking fortune-hunter, a few steps behind them, and who were making that an opportunity for a mercantile barter, which to Edith and Arthur was an ambrosial ecstasy, a dream of happiness, perhaps too sweet to last, a foretaste of Elysium—the enjoyment of Nature's loveliest haunts in the presence of the adored one.

CHAPTER XVI.

"She was Italy's daughter, I knew by her eye,
For it wore the dark hue of her own native sky."

THERE is so strong a moral lesson conveyed by the fate of the unfortunate Georgina, Contessa di Roccabella, that we will leave, for a short space, our Edith and her Arthur, the real hero and heroine of our tale, to trace in Georgina's career the consequences of one false step, and the tragic results of secrecy in love affairs, clandestine correspondence, and, worst of all, their natural result—elopement.

Foreign alliances may turn out well—they have often done so; but then the Chevalier, Baron, Count, Marquis, Duke, or Prince—for titles are rife on the Continent, and many of them are of little value or dignity—should be properly introduced and well known in English society, and to the parents of the object of his choice. His character should be studied closely, his resources well ascertained, and his habits and former mode of life thoroughly sifted. With these precautions, a foreign alliance, may, where there is strong attachment on both sides, and competence, and sympathy in religious opinions, be a very happy one.

But what can we expect when a showy, handsome, mysterious foreigner forms a clandestine acquaintance and a secret intimacy with a young English girl of family and fortune, and works upon her passionate folly and juvenile romance to induce her to elope with him? Let those, then, who, like Georgina, are enamoured of dark-eyed, moustachioed foreigners, with their captivating guitars, and their graceful mantles, remember that a cloak more frequently conceals a rent than a star.

For some little time after his marriage, of course, Romeo di Roccabella both felt and acted like a lover. Georgina was a perfect specimen of that tall, aristocratic, fair, blue-eyed, blonde beauty, so dear and so new to the sons of the South. Even Di Roccabella, villain and ruffian as he really was, could not but respond to the graceful and romantic fondness of so fair a creature, who had sacrificed a princely fortune, and an English Countess's coronet and fortune, to him; and who so readily and unsuspectingly agreed to all and everything that he proposed with regard to the fortune left her by her grandfather. Her signature and her consent were necessary both to his selling his reversion and to his insuring her life.

His great objects in marrying her had been to do both; and it is remarkable that, by the advice and with the help of an English attorney (one Samuel Skuttel), he insured his wife's life to a considerable amount—larger, indeed, than the sum which he had obtained. With the money for which he sold her reversion, he, as the reader knows, hastened to the German Spas, intent on carrying out several schemes for “breaking the banks;” and by degrees, as Georgina's novelty wore off and she had nothing more to withhold or to grant in regard to money, the Count grew first negligent and cold, and finally rude, cruel, and abusive.

We have said that the wretched Georgina was likely, in due time, to become a mother; and the knowledge of this fact, which filled her heart with such new and delicious sensations, that they almost atoned to her for her Romeo's indifference and cruelty, excited in him no feeling but one of impatience at what

he looked upon as a nuisance and a bore, while anger raged within him at the thought of the inevitable expense.

A succession of heavy losses compelled the Count to leave Homburg. He had not patience and temper to be a successful gambler; and he sternly desired Georgina to prepare to go with him to an old castle, the seat of his ancestors, in a wild, remote part of Sicily (on the sea-coast). There, he told her, the heir to the House di Roccabella must, in all probability, be born. It did not seem to occur to him that such a spot might boast neither doctor, nurse, nor any comforts necessary for the unfortunate Countess's safety and solace. Alas! she was too much afraid of him to object.

Thither, then, they went, and thither came, soon after, and by degrees, numbers of dark, fierce-looking, moustachioed Italians—who lounged about all day, idling, smoking, and playing cards, and who often did what was far more objectionable, for they tried with their glittering black eyes and their rich Italian voices, which they accompanied with their guitars, to convey to the miserable young wife's mind that they thought her very lovely, and that, at the slightest encouragement, they would be at her feet.

Often for days and nights together Georgina neither saw nor heard of her husband and these his "*free companions*;" and she knew that sometimes they were out on excursions by land, and sometimes by sea; that they met with perilous adventures, of which her slender knowledge of Italian (as taught in England) prevented her understanding the object or the nature, but which even *she* began to suspect had some deeper, darker motive than visits of civility to the nobility of the country, to which her husband haughtily and rather sneeringly attributed them. It is quite certain that these visits were never returned. No Sicilian lords and ladies ever entered the Castello di Roccabella.

The castle was a very large, gloomy building, partly in ruins, and so close to the sea that in stormy weather, the cellars, and even the marble entrance-hall, had been flooded more than once. The Countess's apartments were on the first floor: they looked on the open sea and the blue skies of Sicily. There were some remains of former grandeur about them, but not one iota of comfort, according to our English notions. The windows had no shutters, and the stone arches of the corridors were open to the air. The fireplaces were like caverns, and, looking up through the broad chimneys, you could see the blue sky. The floors were paved; the stairs were of marble. There were no carpets anywhere but in the countess's bed-room and drawing-room, and those only squares of old tapestry in the middle of the rooms.

Poor Georgina had no English maid with her; in fact, an

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English maid would have died of discomfort, *ennui*, and despair in such a place. When first she arrived there, an old witch-like woman had the care of the castle, and did all that was not done by wild-looking, banditti-like men in attendance on the Count and his followers.

But when the Contessa's increasing delicacy of health rendered some additional female attendance necessary, and the approach of an heir demanded that it should be some one who could ply her needle in the cause, old Perpetua recommended that her orphan granddaughter, who had been taught needle-work at the nearest convent, and who had been in good service besides, should be hired to wait on the Contessa.

Accordingly, Jocunda was introduced to the Contessa during one of the long and frequent absences of the Count. She was a splendid young creature, of twenty-two, but looking at least five-and-twenty. Her dark complexion had a translucency about it that gave it a singular eloquence and charm. Her cheeks were rich in the carnation of youth and health. Her eyes were those of the gazelle; and above her rather low brow the thick ripples of blue-black hair waved in beautiful luxuriance, and were gathered together in two thick, long, Clothilde plaits tied with red ribbon, and which reached down to the middle of her fine, tapering leg. This densely black hair matched the ebon arch of her eyebrows and the long lashes that hung from the upper and under lids of her glorious eyes. Her nose was delicately aquiline, her upper lip short and curved, her well-chiselled lips were of the richest vermilion, and her teeth were like two rows of Roman pearls. She was a young Diana in form, with the broad shoulders, full bust, short waist, column-like throat, and powerful, well-shaped limbs that mark the child of the people. She wore the half-military, half-peasant costume of her country, in which a good deal of black velvet, gold braid, white muslin, and scarlet, set off her singular and most picturesque beauty. The Contessa took a fancy to Jocunda at once. The strong, healthy, young Sicilian, who had never known a care, whose cheek was indeed "unprofaned by a tear," felt her good, kind heart soften and warm towards the fair, delicate, and unhappy-looking being, who, in years a girl like herself had that drooping, care-worn air, those pale cheeks and swollen eye-lids, that air of self-neglect and self-abandonment, and that sacred, crushed, forlorn look, which, in all lands, and at all times, bespeaks the unloved, unhappy, down-trodden, and frightened wife.

The young love the young; and, in spite of all old Perpetua's rules, lectures, threats, and promises (for Perpetua had no sympathy with the "pale, sickly mope," as she called Georgina), all the young Jocunda's energies were secretly directed to cheering

and comforting the young Contessa, and preparing for the little stranger, of whom she spoke with the love and enthusiasm generally only bestowed on the little one already born into this world of sin and sorrow. Not that, to Jocunda, it was the world of sin and sorrow which it had proved to her young mistress. Jocunda was as innocent as the wild flowers she loved to gather, and as glad and merry as the birds in the air, and the kids that leaped from crag to crag. But she was full of daring, courage, moral and physical strength. She knew no fear; and, though all the young fellows in the neighbourhood were in love with Jocunda, she, as yet, knew the master-passion only by name; for though her heart was not a little inclined to favour Renzo—a brave and bold young fisherman, who would have died to serve her—she, as yet, felt only for him that growing preference, and that dawning interest, which may or may not ripen into love.

The doubt kept the handsome young Renzo in a fever of suspense, an agony of devotion, and a perfect thralldom of attentions and homage. He was very glad when he heard that Jocunda was going to reside at the Castle, because his little fishing hut was situated among the rocks about ten minutes' walk from the spot; and when he put out to sea in the morning he could see her waving her graceful hand to him, and at night a light in her window told him that if she would not own him as her acknowledged lover, he was still in her thoughts, and that perhaps that light was meant as a beacon to guard, and a star to light him on to an Eden of love and joy.

CHAPTER XVII.

"No radiant pearl that crested Fortune wears,
No gem that twinkling hangs from Beauty's ears,
Nor the bright stars that heaven's blue arch adorn,
Nor rubies bright that deck the early morn,
Shine with such radiance as the tear that breaks,
For other's woe, down Woman's lovely cheeks!"

ANON.

THE Contessa and Jocunda soon understood each other. The former quickly learnt the soft Sicilian dialect that flowed like music from the scarlet lips of her maid; and Jocunda began to speak the prettiest broken English, picking it up as it fell from the pale lips of the unhappy Contessa.

The Count and his free companions had been some weeks absent, but several of the rough, wild, serving-men remained behind to guard the castle, assist old Perpetua in all her household labours, even in those of a housemaid and cook, and by their fishing, shooting, and gardening, to supply the table. These dark, moustachioed, bearded fellows were all armed; and

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the Contessa, accustomed to the well-trained servants of the Hauteville establishment (one of the most perfectly appointed in England), smiled a faint smile when she saw these bandits scrubbing the floors, dusting, washing, preparing the vegetables, and watching the roast or boiled, all kept in strict order, in spite of their daggers and pistols, by the shrill tongue and termagant temper of old Perpetua.

By degrees, as the Contessa and Jocunda began to understand each other better, the former poured out her filial penitence, her wedded misery, and her growing fears, into the sympathising, devoted bosom of the zealous Jocunda. The young Sicilian had great natural shrewdness, perception, and tact. These qualities in her supplied the place of experience and knowledge of the world. She knew nothing of reversions and life-assurances, but when the Contessa explained to her what had been done, Jocunda shook her raven tresses, and as delicately and cautiously as she could, she informed her mistress that the Count had a dreadful name—that Jacopo, his head man, was a remorseless villain—that terrible crimes were laid to the charge of both, and she advised her to dissimulate—to appear to suspect nothing—but, as soon as the child was born, and her health required to be restored, to make an excuse to go to the baths of L— for a little change, and thence to make her escape to England, never to return.

“Oh! Jocunda, I dare not. I have no courage—no energy. If I failed, he would re-capture and kill me.”

“But you should not fail, sweet lady,” said Jocunda. “I will go with you—I will help you; and Renzo, of whom I spoke to you, Eccellenza” (and here a slight blush mantled her animated face), “he shall help us. By the Holy Virgin, he shall enable you to escape, or he may give me up, and hang himself, or marry humpbacked Bertha.”

“But we can do nothing yet, Jocunda,” said the Contessa, with the timid, procrastinating spirit of the cowed, down-trodden wife. “It is not necessary yet. I must stay here till after my confinement; I could not escape now.”

“I know not that, dear lady,” said Jocunda. “It were better your child were born among those flinty rocks than in this castle. But you look pale, Eccellenza, I will say no more at present, we will talk of this when you feel better. I overheard Beppo tell my grandmother that the Count will not be back for six weeks, at which time he expects to be a father.”

“Oh! thank Heaven! he is not coming for six weeks then!” said the Contessa, clasping her thin, white hands.

“They were so wan and transparent of hue,
You might have seen the moon shine through.”

“Oh! Jocunda, what a relief is that! Every morning and

every evening I pray that God in His mercy may take me and my expected babe to Himself before the Count returns to curse me, as he did ere he departed."

And this was the young girl of some ten months back, who had so cunningly deceived her parents, so adroitly wrought her own ruin, and realized the romance of a foreign alliance and a love-match.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Unhappy woman! still thy lot shall be
A dream of love, or a reality
Of unshared sorrow; raise your heart, you need
A firmer pillar than the broken reed
Of man's affection! Why will you bestow
On *him* the worship which to God you owe?
Know you the cause of all your careworn years,
Your days of watching, and your nights of tears?
Love you, and are you sad? and would you know
Why tale of Love is ever traced in woe?
Ask—ask your heart: you've reared an idol there;
You've laid up treasures, with mistaken zeal,
Where moth and rust corrupt, where thieves break through and steal!"

BRIDE OF SIENA.

ONE bright but windy night, just before the Contessa undressed, preparatory to seeking her couch (Jocunda and herself had been working till a late hour for the expected one), loud screams in the entrance-hall below caught the ear of both. Jocunda started to her feet, and ran upstairs to rouse Perpetua, and to get a dagger which the old crone kept under her pillow. She begged the Contessa to await her return; and Georgina would certainly not have ventured down alone, but that the shrieks which had disturbed her were mingled with English ejaculations, in a voice familiar to her ear! Yes, it was the well-known voice the poor Contessa had so often longed to hear again—the voice of the constant companion of her girlhood—her sister Augusta!

Without a thought of self, the Contessa rushed downstairs, and there, by the light of the hall-lamp, she saw two of her husband's free companions—the one was carrying a lady who had fainted, the other was struggling with a fair, dishevelled young creature, who shrieked wildly, and resisted all his efforts to drag her along. Despair gave her strength, and she clung to the door-sill. The door was open, and the sea, flooded by the silver radiance of the moon, was to be seen in all the glory of both.

"Beppo," cried the Contessa in Italian, "let the lady go—she is my sister! Augusta," she cried, "do you not see me?—do you not know me?—do you not recognise your unhappy Georgina?"

In a moment the sisters were in each other's arms; and Beppo and Marco, all ruffians as they were, felt there was some-

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thing sacred in that meeting—something holy in those tears, and presumed not to interfere. The Contessa then led the way to her own apartments, and Jocunda was soon at hand to help her to comfort and assist Lady Richlands and her companion, an Italian of great beauty. Lady Richlands (the reader will remember that Augusta Hauteville had accepted her sister's forsaken old Earl) gave the following account of her being thus violently brought to the Castello.

She said that the Earl of Richlands had latterly taken great delight in yachting; that at Naples he had formed an intimacy with some Italian noblemen, who had advised him to visit Sicily; that the Earl, herself, and a Neapolitan lady introduced by one of these Italians, had set sail for Sicily, and that within a mile of the castle they had been attacked by pirates, boarded, conquered, and carried off by force. What had become of the Earl, and of the money and valuables she had on board the yacht, Lady Richlands did not know. But she was so enchanted to find herself under her sister's roof, that she did not seem disposed to give way to despair at the possibility that the old Earl might have been taken captive.

Beppo, resolving to keep strict watch over the doors, was obliged to allow the Contessa's sister to share her apartment.

The beautiful Neapolitan had a room assigned her, and the Contessa was much disposed to treat her with great confidence, as a sharer of her sister's misfortunes, and of her "moving accidents by flood and field."

However, a hint from Jocunda put her on her guard. When the Neapolitan was safe in her own room, Jocunda closed the Contessa's doors, and said, in a whisper:

"Eccellenza, beware of the Neapolitan; she is no stranger here. Even I distinctly remember her features in the long ago, and I am certain some deep plot brings her here now! She was not in the swoon she shammed so well; for I remarked, as Beppo carried her upstairs, she took care to move so as to avoid being hurt by the banisters and the door-posts. I think my grandmother knows all about her, but she is as close as wax. I saw looks of intelligence exchanged between her and the men; I am certain she is here for no good! I believe she is a woman who occasionally lives here with the Count, and I know it was said that she was a slow and secret poisoner: she has an evil eye. Dear ladies, I much fear there is no time to be lost! If the Count returns, we are powerless. What say you?—have you strength, have you courage, to escape to-night?"

"Oh, but those terrible men!" said the Contessa, shivering, and growing pale as the Dead.

"I have left the brandy on the table, as if by accident," said Jocunda; "they will drink deep, and sleep soundly. I have

instructed Renzo to be in readiness; and I have told him, if, when he looks up at my window, before going to bed, he sees two lights instead of one, he is to row at once, in his fishing-boat, under these windows, by the terrace steps outside. We can easily get into the boat without disturbing those ruffians. I feel certain it is your only chance, Eccellenza; do not throw it away! That woman's arrival bodes you no good! Let me put up a few things in a basket, and take, dear lady, all your valuables. Renzo can row you to a place of safety. I feel as if Providence dictated my words!"

Still the Contessa shrank and hesitated, but her sister and Jocunda decided for her.

Jocunda signalled to her lover, and ere long the light splash of his oars was heard beneath the windows; and his boat, black and broad, and very safe, rose and fell with the undulation of the silver waves.

Jocunda had put up all the baby-linen prepared for the little stranger, the Contessa's jewels, and what little money she had, and a few changes and comforts. She had ventured down to the foot of the stairs to listen, and had ascertained that the men were in the dead sleep of inebriety.

The Contessa was almost helpless with fear; but, with the aid of Jocunda and her sister (Lady Richlands), she was wrapped up in a large, black, hooded cloak, and placed in the boat. Lightly Lady Richlands and Jocunda sprang in after her; and Renzo, plying his oars as if for his own life and liberty, sent the boat swiftly along. The cool night breeze nerved the Contessa, who

"Felt her brow become more light
Beneath the freshness of the night;"

and, to enliven the ladies (when they were out of earshot), Jocunda and Renzo chanted the Sicilian Mariners' hymn, in the rich, deep voices of the south; and the melody, the moonlight, the sense of her sister's presence, and of Jocunda's fidelity and devotion, filled the Contessa's heart with hope and comfort; her head drooped on Jocunda's broad shoulders, and, ere long, a soft sleep closed her weary eyelids—the first refreshing sleep she had known for many a long month!

Renzo knew of a safe shelter among the rocks. It was a place where he had often moored his boat, and it possessed a cave, in which he advised that the ladies should remain hidden during the glare of day; and that when night again set in, he should row them on, until they met with some vessel which could convey them to a port whence they could embark for England.

It was bright moonlight when they entered the cave. Renzo moored his boat behind a jutting angle of rock, where it could

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not be seen from the castle side of the coast; and then he busied himself in helping Jocunda to make things comfortable for the Contessa and her sister.

Jocunda had brought a good supply of cushions, shawls, and a rug, and as there was clean, dry straw in the corner of the cave, Renzo and Jocunda soon contrived, with the shawls and the rug, to make a comfortable couch whereon the ladies could repose. She had forgotten nothing; and Renzo, by her commands, began to kindle a fire among the rocks outside, to fetch water from a rill that trickled in a silvery stream down the rocks, and to boil the same.

Soon the fragrant steam of coffee saluted the nostrils of the recumbent, half-sleeping sisters. Renzo was in the seventh heaven. It was such ecstasy to him to be permitted to help Jocunda, to be by her side, to be praised, consulted, or even scolded by her, to feel her sweet breath wave his thick clustering black hair, and fan his bronzed, manly cheek, now and then to touch her hand, or even the hem of her garment—all this was ecstasy. "Trifles make the sum of human things," and this beautiful truth applies especially to the inner life of love. A kind glance can ensure happy days and nights of sweet repose. A cold look, a frown, or a haughty, sarcastic smile have, ere this, driven Passion to Suicide. Oh! then, ye who are loved, beware how you trifle with the great and sacred power bestowed upon you!—

"The rose we wear upon the heart,
Should have no thorn to wound us."

Jocunda, we must own it, *was* a little over-bearing, exacting, and tyrannical, but Renzo was a very good-humoured young fellow, and he could see that there was a growing softness in Jocunda's black eyes, even while she scolded him with her soft Sicilian tongue, or even when she hit him (hard, though in sport) an occasional slap with her large, well-shaped hand.

Jocunda had forgotten nothing—coffee, cream, sugar, cakes. The Contessa had a small English travelling-case, with tea and coffee pot, two cups, &c., &c. This Jocunda had brought with her, and, after the ladies had done, Renzo and his beloved repaired to an outer cavern in the rock, out of hearing, that they might not disturb the Contessa and her sister; and there they, too, feasted on the coffee and the cakes, and Renzo on the love that was filling his own heart to an overflow, and on that which he began to fancy trembled in Jocunda's voice, fluttered at her full bosom, beamed in her eyes, and translated itself into blushes on her cheeks, and into smiles on her lips.

The Contessa and Lady Richlands slept the deep, dreamless sleep of intense fatigue. Locked as they were in those slumbers, the young Renzo and Jocunda were alone. That "sun of the

sleepless" (the moon) was shining on the ocean, and looking into the maid's pure, deep Sicilian eyes, and Renzo led her by the hand out of the cave to roam by the glorious sea. He adored her, passionately adored her; and she was alone with the moon and him!—but yet she was safe. There is a sort of reverence in true love. No thought she would have blushed to hear or to inspire darkened the heart where her fair image was enshrined. Protected by her own innocence and by his honour, they roamed on, on, on, hand in hand—bright, beautiful, beloved. Hero and her Leander might have looked thus, in the light of the moon that silvered the Hellespont. Suddenly Renzo drew Jocunda behind a projecting rock, whispering to her,

"Hush! stoop down, keep closer, they come!"

"Who come?" said Jocunda, in a frightened whisper.

"The Count, Beppo, Jacopo, and several others."

"They have, then, discovered our escape, and they are in pursuit! Doubtless they think we have fled on foot and are gone to —. They have not dreamt of the boat and of you, Renzo."

"No matter, if you have, *carissima*," said Renzo, kissing her hand, and receiving a box on the ear in return.

"How can you sport at such a time?" said the maid.

"Why, we are safe; we may well sport. The Contessa is saved. They will go on to B—."

As he spoke, several horsemen galloped past the rocks where our lovers were hidden. Their horses' hoofs seemed to fly across the hard, smooth, silvery sands. It was low water; and Renzo, cautiously peering from behind the angle of crag, exclaimed,

"*Per Bacco!* there is a woman of the party! Who and what may she be? A fine figure, too! She rides well, and her long hair floats in the moonbeams like a black banner. Who is she?"

"Hast thou never heard of a Neapolitan, who was here some three years ago? They called her Petronella, the slow poisoner."

"Oh!" said Renzo, with a shudder, "I do remember her. The old Count and Contessa died during her stay here."

"Ay, Renzo; and but for thee and thy brave help this night, the young Contessa would have shared their fate."

"Thou art pleased with thy poor Renzo?" And he stole his strong arm round her waist.

"Very," she faltered; and her head sank on his shoulder.

"And may I claim a reward?"

"Yes; but only to be granted when she, poor lady, is safe."

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"So be it," said Renzo. "And, in the meantime, seal that promise with one kiss—O my Jocunda!"

Jocunda knew not how it happened; she was certain, in thinking of it afterwards, that she never consented. She was, in all such matters, not merely a prude, but a very pugnacious prude; and long as Renzo had loved, nay, idolised her, he had never even kissed her hand before that happy night. But yet it was a fact that he did, she knew not how, steal Love's first kiss from her sweet virgin lips—"a long, long kiss, a kiss of youth and love;" and that on her scolding and complaining of what she blushing called a theft, he, wild with joy, exclaiming he would set all right by putting the kiss back again on the very spot whence he stole it, repeated the offence, and was a long time in getting Jocunda to forgive him; and this she would only do upon his promising never to attempt the like again, until good old Father Filippo had joined their hands in the little church of Santa Maria, among the hills, where both had been wont from infancy to pray, and where both had made their first communion, and where both were wont to confess their little peccadilloes, in default of great sins. To ensure obedience, and not to lead herself or her betrothed into temptation, Jocunda, ordering him to try and compose himself to sleep in the outer cave, stole into that where the Contessa and her sister, Lady Richlands, slept; and just as the sun came forth in triumph, to tread the path which Aurora had strewn with fresh roses, Renzo in the outer and Jocunda in the inner cave, passed through the crystal gates of sleep into the blissful Dreamland.

* * * * *

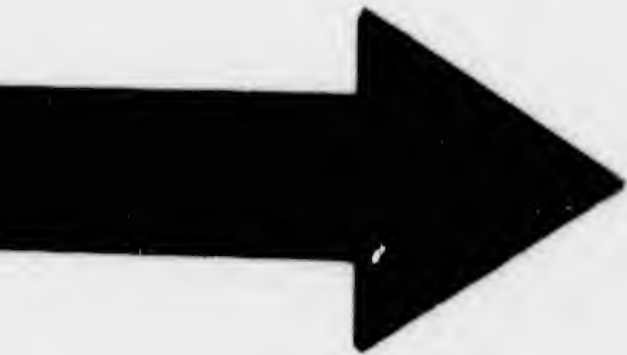
All through that bright and sunny day our wearied wanderers slept. The soft ripple of the waves and the wild hum of the bee, as he passed from one bright rock-caetus to another, were their lullaby.

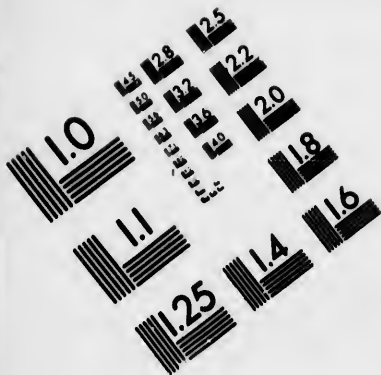
At night they awoke, rested and refreshed; and Renzo, by the light of the moon, rowed them on, on, on, until a yacht—an English yacht—appeared, silvered by that moon, at a little distance, and English voices gladdened their ears. To their "Boat, ahoy!" Renzo answered by shouting out, in Italian, that two English ladies in distress begged to be taken aboard.

The *Nautilus*, upon this, soon shot to their rescue. Lord Claremont, the kind, jolly, and noble captain of the *Nautilus*, was an old friend of Lady Richlands, and had picked up the old Earl, her husband, who, when the supposed pirates boarded the steamer she was in, and carried off herself and the Signora Petronella, had been left to sink or swim as fate might decree.

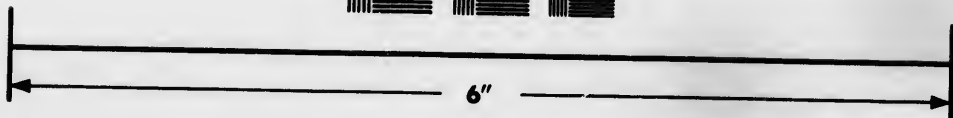
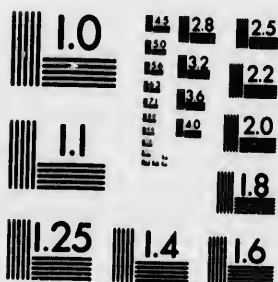
The poor old Earl, who had lost his wig, his porcelain teeth, and his dressing-case in the conflict, and whose rouge and false







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eye-brows had been washed off by the rude waves, was ensconced for concealment in a berth, and thus the Contessa escaped an interview with her forsaken adorer.

The question now arose, what was to become of Jocunda? The Contessa, Lady Richlands, and all the gentlemen (Lord Claremont at their head) tried to persuade Jocunda, whom they ardently admired, to embark on board the *Nautilus*.

Renzo was silent, but there were volumes of love and entreaty in his dark, appealing eyes; and, more irresistible still, there was a tear glittering on the black lashes, and a deadly pallor on the bronzed cheek; and they prevailed.

"No, Eccellenza—no, kind lords," she said; "I promised Renzo to be his wife when I had seen that the Contessa was safe. The Contessa is safe now. He will row me back to the shore; we shall repair at once to the church of Santa Maria, among the hills; and there the good old Father Filippo will join our hands. Farewell, dear lady! Addio, addio, addio!"

Renzo, at these words, threw his arm round his bride elect, and waved his red fisherman's cap in token of triumph and adieu, while she bowed her graceful head, and the noble captain and the crew on board the *Nautilus* cheered lustily; and then the splendid English yacht and the broad-bottomed, black old Sicilian fishing-boat parted company. The former was bound for Naples in the first instance, and Dover in the next; the latter for the nearest point to the little church of Santa Maria among the wild hills. Both reached in safety the havens where they would be.

The good old Father Filippo gladly joined the hands of the young pair, whom he had baptized, and in whose innocent confessions each other's names had so often figured.

Renzo led Jocunda, bathed in blushes, from that altar to the little fisherman's cot, which she was to convert into an Eden of the heart.

"Happy, happy, happy pair!
None but the brave,
None but the brave,
None but the brave deserve the fair."

And Renzo was brave—Renzo had deserved the fair. He had won that pearl of price, a maiden's heart; he won it well, and may he wear it long!

CHAPTER XIX.

"No matter what the age, the form, the face,
There is in virtue such resistless grace;
The old, the ugly, may the fair control,
If he reveal nobility of soul."

LASCELLES.

THERE was something fine about the old Earl of Richlands. There generally is something great, beneath the bubbles of

vanity and folly, in the heart of an English nobleman. Froth and straws may float on the surface, and cold waters, that chill and repel, may shock away sympathy; but there are gems of value in the caves beneath.

And so with the vain, made-up old Earl. He would not let his young wife see him in his dilapidated state, denuded of all his artificial charms. He was resolved she should not have one glimpse of his person until his valet, and the artistes in teeth, hair, and complexion had restored him to his former self. But for the first time he let his young wife see into his heart—his inner self; and this glimpse of his true nature did more to win her love and fealty, than all that Art had effected in patching up his face and form.

The Contessa, remembering how she had jilted him, feared he would refuse to allow his young wife to receive and to shelter her. Augusta, Countess of Richlands, herself felt very uneasy on the subject. Both sisters were very much relieved, and the wife was touched to the heart, when a note, written by the Earl in pencil (from his berth), was put into Lady Richlands' hands. He simply said:—

"I am sorry, my darling Augusta, that I cannot at present receive you and your fair sister, and congratulate you both on the miraculous escape, of which I do not at present know the full particulars; but my nervous system has been so much impaired by this shipwreck, I have caught so severe a cold, and am so much disfigured in my personal appearance, that I cannot bear to present myself before you until I am in some degree recovered and restored. To your lovely sister, my Augusta, present my brotherly regards and warmest sympathy. Tell her that her sister's husband will be in all respects a brother to her; that our sympathy shall comfort, our love cherish her, our roof shelter, and our protection shield her. Beg her, my darling Augusta, to rest assured that no harm I can avert shall ever befall one who is the sister of the idolised wife of

"RICHLANDS."

Oh! if men who really covet the love of their wives, and are jealous of their tenderness did but know how their hearts respond to any act of generosity to those dear to them from the cradle, they would surely take as much pains to make their relatives welcome and happy in their homes, as they often do to estrange and annoy them.

For the *first* time (as she read this kind and generous letter) Augusta's heart warmed towards the Earl, and she inwardly vowed to be a good, a true, a loving, and a faithful wife to one who had proved that he had such true nobility of soul, such a sublime power of forgiveness of what a vain man hardly ever does forgive—the being jilted, on the eve of marriage with a girl young enough to be his daughter.

It is wonderful how much good a man does himself with his

wife, by proving himself in any degree worthy of the homage he is so ready to exact, and which she so gladly pays, when she can persuade herself it is deserved.

"Your home will henceforth be with us, Georgina," said the young Countess of Richlands, fondly embracing the pale Countessa, whom her former lover's generosity had convulsed with sobs and tears. "You will not be obliged to face mamma."

"No! no! no! I could never have done that. I could work, beg, starve; but I could never go home to my parents. I could never endure mamma's reproaches, papa's cold and silent scorn. How shall I prove my gratitude to him I so heartlessly——"

"Oh! don't trouble your head about that," said Augusta, colouring; "leave that to me. I can reward him, and I will, never fear."

Augusta was beginning to feel even a little jealous of the Earl's former preference for her sister. She is proud of him now! Well done, old Earl of Richlands! wert thou ten times more made up in face and form than thou art, the evidence thou hast just given of a generous nature, a great soul, and a noble mind, would win the love of any true woman's heart!

CHAPTER XX.

"How much a fool that has been sent to Rome
Excels a fool that has been kept at home!"

COWPER.

Two years have passed pleasantly away on the Continent with Mrs. Croft and her travelling party. Arthur is to the surprise of every one who looked upon him as the poor, dependent, adopted grandson of Lawyer Croft, has been entered at Oxford, after five years as an oppidan at Eton. His vacations are spent on the Continent, as are those of young Croft, Lord Pontecraft, and the eldest son of the house of Hauteville. The old Earl of Rockalpine still lives—a life devoted to piety and good deeds. He corresponds regularly with his darling, Edith Lorraine; he still attends to her poor at Rockalpine, and enables her to do much in judicious charity abroad.

Young Croft is become madly enamoured of Edith, and the passion of his crony, Lord Pontecraft, keeps pace with his. But Arthur is still what he has been from her childhood—the one idol of her fancy, the one darling of her heart.

From a sickly but sweet-looking girl, Edith is grown into the loveliest, most delicately blooming, and most fascinating of young women. The once red hair is now of the richest and most golden brown; and the figure which Lady Hauteville and her doctors had doomed to perpetual deformity, is now a shape that,

"Given to marble, had immortalised a name."

And all this time Lady Hauteville, who so values, or rather overvalues, the "power of grace" and "Beauty's heavenly ray," thinks and talks of our lovely heroine as "poor little Edith, the carrotty cripple," doomed to perpetual spinsterhood.

Her third daughter, Ida, is now in her second season, and as yet has had no offer. She has been much admired (especially at her *début*), but she sees her chances diminish every week. The old millionaire, Sir J. Brownlow, has shown some symptoms of liking; but Ida scorned them in her first season, and now she would not refuse even him.

Lady Hauteville does not see much of her daughter, the Countess of Richlands, because she is so bitter against the unfortunate Contessa, whom she will not forgive, and the Earl of Richlands is so devoted a champion of his poor sister-in-law. The Earl's charms are all restored, and his cheek is more pink, his eyebrows more jetty in their perfect arch, his teeth more glittering, and his Hyperion curls more glossy and more fragrant than ever. He is padded into perfect symmetry, and the old man is only to be detected in the stiffness of his gait. He is the very proudest and happiest of men, for his Countess has presented him with an heir. He has redeemed his pledge, and is indeed a brother to the poor Contessa, who has never heard one word of her ruffian husband since her miraculous escape.

The poor Contessa was not destined to be a happy mother. How could a treacherous and undutiful daughter expect the great, all-atoning blessing of maternity? Her terrors and griefs ended in the birth of a still-born child (a daughter). She narrowly escaped with her own blighted life.

Mrs. Croft, who has found money fly as fast, if not faster, on the Continent than in England, has taken a villa, for a year, in the neighbourhood of Zurich. And hither, at Christmas, Arthur had come to spend his vacation with them. He was to be followed, soon after, by Roger Croft, Lord Pontecraft, and Edith's brother, Marcus Lorraine.

The villa was at about six miles distance from Zurich, and Arthur had, hitherto, always walked from Zurich, leaving his luggage to come in a cart. Hitherto, also, Edith, attended by a servant, had contrived to meet him in a forest about a mile from the villa.

When she rose on the morning of the day upon which Arthur was expected, she saw that a heavy fall of snow covered the landscape. She said nothing, fearing that Mrs. Croft might insist on her not venturing out; but, full of love, impatience, and the fear of disappointing Arthur, she seized her opportunity when Mrs. Croft was rating all her servants in the kitchen, and, putting on her goloshes and her hooded plaid cloak, she sallied forth alone.

The paths of the villa garden had been swept, the road to the little hamlet was trodden down; and it was not till Edith got out into the open country that she began to fear that she should never find the road through the forest. Everything looked so different; the country, of which she knew every path, was now all strange to her! To add to her despair, a fierce north wind set in and chilled her young blood; down, too, in blinding, bewildering drifts came the snow!

On, on, on, for a full hour plodded poor Edith, and then the sudden conviction forced itself upon her mind that she had lost her way; that Arthur would think that she had not cared to meet him; that the cold was numbing her limbs, and rendering further progress impossible; that she was weary, dreary, desolate, half-dead with exhaustion and fatigue, and very likely to be frozen to death. As this dreadful conviction forced itself upon her mind, her strength and endurance gave way at once, and she sank down at the outskirts of that forest through which her pathway lay.

There, some hours later, on their way home from work with their yoked bullocks, two woodcutters found her, as they thought, frozen to death.

"She belongs to the Villa Bellevue," said one. "She is that pretty young English girl who always smiles so kindly when we meet her in the forest."

"And gave us something to drink her health the other day," replied the other. "Lend a hand; let's wrap her up, place her on the *charrette*, and take her to the villa. She's numbed and asleep, but I don't believe she's dead."

Very tenderly the Swiss woodcutters raised the half-frozen girl, and placing her on their rustic truck, hurried away with her to the villa.

* * * * *

There was great consternation and terror at Bellevue Villa when it was discovered that Edith Lorraine was missing.

Arthur, who had reckoned on meeting her at least in the avenue of fir-trees at the entrance of the villa, felt hurt, slighted, and disappointed when he found she was not there.

First love is so sensitive, so exacting, so susceptible to the smallest change, neglect, or slight! But its moods are as fitful as those of an April day; and after the first heart-crushing emotions of disappointment and wounded feeling, came a reaction in the thought that, perhaps, Edith was ill! It was so unlike *her* to disappoint the heart that secretly adored her! Edith—generous, devoted, delicate Edith—she always delighted to surpass her lover's expectations! If he gave her the strong, passionate, exclusive love of his young, ardent heart, sweet Edith repaid him measure for measure. There was not

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one jot of coquetry, one shade of artifice, one iota of vanity in the nature of Edith Lorraine.

The Misses Croft were full of worldly maxims, instilled by their mamma, such as, "Fly, and they'll follow; follow, and they'll fly;" "By keeping them off, you'll keep them on;" and, "You'll never be dear if you make yourself cheap." Even Gloriana had learnt to toss her head, and arch her neck, and affect indifference; but Edith was all truth, tenderness, devotion. She loved Arthur as Virginia loved Paul, and Arthur loved her as Paul loved Virginia.

Of course Mrs. Croft could not be quite blind to the strong affection that bound these fair and noble young hearts together. But she affected to treat it as a childish friendship—a brother and sister love! She knew that the old Earl of Rockalpine had left to his darling Edith everything that was not strictly entailed on his heir, Lord Hauteville. Mrs. Croft was not above occasionally lingering at doors or peeping into letters! She knew that, as it was owing to Edith and her holy influence that the old man had been induced to lay up treasures in heaven, he had left the hoards of a life to her.

She knew, then, that Edith, at the Earl's death, would not only be Lady Edith Lorraine, but heiress to fabulous wealth; she knew that her son—her Roger, in her partial eyes the most modish, handsome, and fascinating of young men—loved sweet Edith, with such love as such natures can feel; that a passionate desire to possess and be master of a creature so lovely and loveable was wisely blent, in her Roger, with the ambition to ally himself with the great house of Rockalpine; to have (as he said) a handle to his wife's name, even if he could have none to his own: and to secure the heiress of the old Earl's wealth before he died, and before it was known to the world and to Lady Hauteville, that poor little Edith, "the carrotty c. le," to whom she had destined two hundred a year, to live a deformed spinster at Croft Villa, was an auburn Aphrodite in face and form, and heiress to all the hoards of her miser grandfather.

There were great difficulties in the way of getting her fast, over-dressed, under-bred, cigar-smoking, casino and Cremorne frequenting Roger united to the delicate and heart-stirring Edith; but both mother and son so highly estimated the attractions of Mr. Croft, junior, that they agreed it was "on the cards."

One great impediment arose (as they fancied) not in the form of Arthur, whom they both secretly hated and despised, but in that of Roger's Eton and Oxford chum, Lord Pontecraft. He loved Edith; and, as heir to the Marquis of Dunstanburgh and his immense estates and boundless wealth, he felt he had only to ask and have—to propose and be accepted. He had no Belgravian mamma to plot and counterplot—no sisters to pick out

flaws in sweet Edith, and to try to entangle him with some dear Lady Laura or Lady Harriette, whose brother they were aiming at for themselves. The old Marquis, his father, was a martyr to gout, and could not live long; and once a Marquis himself, he would propose to Lord and Lady Hanteville (whom, as yet, he only knew by name) for their enchanting Edith; and he did not imagine he should meet with a refusal from them.

He was a cold-mannered, hot-headed, warm-hearted aristocrat, with an overweening notion of his own importance; tall, well-made, with a pale, Grecian face, inherited from his mother, a fine forehead, a well-curved lip, and a heart that had never failed to throb to a generous sentiment, or been conscious of the power of love, except in its secret and wilful passion for Edith Lorraine.

Roger Croft was the toady of this young aristocrat. Roger Croft flattered him, imitated him, swore by him. Lord Pontecraft quizzed Roger Croft, made use of him, and swore at him. In his heart Roger hated the young lord, and anticipated with inward exultation the delight of outwitting him, and of marrying the only object whose presence had ever sent a flush to Lord Pontecraft's marble cheek, a ray to his cold blue eye, or a throb to his strange proud heart. But while resolved to marry Edith himself, Roger was the confidant of his noble friend's passion, and pretended to encourage, to approve, and to be ready to assist.

Roger treated Arthur with a ludicrous degree of coldness and *hauteur*, and had tried all he could to embitter his Eton career. Roger Croft, and a good many "nobs" of his set, had contrived, by hints, inuendos, and vile anonymous letters, to convey to the boys, and even the masters, that Arthur was an illegitimate, penniless lad, adopted by his father out of caprice.

Birth and wealth are a good deal esteemed at Eton by masters and pupils, but scholarship and "pluck" have greater influence still. Arthur, with the idea fully impressed upon his mind that he had nothing but his scholarship to depend upon, worked very hard, and was soon far above Roger Croft and Lord Pontecraft.

Then, too, he was very brave and very good-humoured. At cricket and at rowing he was pre-eminent, so that soon he had a strong party in the school.

Roger Croft was a great bully; and Arthur, having traced a vile slander to him, challenged him (big as he was, and four years Arthur's senior), fought him, and thrashed him soundly.

"Croft's set" grew much more cautious and civil after this. They took warning from the fact that Roger Croft had two black eyes, and two front teeth broken.

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gave. Yet it was his own fault, for the meanness of his under-
hand endeavour to injure poor Arthur deserved a more severe
punishment. But as his front teeth projected, and were very
large, he was immensely disfigured by the breaking of them,
and spoke with a thick lisp ever after.

At Oxford, Roger Croft and his "fast set" both tried to in-
jure Arthur in the opinion of the men they thought most of;
but many of his Eton chums remained his fast friends at Oxford.

And now we must accompany Arthur from *Alma Mater* to the
Villa Bellevue, and describe the agony of his alarm when it be-
came certain that Edith was nowhere to be found. He was rush-
ing frantically about the country, unconscious of the bitter cold
and fast-falling snow, when he suddenly encountered the wood-
cutters, and on their *charrette* beheld the slight form of Edith.

The men motioned to him not to arouse her; and Arthur,
in an agony of suspense, walked by the side of the *charrette*;
and when it stopped at the doors of the villa, he caught
the apparently lifeless form of the young girl in his arms,
and carried her up into what he knew was her own room.

Mrs. Croft, her daughters, and the maids of the household
soon rushed in. One of them, an old cook, was fortunately a
sensible woman, and well acquainted with the means to be used
to restore animation in cases of drowning, freezing, etc. Lucki-
ly, the room, which was heated—as all rooms in Zurich are—
by a large earthenware stove, was well warmed; and a bright
wood fire blazed in an open fire-place (a great rarity in that
country) in Edith's dressing-room. Friction, stimulants, a
warm bath, and a warm bed were tried; and Arthur, neces-
sarily driven away, was pacing the landing outside Edith's
door, and praying fervently. Presently the old cook, who felt
for his suspense and anxiety, went out to tell him that anima-
tion was restored; that warmth had returned to the body,
colour to the lips and cheeks; that the pulse could be felt, and
the breathing heard; and that the young lady had sunk into a
soft, deep sleep.

Upon this, Arthur implored so passionately to be allowed to
see her for a moment, that the kind old cook (*pro tempore* nurse)
could not refuse to permit him (under many restrictions) to
approach Edith's bedside.

CHAPTER XXI.

"—None such joy are reaping
As those who watch o'er what they love while sleeping." BYRON.

POOR Arthur! when he entered the darkened chamber (gene-
rally so full of life and light, but in which at that moment a
shaded lamp threw a sickly gleam on every object), and saw

the idol of his heart lying in a death-like sleep, white and cold as marble, her rich long auburn hair, damp with snow, scattered over the pillow, and lilac tints round her closed eyes and sweet mouth, he sank on his knees beside the bed in an agony of grief and fear. He hid his face in the snowy quilt of the young girl's bed, and in spite of all his manhood, all his self-control, hot tears gushed from his eyes, and choking sobs contracted his throat and convulsed his breast.

Two of the Croft girls were watching the lovely patient, while the cook-nurse, Lisbeth, went to her supper. Gloriana, grown into a pretty young woman, was standing in real anxiety and sorrow at the foot of the bed, almost tearing her pocket-handkerchief, as busy Memory would recall to awakened Conscience many little unkindnesses (prompted by spite, envy, and jealousy) which she had done to poor Edith; many angry, cross, and bitter words, many petty slanders and wilful mis-constructions, and all in return for goodness that was never weary either in word or deed, soft answers that turn away any wrath but that of Envy, and countless services great and small—all felt, acknowledged, and remembered, perhaps too late!

The eldest Miss Croft, quite as blameable, but much more hardened, was smiling, a little bitterly perhaps, at Arthur's anguish. Arthur, generally so collected, so reticent, so dignified with these, his half-aunts and whole enemies, to be seen so prostrated by grief and terror as to sob and weep! But a malicious, heartless woman must that be, who could look on such a scene with a sneer, or who could ever see a man weep, or could hear a man sob, without melting into tears herself.

* * * * *

The doctor was not very sanguine about Edith's recovery. The exhaustion was so great, and there was so little re-action, for Edith had never been strong or robust. Everything Dr. Richter (he was a Swiss) said, would depend on the most careful nursing; that all through the night Edith must have some restorative administered every quarter of an hour—chicken-jelly, strong broth, brandy—these must be given in very small quantities, but at regular intervals. The fire must be kept up, so that the room should be constantly at a certain temperature, and hot bottles must be kept to the feet.

Arthur heard all this, and noted every word. His own life was bound up in Edith's, and he resolved to watch. The Misses Croft, Gloriana especially, begged to be permitted to sit up with Edith, but "mamma," who was very anxious about their looks, particularly as Roger Croft was expected to bring some young men of family and fortune over with him on a visit to Bellevue Villa, would not hear of it. As for herself, she declared she was quite unfit to nurse Edith for an hour, so

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terrible had been the shock which her nervous system had sus-
tained, by the absence and alarming condition of the dear girl
whom she had reared and cherished as her own. No, Lisbeth
was willing to take charge of Edith Lorraine—Lisbeth the
cook, at one time a regular nurse, accustomed to sit up at night,
and every way suited for the responsibility.

Arthur said nothing, but he inwardly vowed that, if Lisbeth
watched Edith, he would take care to watch Lisbeth. Lisbeth,
a good, hard-working creature, who rose every morning at five,
and toiled all day long—could Arthur sleep with the knowledge
that *on her not dropping off to sleep the life of Edith depended?*
Let those who have truly loved answer that question.

Edith lay still, "white as her sheets," when Arthur, with
the rest of the family, retired—they for the night, he to spend
the long hours in walking up and down before Edith's door, to
listen whether Lisbeth was up and stirring, and whether she
regularly administered the sustenance on which depended that
young life, and, consequently, his own.

For some time (as the door was ajar) he had no difficulty in
ascertaining that old Lisbeth, who kept on muttering to her-
self, did her duty well. He could hear her stirring, praising
herself in guttural sounds, keeping up the fire, and feeding her
patient as gently as a nursing-mother her babe. He could hear
a few soft, weak, gentle words of thanks from Edith. But at
the coldest, shortest, darkest hour that precedes the dawn, he
felt the air of his darling's room (as he stood at the door) grow
chill. There was no longer a ruddy glow from the open fire-
place (a great rarity, as we have said, but the villa belonged to
an English family). Presently his heart grew cold and heavy,
for he distinctly heard a loud, regular snore, and then all the
blood in his body seemed to rush to his head and face, for he
caught some low, imploring words from Edith. He thought
she said, "Brandy, Lisbeth! a little brandy! Oh, haste! I
sink—I die! Lisbeth, brandy!" And Lisbeth—horror of
horrors!—locked in labour-earned sleep, only replied by ano-
ther and louder snore! Then did faithful, sleepless, watchful
Love win the right to enter that chamber, and the triumph of
saving that priceless life!

Arthur stole to Edith's bedside; Arthur administered a tea-
spoonful of the cordial which the fainting girl craved and im-
plored her snoring nurse for, and in vain! Arthur's arm
supported the beloved form, upheld the beautiful head against
his breast, while he cautiously held to her lips what, in this
case, was indeed *eau de vie*. (How often has it proved, to
those who do *not* need it, *eau de mort*. It is at once a *spirit* of
evil and of good.)

After imbibing those few drops, a faint tinge of colour re-

turned to the pale cheeks and lips. Edith raised the snowy lids, that had scarcely strength to lift the weight of the long brown lashes. The large blue eyes gleamed with love and joy, and then slowly filled with tears, as, her fair head drooping on his breast, she said, "Heaven bless you, Arthur, my beloved!"

The nurse Lisbeth had dropped asleep in a chair by the fire, watching some broth, which had all boiled away before her closed eyes. Arthur made some attempts to arouse Lisbeth, but he soon saw that, even if he succeeded in awaking her, she would inevitably drop off again; and so he resolved to resume his watch at Edith's door. He did not like to take advantage of her unconscious and helpless state, to establish himself in the arm-chair by her bed; but he made up the fire, put on more broth, refilled the kettle, trimmed the lamp, and taking out his watch, placed it before him, with a lamp, on a little table outside Edith's door on the landing, as he established himself there.

Sounder and sounder slept old Lisbeth; and louder and louder became her regular snore. Every quarter of an hour, Arthur administered the necessary nourishment, in return for which he heard Edith bless him! Gradually the colour deepened on her cheeks and lips; her pulse became stronger, fuller, more regular; her breathing softer and freer.

Towards five o'clock (old Lisbeth's usual hour for rising) she began to stir, to snort, to groan, to stretch. Arthur saw she would soon be wide awake; and so, with a blessing and a prayer, he softly on tiptoe left the room. Lisbeth yawned, rubbed her eyes, and was frightened at first to find she had fallen asleep; but when she saw the fire burning, the water boiling, and Edith looking so much better and less wan, she persuaded herself that she had only slept for a few minutes, and our lovers never undecieved her.

Arthur watched her for some time, until he felt certain that she had waked up full of energy, and better able to nurse sweet Edith than he was; for, the excitement and anxiety over, he found himself cramped with cold, and very, very weary.

But he had saved his darling's life; but for him, she must have died of exhaustion, as, alas! so many do, while hired nurses sleep. But she is saved—saved by Love and him! And with this conviction warm at his heart, Arthur hurried to his cold bed, and was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Oh, there's nothing half so sweet in life
As Love's young dream."

MOORE.

EDITH LORRAINE's recovery was very rapid. Youth and a good constitution were on her side, and, better still, the delightful

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(though silent) conviction that she owed her life to Arthur's devotion. In the long hours of convalescence this thought cheered her drooping spirit, and sent the bloom to her cheek, and the love-light to her eye.

Lisbeth boasted of a recovery which she attributed solely to her unremitting care and *sleepless* tending during the night of the crisis. Yes, she boasted and triumphed, and was thanked, praised, rewarded. And our lovers kept their own counsel; only Arthur stole a timid glance at Edith, while Mrs. Croft was pompously presenting Lisbeth with a new dress, and Mr. Croft with a silver watch, for her successful tending of their dearest Edith; and the blushes that suffused Edith's face, neck, brow, and bosom, and the tears that gathered in her eyes as she gazed at Arthur, convinced him—though they had not yet had an opportunity of exchanging a word on the subject—that she was fully conscious to whom she owed her life, albeit a thousand maiden scruples kept her silent then.

This delightful secret formed a new bond of union between Arthur and Edith.

Woman's love is always half gratitude, while man's is often in a great measure made up of a sense of protecting the gentle, timid creature whose instincts teach her to look up to him, to cling to him, to cleave to him. As a little boy, Arthur had left rosy, merry little girls, to sit by Edith's reclining-board, when she was "the little carrotty cripple"—the large-eyed, pale-faced, sharp-chinned, small, halting girl, whom every one looked upon as certain to be humpbacked, but who was so grateful, so patient, so intelligent, and so pious.

"When we learn to pity, how soon we learn to love!"

says the poet. Arthur's first feelings for Edith were those of intense pity—pity that she could not run about the fields like the little Croft girls, to gather wild flowers, nor go nutting in the woods, nor ride the Shetland pony, nor sport by the wild sea, but must always be in a dull room, on her reclining-board, so lonely, except for him! Then, when he noted her patience, her faith, and her cheerfulness, a feeling of reverence, of admiration, and of deep tenderness, grew up in his heart. To her he brought the first snowdrop, the first primrose, the first violet, the first rose, the first red strawberry, or sunny apricot, or fragrant blackberry, the first golden wheatcar. The little callow bird, fallen from its nest, was laid on a little table by her side; so was the velvet mole, which looked like a very old-fashioned lady, with a long nose, in a very tight-skirted velvet dress, pressed to death by too tight a belt. The deserted bird's nest was brought to her, and so were the pebbles, which, on the beach, looked like many-coloured gems, but seemed such poor, dull things, when they were spread before Edith.

Edith could scarcely remember the time when Arthur had not been her great solace, guide, companion, and friend; and Arthur felt that he had always loved Edith, but that he had never been *in love* with her till she was fifteen and he seventeen. And now, the stronger the passion that filled their young hearts, the more reserved were they in each other's company. Love, as in Lalla Rookh's case, had fled from their eyes, to hide himself in their hearts.

Edith was again a member of the family circle when Roger Croft arrived at Bellevue Villa, with his tutor, or "coach," as he called him, and with a gay party of young men of his college, travelling during the long vacation, among whom the young Lord Pontecraft was pre-eminent for wealth, rank, importance, and influence over his young companions. These Oxonians were all singularly alike; they were all dressed by one tailor, adorned by one jeweller, shod by one bootmaker; their hair was cut by one hairdresser, their hats came from one hatter—even their shirts, gloves, ties, collars, were all furnished by the same purveyor. They had been educated in one school—Eton; one college—Christ Church; they were all close imitators of one model—the young Marquis; and all, except Roger Croft, were of the aristocracy. We say all except Roger, for in everything Arthur was as unlike as possible to the "set" now honouring the Bellevue Villa with their presence. They all thought the same thoughts, felt, or affected to feel, to think, to talk, walk, sit, loll, yawn, and smoke alike. They had one common slang—Oxford slang; one common drawl, one very bad slow walk, though they all aimed at being thought "fast." They all joined in quizzing Harkup Hackney, their "coach," whom the young Marquis set the fashion of calling "Old Hackney-Coach." Hackney was a first-rate scholar and mathematician—a "double first" who had lived from the age of eighteen to fifty-two the cloistered, monkish life of an Oxford private tutor, and who was as simple, absent, unworldly, credulous, and ignorant of the world and its ways as any village girl of fifteen. He was also as pure of heart, as impulsive, and affectionate. He was engaged to be married, too, as soon as he had amassed a certain sum wherewith to make a settlement on the object of his affections—a curate's seventh daughter. This curate had been his schoolmaster; and Prudence Pryme and Harkup Hackney had been lovers from the time that he was a gaunt, plain, but very clever, kind-hearted boy, in jacket and turn-down collar, and Prudence a rosy hoyden, in white frock and frilled trousers, and with her golden hair hanging in ringlets down her back, till now, that his once long, wild black hair was iron grey, and till Time had stolen the gold from her locks, and left the change in silver.

Harkup Hackney was a tall, wiry, powerful man, with a

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patchment skin, deeply furrowed with the lines of thought. Like Dominic Sampson, he paid no attention to his dress; but it was the delight of the young Marquis, who cared not what money he lavished on what he called "a lark," to substitute for old Hackney-Coach's threadbare black coat and washed-out trousers, whatever was gayest and most in fashion; and he, full of squaring the circle, or turning a Greek epigram, put on whatever he found on the chair by his bedside, and would have done so had it been a general's uniform, or a Chinese mandarin's robes.

For nearly thirty years Prudence Pryme and Harkup Hackney had been engaged. They had not often met in that long period; for old Pryme, the lady's father, lived at the very top of Northumberland, and Harkup had, considering the object he had in view, no money to spend in travelling; but they had constantly corresponded, and Harkup was, by extreme industry and self-denial, fast approaching the realization of the sum old Pryme insisted on, before he would allow Prudence to marry. He had suffered such misery from wedded poverty himself—for he was a gentleman by birth, and had married a lady—that he vowed no *girl* of his should unite herself to a man who could not keep her in comfort, and settle on her enough to secure her a competency in case of widowhood.

Several times, at intervals of many years, Harkup Hackney had been all but ready, when the failure of some bank or some speculation, into which Craft had inveigled his Simplicity, threw him back again as far as ever from the altar and Prudence! He was, however, very near them now; and the sum he was to receive as travelling tutor to our party of "nobs" would all but enable him to present himself at the parsonage, near the Borders, to claim of the curate of eighty his grey-haired daughter of forty-nine—his old, old bride, who was still young in his eyes, and fair, too; for hard study had dimmed his sight, and the image of what she had been was engraven on his heart; while the recollection of her constancy, her tenderness, and her truth, made her, to him, the *beau ideal* of womankind.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"The love of gaming is the worst of ills,
With ceaseless fears the blackened soul it fills;
Kills health, pawns honour, plunges in disgrace,
And turns an angel's to a demon's face."

LITTLETON.

ALL things considered, Harkup Hackney's ignorance of the world and its ways, his absence of mind, and simple credulity of temper, he was as unfit to be the travelling tutor of the "fast party" now at Bellevue Villa, as the Dominic of immortal memory himself.

But the dons of his college wished to serve Hackney; they valued him; his scholarship made him invaluable, as a tutor, to those who wished really to profit by his coaching; and the young Marquis felt so convinced that "no end of fun" would be the result of old Hackney-Coach's travelling tour, that he at once decided that Hackney was the man.

The history of old Hackney-Coach's long engagement was well known to the "fast," jeering young set he attended; and he, in his honest, simple heart, believed their interest and sympathy sincere; and when they, in derision, toasted Prudence Pryme, his red, weak eyes would fill with tears, as, bowing all round and standing up, he would say, "Prudence! God bless her, and keep her, and make us happy together!"

To Arthur and Edith, this constant and deep attachment was intensely interesting; and they did all they could to shield old Hackney-Coach from his pupils' ridicule, and to prevent his discovering that they were making him and his Prudence the butts of their poor, heartless wit. They need not have feared for him; he never suspected evil or falsehood in any one.

However, the great interest which Arthur took in old Hackney-Coach, made Roger Croft, who hated the former with the bitterest hatred, and the young Marquis, who was very jealous of Arthur on Edith's account, determined to postpone, if possible, to an indefinite period, the union that now seemed to be fast approaching. Making Bellevue their head-quarters, Roger Croft and the Marquis, who were both fond of play, resolved to vary the scene by adjourning for a week or two to Spa, at which place desperate gambling, in its worst form, was going on.

Roger Croft was one of the most malignant and malicious of men. He disliked old Hackney-Coach for his preference of Arthur—a preference which often sent a flash of triumph to Edith's eyes and a flush to her cheek.

As for the Marquis, he was idle, rather satirical, very thoughtless where others were concerned; and readily adopted and reproduced as his own a most mischievous plan for postponing *sine die* the union of old Hackney-Coach with his Prudence.

This was nothing less than to get him to the gaming-tables; there, as they knew by experience, the taste for gambling, inherent in all of "woman born," would be excited; and whether, in the first instance, he lost or won, he was equally certain to persevere.

Now, had Hackney been even a wicked man of the world, he would not, on any account (as a travelling tutor) have shown himself openly at a gaming table, whatever he might have done in private; but he was so simple, so confiding, and so unsuspecting, that when the young Marquis and Roger Croft, pretending to be very much interested about his union with his

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Prudence, showed him a number of bank-notes and napoleons, which they pretended to have won at the tables, and prophesied that, in one hour there, he would obtain the needful sum (without any one being at all the poorer, since it was a Government concern), old Hackney-Coach at once fell into the snare; and without leaving him time to reflect, they hastily converted him into an *élegant*, by putting on him a surtout of the Marquis's (who was very tall), a tie of Roger Croft's and a "tile," as he called it, of young Melton's. This done, old Hackney-Coach, in company with all his pupils, left the bright, sunny day and the open air, and was soon, with a card and a purse in his hand, seated between the young Marquis and Roger Croft at a long table, at which were crowded pale, hollow-eyed, anxious, spell-bound slaves of the Demon of Play.

Hour after hour there they remained, lost to everything but the chances of the game. There were women—young, fair women, looking old and ugly, with their intense anxiety—women who ought to have been angels at home, fast becoming demons there! Young men who had forsaken the up-hill, thorny path to Fame and Fortune, with the hope of getting rich by one lucky throw; and more than one of whom, having ventured their all, had in their pocket pistols wherewith, in case of failure, to stifle the voice of Conscience, and to cut short a life of Poverty and Despair.

Old Hackney-Coach at first won. He went on, on, on, and had nearly made himself master of the sum necessary to enable him at once to reward his Prudence for the patient constancy of a long life. His eyes were on fire, his cheek was flushed, his heart beat high—when lo! a turn of Fortune's wheel, and he lost all!—all his winnings, and much of his original stock!

By this time it was dark outside, and the lamps were lighted; and still on, on, on, played poor Hackney-Coach! The young Marquis, Roger Croft, and the rest, were gone to a *restaurant's* close by to dine, but Hackney would not stir. Suddenly Hackney thought he detected some sleight of hand with regard to the dice. Maddened by his losses, he rose, collared the *croupier*, and demanded to be allowed to examine a die which the latter had thrust into his pocket, and which Hackney declared was loaded. The whole table, upon this, rose in tumult; a furious scuffle ensued between Hackney and the *croupier*; two of the gamblers fell to the ground, as the combatants, in their fierce struggle, upset their chairs. Suddenly the *croupier* drew a stiletto from his breast, and was about to stab Hackney to the heart, when the latter wrenched it from him, and he would probably have killed him then and there, but that two of the gamblers, seeing the *croupier's* danger, caught Hackney by the coat-tails, and held him forcibly back. Even with such

odds against him, old Hackney-Coach, maddened by his losses, and the cheating to which he owed them, and which he felt certain he had detected, was a very dangerous opponent; and, as he was still armed with the poinard which he had wrenched from the *croupier*, there would certainly have been bloodshed, had not the young Marquis and the rest of the party returned.

Of course, as Englishmen, they gloried in "a fight," and the certainty of thrashing the "foreigners;" as men, they could not but stand by and back up their tutor, old Hackney-Coach. All he insisted upon was his right to examine the die through which he had been robbed of the savings of a life. As all connected with the gaming-house resisted what they knew would ruin the character of their establishment, the Marquis, a great bruiser, brought his fists to bear upon the sallow faces of the gamblers. All his party followed his example; Hackney especially engaging with the *croupier*, who soon gave in, when he saw his blood, which the Marquis called his "claret," soaking his embroidered shirt-front, as it gushed from his cut lip and broken nose.

Before the police arrived, Hackney had possessed himself of the loaded dice. All the parties were taken before the *Juge de Paix—Anglice*, magistrate. The *croupier* was convicted of cheating; old Hackney-Coach received back all his money, and, in the end, the *croupier* was sent to the galleys.

Old Hackney-Coach, when he once again clutched the savings of a life, registered a solemn vow, that as it was his first, so it should be his last visit to a gaming-table; and nothing that the young Marquis or his imitators could say ever elicited any reply beyond, "*Experientia docet.*"

As there was something generous about the young Marquis, he resolved to atone to old Hackney-Coach for the agony he had caused him, by himself, at the termination of the tour, making up the sum which the curate, old Peter Pryme, required Hackney to settle on his bride; and this being communicated to Prudence, she is working hard at her *trousseau*; and the constant old Hackney-Coach sees, at length, vividly before him, the much longed-for end of his "coaching-days," and the kind wife and happy home he has looked forward to for thirty years!

* * * * *

Mrs. Croft and her daughters were much disappointed at the result of the visit of Roger, the young Marquis, and his "fast set" at Bellevue Villa.

Miss Croft, Almeria, and Gloriana, were all pretty enough to have made some impression on any *but* "fast men;" but, in addition to the selfish callousness to the charms of *ladies* that distinguishes such natures, they were all, in this and every other respect, such imitators of their young and noble leader, that they all admired Edith, and that exclusively.

Before their departure for Spa, and after their return, their eyes were all fixed on her, because on her his lordship gazed so admiringly. On her every kind of attention was lavished; the chair or couch on which she sat became a throne, around which a little Court was formed.

Very disagreeable was all this to Edith, who found herself thus shut out from the only one she wished to have near her; and reviving (in spite of recent reflection, remorse, and repentance) all the demons of fury, jealousy, rage, and detraction, even in the bosom of Gloriana, the most amiable, or rather the least unamiable, of the Croft family. Even old Hackney-Coach, when he returned, found himself irresistibly attracted to Edith's side; she was so full of gentleness and sympathy, and the Misses Croft were so affected, so unreal, so cold, and so scornful to Roger's tutor.

Mr. Croft was very seldom with his wife and family; he had a great deal to do in England in the affairs of the old Earl and the management of the estate. Besides, he was growing old, and old trees do not bear transplanting. After the first novelty was over, continental life became odious to him. He missed his office; he could not occupy, he could not amuse himself. He hated foreign cookery, whether French, German, or Italian; he hated cheap French wines—they disagreed with him. He liked his old crusty port, his roast beef, his fat capons; the long-legged, sinewy, half-starved poultry abroad, and the tough, dark, stringy meat, disgusted him.

He was very glad to get back to Croft Villa, and Mrs. Croft was not sorry to get rid of him; for he grumbled incessantly, and was for ever imploring her return to her country and her home.

Meanwhile, the vacation came to an end. Old Hackney-Coach and all his pupils returned to Oxford. The Marquis was as good as his word—Harkup Hackney gave up coaching; he repaired to the parsonage, where Prudence dwelt with her old father the curate. The required sum was settled on Prudence, and in his own little church old Peter Pryme united the hands of those whose hearts had resisted the power of absence, time, chance, and change to sever them.

The bride felt she was too old for bridesmaids, a veil, an orange-blossom wreath, favours, or a carriage and four. In a quiet, grey silk, and a neat white bonnet, with a soft veil, Prudence walked to church with Harkup Hackney, her only unmarried sister being present. The happy pair then returned to the parsonage to partake of a quiet, comfortable breakfast; after which, the bride and bridegroom, accompanied by the sister of the former—a pleasing old maid—set off in a fly for the station; Miss Mercy Pryme being, according to the fashion of a

former day, included in the wedding excursion—a great delight to her, for both she and the bride were going to London for the first time in their old lives. They were going to see all the wonders of which country people think so much, and Londoners so little:—St. Paul's, the Monument, Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Lords and Commons, the Crystal Palace, Madame Tussaud's, the Zoological Gardens, the South Kensington Museum, the theatres, Astley's, Cremorne—everything! And Mercy, who, five years younger than the bride, was (as Roger Croft observed) “no chicken for all that,” yet entertained a hope that, among the myriads of marrying men with which London swarms, she might find a husband, and was in the very highest, almost hoydenish, spirits.

Harkup (who no longer deserves the nickname of “Old Hackney-Coach”) was extremely kind and liberal; and a happier wedding-party never set out than that which consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Hackney, and Miss Mercy Pryme. They were borne in the slow, prim fly to the swift train, which by night-fall conveyed them to London, where a cab deposited them at an hotel in Covent Garden.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“Child no more! I love, and I am woman!” RICHELIEU.

THE winter passed quietly away at Bellevue Villa, after the “fast set,” Arthur, and Hackney, had left it. The spring followed, enlivened for Edith by memories of the sweet past, and bright hopes for a sweeter future. But it was very dull for the Misses Croft, who began to feel that they were wasting some of the best years of their lives in a beautiful and silvan, but monotonous seclusion. Urged on by her own maternal ambition and her daughters' discontent, Mrs. Croft resolved to quit the villa, which she had taken chiefly from motives of economy; and as English travellers were beginning to enliven the hotels, the streets, the mountains, the lakes, and the forests of beautiful Switzerland, the Misses Croft then began to tease their mamma to let them set out again on their travels.

“So many girls have made conquests in trains, steam-boats, and at *table-d'hôtes*,” said Miss Croft.

“Emily Wiggins got herself engaged to that millionaire, Mr. Green, while they were weatherbound together at the Convent of the Great St. Bernard; and both the Grotes got married to men whom they met at Interlachen—very good matches, too,” said Gloriana; “while Penelope Perkins induced young Lord Ulster to propose by crossing the *Mer de Glace*, and ascending Mont Blanc with him. It's all very well for Edith Lorraine to

be content, sitting in these dull forests, gathering wild strawberries, and sketching the distant Alps. She's a lord's daughter, and every man seems to fall in love with her. She can have her choice, from the Marquis downwards; but we must look out, and that pretty sharp, too, unless we mean, like Miss Pryme, to be brides of fifty."

"Oh!" said Miss Croft, "Roger, who, for reasons of his own, wants to marry Edith—not for love, I promise you—set the fashion of admiring her. He pretends to be ruled by the Marquis, but in reality he rules him and the whole rude, odious set. As for Melton, Danvers, Young, and Melville, they follow their leader like so many sheep. I never was so mortified in my life as when I saw evening after evening passed by all those one-idea'd imitative fools in worshipping Edith Lorraine, and the little pale idiot so stuck-up by it all."

"No, no!" said Gloriana; "you wrong her there. I think she despised every one of them—Arthur always excepted. Oh, she's over head and ears in love with him; but I must do her the justice to say, she treated all the 'fast set' very coldly."

"And so must I," said Almeria; "and well they deserve the contempt of all womankind."

"Ah!" laughed the saucy Gloriana, "I fear, in your case, sister, it was the fox and the grapes!"

Almeria walked away, tossing her pretty head, and muttering—

"The fox and the grapes, indeed! Why, any man of good taste would say that I've a much finer figure, and a much handsomer face, than Edith. What they can see in her I cannot imagine!"

* * * * *

The long vacation found Edith, Mrs. Croft, and her daughters on their travels once more. The young Marquis, Arthur, and Roger Croft were to join them at Interlachen. His lordship had found out the truth of the old song—

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder;"

and, as our young aristocrats are not much used to practise patience where passion is concerned, he had resolved—and that resolve he had confided to Roger Croft—that Edith should be his before another summer came round.

Edith, who had not seen her beloved since the Christmas holidays, was in an inward ecstasy; and the Misses Croft, who had wisely given up all hopes of the Marquis, were all in high spirits; for each had, or fancied she had, an admirer in a party of young fellows in extra English travelling costume, who either followed or met them everywhere; while a set of foreigners were also making love, by glances, sighs, and little delicate manœuvres, to the three Croft Graces. For foreigners fancy

that every travelling English family must be very wealthy, and every trussed-up miss in her turban hat, scarlet petticoat, Zouave jacket, and Balmoral boots, a great catch.

Edith, who lived with, yet apart from, these commonplace girls—Edith, whose life was an inner life of poetry, love, devotion, and constancy—she, of course, might have had her share, and more than her share, in all this folly and flirtation; but there was a virgin modesty, a dignified reserve, a lady-like tranquillity about her, which (much as they admired her grace and beauty) kept in awe the Regent-street gents and the fortune-hunting foreigners.

By dint of constantly ascending the same mountains, visiting the same ruins, sailing on the same lakes, and picnicking in the same forests, the Crofts, the Regent-street gents, and the foreigners have all become acquainted. The Crofts were a little disappointed when they discovered that the gents, whom they, in their inexperience, had judged by their dress and their airs to be young noblemen, or baronets at the very least, were only plain *Messieurs*, and that their names were by no means aristocratic. They affected such military airs, moustachios, and conversation on drill, reviews, uniforms, leave, &c., &c., that Mrs. Croft and her daughters had hoped they were guardsmen. Alas! alas! they were only— But we will not anticipate.

Miss Croft's especial admirer was a Mr. Tippit, Almeria's beau was Mr. Cutts, and Gloriana's, Mr. Blower. But then, on the other hand, Le Comte Gonzalvo de Saint Ventadour, Le Baron Leopold de Château Rouge, and Le Viscomte Amédée de la Vallée Noire, were at hand, ready to atone, as far as name, title, and illustrious descent went, for the plebeianism of the English admirers. True, the young Englishmen were much cleaner, nicer, and evidently better provided with linen and cash than their foreign rivals; but in spite of Shakespeare's exclamation, "What's in a name?" the Misses Croft were much excited by the idea of La Comtesse de Saint Ventadour, La Baronne de Château Rouge, and La Viscomtesse de la Vallée Noire, as opposed to Mrs. Tippit, Mrs. Cutts, and Mrs. Blower.

How it would all end, no one could foresee; but although, before this rivalry in the favour of the Misses Croft set in, the gents and the foreigners had been very friendly, there was now something sulky about the former, and something fierce and belligerent in the manners of the latter, which boded a rupture, if not worse.

Arthur had been a fortnight at Interlachen with his soul's idol, when the young Marquis, Roger Croft, and the rest of the imitative "fast set" arrived.

The Misses Croft were very proud to show off before those who had so slighted them, the rival adoration of the little host of aspirants who attended them everywhere.

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The "fast set" treated with supreme contempt and *hautour* the presumption of a Mr. Tippit, a Mr. Cutts, and a Mr. Blower, whom, however, they had as yet only heard of, in presuming to sit down in the presence of ladies whom they honoured with their acquaintance; and the Marquis, who was very fond of quizzing, greatly exasperated the Misses Croft by his jokes about their having two strings to their bow, and two *beaux* to their string—such as they were.

As for the foreign brigade, the "fast set" decided at once that they were mere hairdressers or glovers, and that if they were Roger Croft, they would soon kick such snobs down-stairs. They tried to rouse Roger to this dangerous enterprise, but in vain; Roger was equally afraid of his sisters and their suitors. The "gents" had made themselves scarce, as the "fast set" said, since the arrival of the young Marquis; a great disappointment this to his lordship, who expected no little sport in quizzing the snobs.

The Marquis was so devoted to Edith, and his imitators followed her up so closely, that she had seldom an opportunity of exchanging a word with her heart's idol, except when they met in an early morning ramble in the exquisite mountain scenery of Interlachen. All the "fast set" were very late risers. Arthur and Edith were up betimes, and often saw the sun rise in that land of enchantment, and felt, as hand-in-hand they watched him flooding the lake with roses and crowning the mountains with gold and sapphires, that just such had been on their hearts and their young lives, the Dawn of Love.

One day—one very bright and glorious day—an excursion to scale the mountains in search of a rare plant was planned by our travellers. And as a good dinner is included in all English arrangements, Mrs. Croft proposed that the excursion should be turned into a picnic, and that the gentlemen should supply plenty of champagne, she undertaking that there should be an agreeable variety of cold lamb, roast beef, lobster, salad, chickens, tongue, pigeon-pie, jelly, blanc-mange, and fruit pies. The foreign brigade and the "gents" were invited to join the picnic. The Marquis anticipated great fun from the presence of the ladies; but, to his annoyance, and the great disappointment of the ladies, they did not, as Roger Croft said, "show up" on the occasion. Miss Croft, who really was in love with Mr. Tippit, pleaded a severe head-ache, and excused herself from joining the party, and they set out without her.

Nothing could exceed the beauty of the mountains, the fragrance of the air, the enchantment of the scenery, the soft shadows on the sides of the hills, the dark chasms between the steep, almost perpendicular ridges, the soft beauty of the Alpine rose, the little dells full of starry wild-flowers and moist green

moss, the silver rills that trickled down the rough cheeks of the crags, and formed cool, deep pools, where the fish loved to dwell; the hardy trees, whose dark brown roots seemed part of the rocky substance in which they were embedded, but whose light green leaves and fantastic branches gave such grace and beauty to the scenery. Nature, in her wildest moods, had piled up these perpendicular cliffs, and tried to conceal their perilous depths by verdure and bloom.

Mrs. Croft insisted on guides, mules, and everything that could ensure safety, much to the annoyance of the young Marquis and his "fast set," who, without knowing anything about it, were yet so full of conceit that they declared they could answer for the safety of the ladies "without the bother of *those regular do's*," the hired guides. However, Mrs. Croft was resolute; and our travellers, *minus* "the gents" and Miss Croft, set off in high spirits.

The Marquis and all his "set" kept close to Edith's mule, much to her annoyance and to the exclusion of Arthur, who did not like to make their mutual attachment the subject of the Marquis's quizzing and the comments of his "set" by taking advantage of her preference, to lead her mule himself. But for the "foreign brigade," the Misses Croft would have been left entirely to the tender mercies of the muleteers.

The absence of the "gents" was a great blow to the belles. Had they known the secret of that absence, it would have been greater still; as it was, they were piqued and mortified, and the Baron de Château Rouge and the Vicomte de la Vallée Noire took advantage of the occasion, and made rapid strides in favour of Almeria and Gloriana Croft.

As for Roger, he, having no belle to beguile for him the steep ascent, voted the whole thing "no end of bore," and wished he could kick all picnics into the middle of next week. He did not dare intrude on Edith in the young Marquis's presence; and so, that time might not be lost, he kept close to Mrs. Croft, consulting with her about ways and means, and how he was to push his own fortunes with Edith, when she had, as he felt certain she would, rejected the young Marquis.

* * * * *

The muleteers guided the party to a convenient flat, on the top of a height, where the dinner was spread. Everything was excellent, including the appetites excited by the pure mountain breeze. Nothing was forgotten, not even the salt. Roger, who had an odious habit of making stale puns, let off a succession; asking Edith if she would have "a merry thought, and some tongue to give it utterance;" offering a "rib" to the Baron, and pie to his mamma, who was, he said, always *pieously* disposed. "Stout to the stout," he said to Melton, who was very

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fat, and therefore did not like the joke; and "sweets to the sweet," as he proffered some jelly to Edith.

All the "fast set" voted him a great bore; and the Marquis, advising the ladies to take refuge in the sparkle of the champagne from the dulness of Croft's stale, flat, and unprofitable jokes, imbibed a good deal of his favourite beverage himself; and in this, as in everything else, the "fast set" followed his example.

At length the guides and Mrs. Croft began to think it was high time to prepare to set out home; and a little stroll among the cliffs was proposed previous to remounting the mules. Edith, hoping to be able to exchange a few words with Arthur, left the noisy, excited set, busy with a bet between the Marquis and Roger Croft, and strolled away in search of an Alpino rose; while the Croft girls were flirting with the Baron and the Count, and Mrs. Croft finishing her last glass of champagne. Arthur was gone to see to the safety of Edith's saddle, and to give the guides leave to sup on the relics of the feast. He then meant to try to get a few moments' *tête-à-tête* with Edith, from whom he had been cruelly severed throughout the whole day.

The ladies had all agreed to dispense with hoops and crinolines, as, in riding on mules, and climbing mountains and rocks, such appendages were found a nuisance and an impediment; and Edith, in her soft flowing drapery of delicate white muslin, looked, as she moved among the dark crags, picking her way along the narrow path, like some mountain nymph or guardian spirit of the spot.

Presently Edith heard steps approaching; her heart beat quick—it must be Arthur! She turned to meet him. But no; it was the young Marquis, flushed, excited, emboldened by champagne, and resolved, there and then, to declare his passion, and to make Edith an offer of his hand and fortune.

Edith resolved to avoid him, and, without a thought of the perilous nature of the mountain passes, wound sharply round an angle of the crag, picked her way down a sharp declivity, and was soon lost to his view. He gazed, he murmured, he cursed his fate, and swore at himself and destiny in vain. Nowhere could he see that enchanting form!

* * * *

The guides grew impatient. Mrs. Croft and her daughters were mounted. It was getting dusk. Every one was ready to set off, and still Edith Lorraine came not.

White and cold with terror, Arthur rushed about, regardless of his own safety, shouting aloud the "one loved name;" and echo, only, answered to his call. Mrs. Croft, the girls, the Marquis, even Roger, the "fast set," and the foreigners, who had made sure that Edith was hiding in sport, now began to

exchange blank looks of terror, and to tremble and grow pale. The guides shook their heads. There was a fatal spot not far off where several accidents had happened—one very recently. They had ropes and lanterns, they never ascended these heights without, but they were of no use, since there was no trace or indication of Edith's whereabouts.

Presently Arthur's shout was heard. The guides, who knew whence the sound came, exclaimed in Swiss,

"Blessed Virgin preserve us! It is the Death Valley! He is shouting from the rocks above it!"

Again came Arthur's shout on their startled ears; and still they moved not. Arthur in a few moments came back, deadly white—his eyes on fire, his hair on end.

"I have seen her!" he said. "She has fallen from a high crag into a dark, deep chasm; but I can see the gleam of a white dress! What is to be done?"

The guides shook their heads.

"Nothing can be done; she is dead by this time," said one of them; "and it is useless to risk the life of living men to save a dead woman!"

"I will give a thousand pounds—nay, two thousand pounds—to the guide who tries to save her, or who brings her up, dead or alive!" said the young Marquis, trembling violently.

The men shook their heads. "What is the use of the money to dead men?" they murmured.

"Fools! cowards! brutes!" said Arthur, "I will risk what you, mountain-born, misnamed guides, shrink from! Follow me, and obey silently and promptly all my commands!"

They have reached the crag: down, down, down, deep in the darkness below, the gleam of the white dress is seen.

"Now, the strongest of your ropes!"

It was produced.

"Now your lantern!"

The guides gave it into Arthur's eager hand.

"Now you, my lord, and you all, help these men to hold fast this rope. Do not *you* give way—be sure *I* will not. Father in heaven, give me strength to save her! If not, blessed Jesus receive my spirit!"

With the lantern in his bosom, and the rope fast clutched in both his hands, Arthur swung himself at one fling half-way down the chasm. There he paused, gaining a momentary footing on a sloping ledge of the cliff. More eagerly then, he peered into the dark chasm, and saw the form of Edith senseless at the bottom. He placed the lantern on a projecting angle of the rock, and by the aid of the thick rope, he went down, down, down, to the bottom of the dark abyss.

Edith lay, white as her dress, and perfectly insensible, on a

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bed of moss, withered leaves, and loose earth. A wild hope that no bones were broken, no blood shed, filled Arthur's heart, and nerved him afresh. He threw one strong, brave arm (his left arm) round the slight form, and with his right hand he still clutched the rope. The Marquis, the guides, and all the men on the top of the crag, pulled bravely and well; and "a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together," at intervals, drew Arthur and his lovely burden (still quite insensible in his embrace) out of the ravine. Midway, where he left the lantern, he obtained a moment's footing, and—oh, joy! oh, rapture!—he thought he felt the dear heart faintly flutter beneath his hand.

Ah! what a prayer of faith and gratitude was that which rose from Arthur's heart to the throne of Grace!

It was answered—yes, it *was* answered—as the prayer of faith and gratitude always is! New strength comes to Arthur's hot, sore, blistered, and almost relaxing hand. New strength is granted to those on the craggy summit who are pulling him up—for they can now see Arthur suspended in mid-air above that black abyss, and Edith in his embrace!

They are saved; oh, rich reward of all-daring, all-enduring, all-conquering Love! They are drawn to the top—they take her from his arm—they lay her on the ground—he kneels beside her. The Marquis holds his brandy-flask to her lips; Arthur chafes her hands and temples. Her colour returns; she opens her eyes; she smiles on Arthur; she murmurs, "Heaven bless and reward you, Arthur!"

Oh, miracle! oh, ecstasy! she is unhurt! Stunned and insensible, she lay at the bottom of the abyss, and, but for Arthur, would have perished there; but falling on that soft bed of leaves and loose earth, she escaped unhurt; and the story is told to this day by the guides, as the "Miracle of the Mountains;" indeed, they do not scruple to attribute the maiden's rescue to spiritual agency.

CHAPTER XXV.

"They sought her both in bower and ha'—
The lady was not seen;
She's o'er the Borders, and awa'
Wi' Jock o' Hazeldean."

SCOTCH BALLAD.

EDITH'S miraculous rescue from a horrible and lingering death, and Arthur's brave and successful venture, formed a nine days' wonder at Interlachen. The young Marquis, who, as we have said, was not deficient in generosity, and was himself a man of high courage, though not of such an heroic nature as Arthur, took the latter by the hand in every sense of the word.

Arthur could not but smile when the young peer, with a self-

absorption and an egotism perfectly aristocratic, thanked Arthur for Edith's life. Yes, perfectly blind to the fact that the life Arthur had risked his own to save was ten thousand times dearer to him than his own, and entirely engrossed by his own emotions, his own passion, and the misery spared himself, the young Marquis took an opportunity, on their return to the hotel, to say—

“I honour and admire you for your bravery, and I am proud, as an Englishman, that you have done a deed that will be talked of among these guides and their descendants as long as these mountains stand. I dare say, a hundred years hence, they will have made a fine weird romance of this bold English venture of yours. Indeed, I should myself have acted exactly as you have done” (how many people think this is the highest praise they can bestow, and what intense conceit there is in the notion!)—“yes, I should have let myself down, as you did, by means of a rope, only that I felt the chances were ten to one in your favour; and, where Miss Lorraine's life was concerned, I would not suffer any personal feeling to interfere.” (He has actually made a sort of favour of allowing Edith to be saved by Arthur.) “For compare my weight with yours; I doubt whether the rope would have borne me at all, even if the men at the top of the crag could have held it. And now, what I have to say is, that I feel under a deep personal obligation to you. Some day I will tell you why; suffice it at present to say that such is the fact. You may have heard me offer two thousand pounds to any one of those cowardly guides who would do what you have done. I am not going to affront you, my dear sir, by placing you on a level with them, and offering you a reward of that kind; but if you have any wish which I can gratify—any object in life which my interest can enable you to attain—any appointment in view, in obtaining which I can aid you, you have only to remind me of this day, of the glory you have shed over the English name, and the inestimable service you have done to myself individually, as well as to Miss Edith Lorraine, and all her family.”

There was something in the tone and manner of this address, kind and complimentary as it was, that yet did not please Arthur. However, he took kindly what seemed to be so kindly meant, thanked the young Marquis, and got out of his way as soon as possible.

Edith was much too weak to support herself, and sit upright on a mule; but Arthur, who had a suggestive mind and helping hands, contrived a sort of hammock out of some rugs and shawls they had brought with them, and, with the aid of the guides, carried Edith safely down the mountain side, and back to Interlachen.

Miss Croft did not appear, as usual, to preside at the well-spread tea-table. The English maid, whom the Crofts had brought with them, announced that Miss Croft had begged she might not be disturbed, as her headache was of a very distressing kind.

Edith Lorraine was at once conveyed to bed, there to ponder, with passionate gratitude and tenderness, on all she owed to Arthur, who, for the second time, had saved her life. If the first time she recalled his devoted watch at her bed-room door with tears, she now dwelt on the daring heroism of his perilous descent with a glow of enthusiastic admiration; and in the silence of the night—the bright moonlight night, so clear that she could see, as she lay in her bed near the window, the giant mountains and the transparent lake—she registered a solemn vow to devote to him the life he had twice saved—to repay, with all the love and tenderness of her woman-heart, and all the powers of her mind, soul, and strength, the devotion he had shown her—to let no obstacles, no impediments, no prejudices, ultimately sever her life from his; but, sooner or later, to reward him with her hand and heart, and, as the wife of his bosom and the partner of his life, to double his every blessing and lighten his every sorrow.

The next morning the Marquis was at the breakfast-table much earlier than usual. He was in very high spirits, and his handsome face betrayed some inward exultation, such as he always evinced when he had some capital joke or choice bit of scandal to repeat at somebody's expense.

Mrs. Croft, who had a passion for peers, always toadied the Marquis to a painful degree.

"Ah!" she said, "my dear Marquis, I see you are brimming over with some capital bit of fun. Now, let us have it, my dear lord; it is running over at those bright eyes, which are destined to break so many hearts. Ah! I can see it stealing out at the corners of your lordship's mouth. Now, what is it, my dear Marquis? I positively cannot wait. I must have it."

"Well, so you shall; but first let me ask how Miss Lorraine is?"

"Better, my lord—I thank your lordship for inquiring. Edith is better; but not well enough to appear at breakfast, my lord."

"And Miss Croft?"

"Oh! I hope she'll be down presently, my dear lord. And now your lordship must tell us the joke."

"Well, then, I've found out why 'the gents' absented themselves yesterday! And, more than that, I can tell you what they are!"

Mrs. Croft turned a little pale. She had greatly encour-

raged the attentions of Mr. Tippit to her eldest daughter, Miss Croft. Mr. Tippit was a very dressy, fair, delicate young man, of rather pert and off-hand, but effeminate and insinuating manners. He had light curly hair, pretty features, teeth of incomparable beauty, a small straw-coloured moustache, a slight figure, white hands (which he had a habit of rubbing softly), a brilliant wardrobe, choice watch breguet chain, rings, pins, studs, and links.

Mr. Tippit might be a little finnikin, and talk a little too much about the weather, and in a sort of off-hand way about things in general; but he had a great command of money, alluded to many ladies and gentlemen of distinction, as if he were intimate with them, and gave Mrs. Croft a great number of autographs to add to her collection. He had also presented her and her daughters with some very fragrant dentifrice, such as he used himself; he was good-natured, too, and had very cleverly cured Mrs. Croft and her English maid of a raging toothache, by an application known only to himself.

Miss Croft was desperately in love with him; and Mrs. Croft, though she did not suppose that a Mr. Tippit could be of a noble family, imagined he might be a gentleman of fortune, and was very anxious to promote the match.

And now the thought of her rashness, her imprudence, blanches her cheek; for it is evident, from the Marquis's manner, that there is something very much against Tippit—something ludicrous; what can it be? The Marquis kept her a long time in suspense. Her anxiety delighted him. He hinted that he also knew who and what Cutts and Blower were.

At length, when he could keep the joke to himself no longer, the Marquis revealed the terrible discovery in these words:—
“Compose yourself, my dear madam; and first let me assure you that Mr. Tippit is a very respectable and a very wealthy young man, and that he lives in a very handsome house in Bedford Row, Bloomsbury, a house in which his father and grandfather lived before him.”

“Thank Heaven for that, my lord! Your lordship has taken a great weight off my mind,” said Mrs. Croft.

“I am glad to hear it,” said the Marquis; “the name of Tippit is one not unknown to fame, either.”

“You enchant me, dear Marquis!” said Mrs. Croft; “I never heard it before I knew this charming young man, excepting always as that of Tippit the dentist, who, when I was a little girl, used to attend the boarding-school where I was educated, to draw our teeth. Oh! how we all dreaded and hated him! Oh! my lord, how he used to smile and talk of the weather with the terrible key instrument hidden up behind him! Oh! how I loathe a dentist, my dear lord!”

“And yet such is the calling of the gentleman in question.

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Mr. Tippit is a dentist; nay, more—he is the son of a dentist, the grandson of a dentist. He is not a man of the calibre of Cartwright or Parkinist; but he is a very good, advertising, third-class dentist, in great vogue with the middle classes!”

“Oh! my lord!” cried Mrs. Croft, “how can I thank you for discovering this? Heaven only knows what misfortune you may not have prevented! How did your lordship discover it?”

“Simply thus! My valet, who was taken ill at Brussels, only joined me yesterday. It seems, after I had set off, he met with Mr. Tippit, who was about to join your picnic with his friends Cutts and Blower. Cutts—you will be amused to hear it—is a very celebrated chiropodist.”

“What is that?” groaned Mrs. Croft.

“A corn-cutter! and Blower is an equally successful maker of artificial legs, arms, eyes, and noses!”

“Oh! what a disgusting set of fellows!” said Mrs. Croft; “I’ll never take the slightest notice of any one of them again; and Gloriana, remember, I forbid you ever even to bow to them. Just go, my love, at once, and tell your sisters what those odious wretches are, and beg them to come down to breakfast. Oh! my lord, what do we not owe to you! No wonder they were ashamed to join our picnic, when they saw they were detected, and knew that your valet would expose them.”

At this moment, in rushed Gloriana, with a note in her hand, pale as death, and trembling violently.

“Good heavens! what is this?” cried Mrs. Croft, as she tore open the note, and read:—

“BELOVED MAMMA,—Forgive us for anticipating the consent we knew you would not withhold; our chosen lords and masters insist on this proof of our confidence and affection. By the time you receive this, I shall be Mrs. Tippit, and Almeria, Mrs. Cutts—two blessed brides—not noble, not ‘My Lady,’ as you had hoped and planned, but the happy wives of two perfect gentlemen, with plenty to keep us in affluence, and to enshrine us in elegant homes, where our beloved mamma will find she has not lost two daughters, but gained two sons in the persons of those daughters’ husbands. Pray forgive us this once, and we will never do so any more; and pray induce dear papa to pardon his

“BARBARA and ALMERIA.”

“I have gained two sons,—a dentist and a corn-cutter! Oh! my lord, I can never survive the disgrace, the shock!” cried Mrs. Croft, and she went off into the strongest hysterics, of the screaming and kicking genus.

It was as the young Marquis had divined. Mr. Tippit with his friends, Messrs. Cutts and Blower, were on their way to their rooms to array themselves in a jaunty, elegant picnic costume, when the former, to his horror, met Mr. Pinkey, his lordship’s valet, whom he could not affect not to know,

since not only had Mr. Tippit extracted several huge grinders from Mr. Pinkey's head, but he had supplied the large bluish-looking incorrodible porcelain teeth which gave such a strange, unnatural look to Mr. Pinkey's face.

Mr. Tippit felt at once that the game was, as he said, up, unless he could induce Miss Croft to elope with him before it became known, through the Marquis's valet, that the *élégant* of Interlachen was the dentist of Bloomsbury. Taking counsel, therefore, with Messrs. Cutts and Blower, they decided to absent themselves from the picnic, lest Mr. Pinkey should have found some means of betraying their secret.

Mr. Tippit, strong in the confidence of his own charms and his Barbara's attachment, resolved to put it to the test by contriving to despatch a note to her, imploring her not to go on the picnic excursion, but to grant him a meeting on particular business, while her mother, brother, and sisters were absent. This note he conveyed to her by the agency of the laundress.

The result is already known. Mr. Tippit pleaded so eloquently, and looked so charming, that Miss Croft not only agreed to elope with him that very night, but to use her influence with Almeria to accompany her sister, as the bride elect of Mr. Cutts. Mr. Blower would fain have carried off the saucy little Gloriana; but Miss Croft assured him that any attempt to include her in the bridal party would end in the detection and ruin of the whole scheme; that Gloriana was the most impracticable little creature in the world, and was quite resolved never to marry any one but a nobleman; and that, if she could not get an English peer, she would accept a foreign one—probably the Count, the Vicomte, or the Baron, now of the mountain picnic party with her.

Miss Croft was right; nothing would have induced Gloriana to elope with Mr. Blower. She had some heart, and some principle, and some feminine delicacy, too, acquired through her intimacy with Edith Lorraine.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"'Twas the dead of the night when Agatha stole
From beneath her mother's eye,
And she paused not to mark the light clouds roll
O'er the queen of the midnight sky."

ANON.

If the elopement scheme had been proposed to Gloriana, she would certainly have put a stop to it by at once informing her mother of the plot.

Almeria, on the contrary, vain and romantic, at once entered into her sister's views. And in the dead of the night these two dupes, fancying themselves heroines of romance, stole down, in

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Roger Croft, who was very weary of mountains, forests, and lakes, made the elopement of his sisters an excuse for a visit to Paris.

"Odious as the connection is," he said to his mother, "it is yet quite necessary that I, as the only brother of these treacherous romantic dupes, should ascertain that they are really married, and, if so, it is something to be well rid of them. Both Tippit and Cutts are evidently very well off, and I dare say Barbara and Almeria will drive in their own carriage and pair; and their conduct, at once so rash, so sly, and so undutiful, gives you and my father a good excuse for refusing them any kind of *trousseau* or marriage portion; at the same time, it may be very convenient to you to make an hotel of their houses whenever you want to stay in town."

"Oh, don't speak of it!" exclaimed Mrs. Croft, with well-acted horror; "do you imagine, Roger, that I could ever bear to visit at a house outside which was one of those disgusting pictures of a naked foot, with some loathsome excrescence, and a hand holding a sharp instrument just about to make an incision? No, I could neither rest, eat, drink, nor sleep in so degraded a home; why, I should see that horrid foot and hand in my dreams, and then wake to the consciousness that that hand was the hand of my son-in-law, and that that foot belonged to any chance customer who chose to be operated upon. A corn-cutter call me mother! a chronologist call my daughter his wife!"

"Not a chronologist; a chiropodist, mamma."

"Well, no matter, it's all one; I knew it was one of the *ists*. Oh, it will drive me mad! Nor is it less painful to me to think of staying with Barbara. No doubt that vile Tippit has a brass plate on his door—MR. TIPPIT, DENTIST; and, of course, a glass case, full of grinning rows of white teeth with pink gums! I, who have good old border blood in my veins—I, a Foster, of Foster, to be disgraced and degraded thus!"

"Well, mamma, I must be off; I must just ascertain the fact that the fools are married, and then I will return to you. Don't fret; they are off our hands, without portions, *trousseaux*, or even the expense of a wedding-breakfast. Gloriana must marry well; and if Edith gets the old Earl's wealth, and I get Edith—(Lady Edith she must be in due time)—you need never give a thought to Mrs. Tippit and Mrs. Cutts, except when you want, as I said before, to avoid the expense of a lodging or an hotel in London."

* * * * *

Roger Croft delighted in Paris. He loved play, dissipation, and good living; Paris, therefore, was to him a sensual Paradise. He ascertained, without any difficulty, that his sisters were actually married, and then he gave himself up to amusement and pleasure of every kind. He had no wish to see the brides; on the contrary, he was very anxious to keep out of the way of his plebeian brothers-in-law, for there were some "nobs" at Paris whom he had known at Eton, and Roger wanted to be thought as grand and as exclusive as possible.

Meanwhile, the sister brides were much happier in their choice than such undutiful runaway daughters deserved to be.

We have not a word to say in extenuation or excuse of the conduct of any girl so lost to the sense of filial duty and maiden modesty, as to take the most important step in life, and rush into a husband's arms, without the sanction and support of her mother's presence.

Filial treachery and ingratitude are always punished, sooner or later; the thankless runaway daughter generally finds herself, in her turn, deceived, deserted, and defied by her children. But at present all is *couleur de rose*; for Mr. Tippit and Mr. Cutts—the dentist and the corn-cutter—spend freely abroad the money they earned at home. They are proud of their union with the Croft family. Grander husbands would have been much more stingy, perhaps, and would have looked down on Croft of Croft Villa. A solicitor seemed somebody to Mr. Tippit and Mr. Cutts; he would have been worse than a nobody to an honourable or a baronet.

One day, Almeria was slightly indisposed, and Cutts remained at home to read to her, to nurse her, and to comfort her. Tippit, as it was very fine, proposed to his Barbara a ramble in the woods of St. Germain's. Blower, who was very much out of spirits, and fancied himself crossed in love, was to drive with them to the forest, and be of their party, on condition that he did not interfere with them, but amused himself with his own thoughts, his own resources. The latter consisted chiefly in bon-bons, chocolate, and biscuits, with which he filled his pockets, and solaced his palate, if not his heart.

It was a day of unclouded splendour; the fine old trees were in full leaf, the sky was of the richest blue, the wild flowers, in every lovely variety of shape and hue, carpeted the forest. Tippit and his bride sauntered about in the cool fragrant shade of the noble old trees till they were tired, and then they sank down to rest on the trunk of a felled oak; Mr. Blower, of whose vicinity they were unaware, having seated himself at a little distance, where, shrouded from their view by the underwood, he was munching his biscuits and bon-bons, and thinking of his lost Gloriana.

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Mrs. Tippit was not a regular beauty, but she was a fine, well-grown, blooming young woman, with rich brown hair, which she wore floating down her back; and, in our opinion, love is such a beautifier, that, under its influence, Barbara, what with the light in her eyes and the blush on her cheek, looked very lovely as she sat by her Tippit's side, her head resting on his shoulder, and his arm round her trim and shapely waist. We have said that, all dentist as he was, there was something elegant and interesting about Mr. Tippit. Both bride and bridegroom had thrown their hats on the ground, and his fair, curling hair contrasted well with her dark brown tresses. He was very much in love with Barbara, and she idolized him, and they were very happy—happy almost as the first pair—as they talked of past fears, present joys, and future prospects, in all the exaggeration and sweet tautology of love—when a gentleman on horseback, but whose steed's hoofs fell unheard on that soft velvet sod, passed at a little distance, and caught a distinct view of the loving young couple.

"Hang it! 'tis Barbara, and that snob of a dentist," murmured the equestrian. "What a fool she is, and what a pair of spoons they look! Well, I'm glad I've seen them, because now I know how to avoid them. It would be a fine thing if Arlington, or Yorke, or Porchester, or Charley Ord, or Lord Harry, were to see me in company with a dentist, and find out that the snob's my brother-in-law! No—'forewarned is forearmed,' I'll turn my horse's head, and just canter away as quickly and as quietly as possible."

So saying, the affectionate brother fled the spot, and the young pair, conscious of nothing but each other's presence, and the love that drew their hearts so closely together, wanted no third person to break in on their happy *tête-à-tête*, and Barbara's head still rested on Tippit's breast, although he had taken that opportunity to reveal to her who and what he really was. He had dreaded the result of that disclosure, but without cause. When once a woman really loves a man, no outward circumstances can disenchant or estrange her:

"I know that I love thee whatever thou art,"

is still the burden of her song.

Barbara now knows that her husband is Tippit, the celebrated Bloomsbury dentist, and she has not lifted her cheek from his shoulder nor withdrawn her waist from his embrace. Arm in arm they have left a silvan spot worthy to be the scene of *As You Like It*—to have sheltered Rosalind, and seen Jaques couched on its sod. And Tippit took his bride to dine at the Palais Royal—such a choice little dinner, and such creams and ices! Then they went to one of the *Théâtres des Variétés*; and she liked being the dentist's wife better than being the neglected, lonely daughter of the stuck-up Mrs. Croft.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Oh, happy they, the happiest of their kind,
Whom gentle stars unite!"
THOMSON.

WE cannot afford to spend much time in London with the bridal party; but we hope our readers share our interest in dear, simple, constant old Hackney-Coach sufficiently to wish to know how he, his elderly bride, and her spinster sister got on in London, and whether the delights of the great metropolis equalled their expectations. To old Hackney-Coach, himself, the scene was, as he demurely said, by no means so new as it was to his womankind. He had often been in London before; and—like all true scholars—he was so much absorbed in thought, so absent, and so unobservant of outward objects, that London differed from Oxford, for him, only in the constant risks he incurred of being run over, and the countless shoves, pushes, and anathemas, lavished upon him for not getting out of the way, and not seeing who and what was coming.

Mrs. Hackney and her sister, Miss Grace Pryme, were resolved to be delighted with everything and everybody. They would not own to themselves that, after the sweet country, and the exquisite neatness, cleanliness, and fragrance of the old rectory in which their curate father lived, and where they had been born and bred, the hotel in Covent Garden seemed dark, close, dingy, and smelt of gas and stale tobacco; that a very disagreeable odour of cabbages, no longer in their prime, came in when they opened their window; that the close bedrooms and dingy beds did not, for some reason or other, yield them the sweet, refreshing, undisturbed sleep they always enjoyed at Lonecliffe; that their nights were invaded by nameless visitants, and their complexions did not look as clear in the morning as it was their wont to do; that their bridal finery was rapidly becoming exchanged for the dark livery of London; that they were dizzy with the incessant noises; that they were frightfully overcharged for stale eggs, tough steaks, sky-blue milk, and hot, heady wine; that they were bewildered, stared at, laughed at, and ridiculed when they walked; and cheated, and often abused into the bargain, when they took refuge in a cab. They were resolved to find everything delightful; for were they not actually in London at last? Had they not realized the dream of a life—a visit to the metropolis?

Mrs. Hackney and Miss Grace Pryme were not at all aware that their home-made bridal bonnets, mantles, and dresses, made in the fashion of bygone days, appeared singular and ludicrous in London, where fashion reigns with such absolute sway over all ranks and classes.

The lady who set the fashions at Lonecliffe was the squire's

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THOMSON.

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wife, one Mrs. Oldaker, who, some thirty years before, had arrived there as a bride, in a huge French bonnet, a short dress, with *gigôt* sleeves, and a little tippet. This lady visited nobody out of her own immediate neighbourhood, and had never changed the shape of her bonnet or her dress. In that remote nook by the North Sea, and on the Borders, the scanty female population of the higher class thought themselves "quite the thing," while, in imitation of Mrs. Oldaker, they sported their huge bonnets, their *gigôts*, and short petticoats. Perfectly guiltless were they of hoops, crinolines, long trains, and peaked bonnets. The mere absence of crinoline or hoops would have made them seem like caricatures of the Past, in a place where (even at all risks) the cook cleaning the door-steps, the housemaid sweeping the stairs, and the nursery-maid impelling the perambulator, all adopt the inconvenient appendages for which the female mind has such a passion that it is on record that some of the young penitents at Millbank and elsewhere have been known to rob the water-butt of its hoops to transfer them to their own dresses, rather than appear before "the Board," hoopless! But when, in addition to this singular omission, the large coalscuttle bonnet, short skirts, huge *gigôt* sleeves, sandalled shoes, and little tippets are added to the absurdities of Mrs. Hackney's and Miss Pryme's costume, the ridicule they excited in the streets of London can be understood. Old Hackney-Coach, however, saw nothing ludicrous in the appearance of his bride and her sister. The faces under those huge old-fashioned bonnets were the same kind, simple faces that had looked lovingly on him for twenty-five years; those *gigôt* sleeves were associated with his earliest dreams of love; that short waist was the only one his arm had ever encircled. To him, whatever was peculiar to his Prudence and her sister was dear, and beautiful with the poetry of sentiment.

The bride and her sister were a little vain—few women are not so; and it is a mistake to imagine that a lonely, secluded country life is unfavourable to the growth of this foible. It is in cities, where the beauty of one woman is constantly and unexpectedly surpassed by that of another, and the most elegant and costly dress that one can devise is outdone by that of another who has hit upon something more costly and elegant still, that Vanity is crushed, mortified, killed! The pretty girl or woman of the upper classes in the country sees no rivals, exaggerates her charms, contrasts her delicacy and elegance with the coarse dress and features of the sunburnt peasantry, lingers over her looking-glass in the long, lonely, listless hours, and persuades herself she is a Venus.

The bride and her sisters had been very pretty girls. It was so long ago that all but themselves had forgotten it—old Hack-

ney-Coach always excepted, who saw no change in them. They thought themselves beauties still, and they actually attributed the notice they excited to their charms. Happy in this delusion, they retrimmed their huge bonnets—the bride with orange flowers and white satin ribbon, the bridesmaid with white roses and sarsnet ditto; they had their white dresses washed, and their frilled tippets clear starched; and they never thought of adopting any other costume, or of encumbering themselves with hoops, crinolines, or long petticoats.

One day, that they were delighting themselves with the animals at the Zoological Gardens, and that Miss Pryme especially was enchanted with the playful tricks of the monkeys, one of the latter, while she was feeding another with nuts, swung himself down by his long tail, and pulled off the crowning rose and white bow of the coalscuttle bonnet; and the bride, unfortunately standing too near a boy who had offended the elephant, received a shower of water from his trunk on her muslin dress. At Madame Tussaud's, Grace was frightened into hysterics by the life-like moving of Cobbett's eyes, and in her terror knocked down that great reformer, to whom it was a novelty to be floored.

Old Hackney-Coach was often lost for hours together, and sought in vain by his anxious bride; when he would be found spell-bound at a book-stall by some old Greek or Latin folio, the stall-keeper the while keeping his eye on him, lest he should make off with the prize. At the Crystal Palace, on a crowded Blondin day, the bride and her sister lost their beloved Hackney for the whole day, missed the last train, and only met with him when the doors were about to be closed. They roamed about in despair, vainly trying to find a vehicle of any kind to convey them to town; not one could they see. They tried to get beds at the hotels, and even the public-houses. In vain; either all were full, or the landlords and landladies did not like their "outlandish looks," as they called them. At length a return fly met their eager gaze, and for an exorbitant sum they were safely conveyed back to their hotel in Covent Garden.

These, and a few more small accidents, were all the misfortunes our bridal party met with during the honeymoon. Before it came to a close, they had visited every theatre, seen every show, attended every exhibition, and, in short, fully worked out their plan of enjoyment; nay, more—Miss Grace Pryme had actually made a conquest.

Miss Grace Pryme returned to Lonecliffe herself a bride-elect. An old college chum of Hackney-Coach's who had been thirty years a curate, and who met with his old friend and his "Womankind" by accident at Exeter Hall, envying Hackney's domestic bliss, attached himself to Miss Pryme; and, while

paying his addresses to her, was, strange to say, presented to a living in the immediate neighbourhood of Loncecliff. The whole party, at the end of the honeymoon, hastened back to the Borders to prepare for the wedding.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Some flowers of Eden ye still inherit,
But the trail of the serpent is over them all."

MOORE.

MRS. CROFT'S whole pride, ambition, and maternal affection, after the elopement of her two elder daughters, centered in Gloriana. Long and frequent were her consultations with Roger, on his return from Paris.

Gloriana, she said, must atone by a very brilliant match for the disgrace which her sisters had entailed on the Croft family by their degrading *mésalliance* with a dentist and a *chiroprapist*. She had mastered that hard word at last, to avoid the expression "corn-cutter." Sometimes she indulged in a wild hope that the Marquis of Dunstanburgh (for we should have said that Lord Pontecraft had become a Marquis, by his father's death), might, when rejected by Edith, turn his thoughts to Gloriana; or if not, she resolved on securing her a foreign title, and encouraged the Count. In her rage against Mrs. Tippit and Mrs. Cutts, she was quite blind to the (for them) extenuating circumstance, that she had herself promoted the attachments which had ended in unions so odious to her, and that she was herself the great cause of her own disgrace and disappointment.

It is strange how often the most worldly and artful women act in the most imprudent and simple manner. In spite of the recent severe lesson she had received, Mrs. Croft encouraged the foreigners to accompany Edith and Gloriana in their rambles—to sing, sketch, read, ride, walk, boat, and dance with them; and yet she knew no more of their antecedents than she had done of those of "the Regent-street gents."

Le Comte de St. Ventadour was the one among these foreign aspirants whom both mother and daughter, in the shape of Mrs. Croft and Gloriana, most affected. Not only was he the highest in rank, but he had the greatest command of money, and seemed to be looked up to by the Vicomte and the Baron as a sort of leader. The Comte de St. Ventadour was a handsome, accomplished man, of middle size, with plenty to say for himself, full of those little, half fond, half playful attentions that Englishmen so seldom pay, and that Englishwomen so delight to receive. He sang, without much voice, but with great taste, to a guitar which was slung round his breast by a

broad blue ribbon, and which he played to perfection. He danced like a professor of the art, and he talked very grandly about his honour, his ancient lineage, and his power of loving to distraction.

Roger Croft did not like the Comte de St. Ventadour, because the latter always out-talked, out-shone, out-danced, out-flirted, and, in fact, eclipsed him; and, taking warning by the fate of his elder sisters, he suggested to his mother and to Gloriana the necessity of making some inquiries into the correctness of the Count's statements about himself and his friends, the reality of the domain of St. Ventadour, the state of his finances, and the reputation he enjoyed in his own neighbourhood.

"The fact is," said Roger Croft, "the Marquis has been chaffing me a good deal about the Count and his intimacy here, and he thinks I ought to know everything about these foreign fellows; and I am resolved I will, too, or we shall have a second edition of the Tippet and Cutts romance, only a thousand times worse; for those 'snobs' can maintain their wives, but if these foreigners are adventurers, you may be sure they're either beggars or escaped galley-slaves, or some dreadful thing or other."

"How malignant and slanderous you are, Roger!" said Gloriana, blushing and bridling; "just because the Count is more popular and more admired than you are, you cannot contain your spite and envy; and it's just the same with the Marquis. I'm ashamed that Englishmen, who are always boasting of their generosity, should be so mean!"

"I'll tell you what I advise, my beloved Roger," said Mrs. Croft; "but, first, my darling Gloriana must let me tell her that she wrongs her brother, who is actuated solely by anxiety for his sister's welfare."

Gloriana tossed her head. Roger Croft scowled.

"I fully sympathise with both of you, my dear children, and I can feel for Roger's anxiety about matters that may involve his sister's destiny, and the honour of the family; and I can appreciate dear Gloriana's annoyance at any doubt being expressed by the Marquis of the rank and importance of a foreign nobleman, who has distinguished her by so many proofs of admiration and respect. But you must both remember that at present the Count is only a friend—an acquaintance, in short; and, of course, can never be anything more until we are all well assured of the truth of his assertions."

"I have not a doubt of them!" said Gloriana.

"Barbara had no doubt that that snob Tippet was a gentleman; Almeria felt certain Cutts was an aristocrat. And yet Tippet was a dentist, and Cutts a corn-cutter!"

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"Oh, spare me that dreadful word!" said Mrs. Croft, "I cannot bear it! But now calm yourselves, my own and, alas! only children, for I can never look upon those ungrateful sisters of yours as daughters of mine. The Count is, as you know, very proud. You cannot say a word to him, my Roger—not a word—in which he could detect the smallest intimation of a doubt of his veracity and honour. But the Baron de Chateau Rouge is a very good-humoured, communicative fellow, and from him, I think, Roger, you might be able to obtain all the information you require."

"He is devoted heart and soul to the Count," said Gloriana, "and I think you'd better take care what you are about."

"Where is the Marquis?" asked Roger, rudely snapping his fingers, to intimate his contempt of Gloriana's suggestion.

"Oh! he and Arthur are, as usual, in close attendance on Edith. She is sketching by the lake, and they are waiting upon her like two slaves. Arthur is reading some stupid poems aloud to her, and the Marquis is cutting her pencils and watching her every stroke."

"By Jove! here he comes," said Roger; "and the Baron with him, by all that's lucky! Now for it!"

"Beware!" cried Gloriana. "The Baron is a very touchy, irascible man, good-natured as he seems."

"Be very cautious, my darling Roger," said Mrs. Croft. "But you have so much tact, I am sure you will find out all you wish to know, without giving any umbrage."

"I feel certain Roger will get into a scrape," said Gloriana. "The Count and the Baron are like brothers, and any doubt of the Count's being all he represents himself to be is an indirect insult to the Baron, who has always confirmed all St. Ventadour has said. There they go," she added; "Roger, that meddling, mischievous Marquis, who would sacrifice his best friend to his worst joke, and the Baron. Roger with his envy, and the Marquis with his spite, are actually so taken up with their stupid pumping of the Baron, that for once they have left Edith to walk arm-in-arm with Arthur, who seems to be availing himself of the opportunity to push his fortunes with her! How earnestly he bends down to her! How she blushes! What a lovely, thorough-bred creature she is! It's no wonder the men are all in love with her! All except the Count—*my* Gonzalve—he never admires her—he sees no beauty but in my poor face. The idea of his not being the nobleman he says he is! Why, the aristocrat peeps out in every look, word, and tone. How envious Roger and the Marquis are of him!"

* * * * *

Edith and Arthur were pacing alone the terrace on the borders of the lake. He carries her portfolio and her little flat

drawing-box; and, freed at last from the unwelcome intrusion of the Marquis, they converse, as lovers always do, of themselves, their past, their present, their future, their whole world of love. Arthur has not dared formally to propose to Edith Lorraine—Edith, daughter of Lord Hauteville, and granddaughter to the Earl of Rockalpine. How can he, the poor, dependent, adopted—and, alas! perhaps even illegitimate—grandson of Attorney Croft, ask the high-born Edith to share his fortunes, until he has made them great? And she?—no feeling of pride in those relations who had, as it were, cast her off and despised her, prevents her emboldening him—as a maiden, however modest, may—to put into words the vague allusions he ventures upon about a future to be shared with her.

Well does Edith know that to her worldly mother she is still the poor, little, carrotty cripple, destined to perpetual spinsterhood at Croft Villa. It was not that Mrs. Croft had ventured actually to deceive Lady Hauteville on this point: she constantly reiterated, as in duty bound, that Miss Edith Lorraine was become almost as strong as the generality of young ladies of her age—that there was no lameness left, no deformity apparent. Lady Hauteville looked upon all these remarks as made by Mrs. Croft to exalt herself and her own judicious and devoted nursing of the unfortunate girl. Had not the celebrated Drs. Dulcimer and Lullabel decided that, even if she lived, Edith must be a cripple?

Lady Hauteville had never seen Edith since she had consigned her to the care of Mrs. Croft; but she always thought of her as the little, pale, large-eyed, hollow-cheeked, pointed-chinned, carrotty girl she then was, and nothing but ocular demonstration would have made her believe that she was at all altered.

Edith Lorraine was quite aware what was her mother's opinion and impression about her; and she had a wild hope that, under that impression, Lady Hauteville would not very much oppose a union between "the little carrotty cripple" and Arthur. Then, too, she knew of her grandfather's will in her favour; and she thought to herself, "Arthur will, perhaps, marry in me a portionless girl, for whom nobody, not even her own mother, cares; and then on some sad day—which may fate long avert!—he will be rich and great, for I am dear grandpapa's heiress. And, thank Heaven! none of my family have the least idea of that, and he was very anxious to keep them in ignorance of it; for he foresees that I am one day to be Arthur's wife, and he knows that such a union would be violently opposed by my parents, unless I were supposed to be a little, carrotty, portionless cripple. As it is, their pride will revolt from any connection with the family of a solicitor; but if

mamma knew that I am tall, straight, and by some pronounced handsome, and that I am grandpapa's heiress, she would separate me from the Crofts for ever, and try never to let me see Arthur more! In vain! in vain! Twice has he saved my life, and solemnly have I vowed, sooner or later, to be his, and to devote to him that life which he risked his own to save."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"It is the blush that galls, and not the bruise."

THE LADY OF LYONS.

THE Marquis and Roger Croft, as the latter said, *tackled* the Baron de Château Rouge, as they thought with consummate tact; they cross-questioned him about the Comte de St. Ventadour.

"What a charming person the Count is!" said the Marquis.

The Baron, who spoke English pretty well for a foreigner, replied,

"He is de best friend of me."

"What may be his age?"

"He is *dirty*, and I am *dirty*, too," said the Baron.

"Is his father dead?" asked Roger Croft.

"Yes, else he would not be master of the Château."

"Oh! he is master there?"

"Yes, I tink I hear him tell you so, and invite you dere."

"By the bye, where is the Count's castle?" said the Marquis.

"In Lorraine," replied the Baron.

"Oh! I thought it might be in the air," whispered Roger Croft to the Marquis.

The quick ear of the Baron caught that whisper; suddenly he stopped, turned fiercely round, collared Roger with one hand, and with the other gave him a resounding slap on the face. Before Roger could recover himself, the Baron followed it up by another slap, saying, in a voice hoarse with passion,

"A insult to my friend is a insult to meself! If you are a gentleman, you require satisfaction, and I give it you."

"Oh, hang your satisfaction!" cried Roger, mad with rage; and doubling his fists, he hit the Baron a blow in the chest which sent him to the ground.

"If you refuse my *cartel*," said the Frenchman, foaming with rage, "I post you in every city and town of Europe, as one poltroon, one dirty, lying, miserable poltroon!"

"You *must* fight him," said the Marquis, who had some Irish blood in his veins; "but see, there are people coming. The duel cannot take place till to-morrow."

"Be my second, then," said Roger, who, though by no means brave, was still much excited, and was in that state in which rage supplies the place of valour.

"With pleasure," said the Marquis, going up to the Baron, and asking him the name and address of his second.

The Baron named the Vicomte de la Vallée Noire, and proposed that they should meet at the hour of six the next morning.

The Marquis, saying he would settle all preliminaries with the Vicomte, bowed to the Baron, and with Roger Croft left the forest, in which they had been walking.

Roger Croft was full of deadly passions, but he was not a brave man. The Marquis, who was almost as anxious for the brilliant termination of this affair of honour as Sir Lucius O'Trigger was in a similar case, had great misgivings about Roger, who looked deadly pale, and trembled violently. The Marquis, fearing Mrs. Croft might suspect something was wrong, and guess that a duel was in contemplation, and apprise the authorities, kept close to Roger,

"And tried to keep his spirits up
By pouring spirits down."

He would not let him dine with his mother, Edith, and his sister; but after he had seen the Vicomte, and settled all preliminaries as to place, time, and weapons, which were to be pistols, he took him a drive to a celebrated hotel, not far from the spot where the duel was to take place, and there he plied him with champagne until he actually became quite potent.

The dinner was excellent; and a bowl of strong punch completed what the champagne had begun. Roger did not go to bed sober. He was soon in the heavy sleep of inebriety, and quite unconscious of the approaching peril.

The Marquis had written a note to Mrs. Croft, to say that Roger and himself were going to dine and sleep out, in order to judge of the merit of a certain celebrated vintage, and that of the cook of the Hôtel du Luc. With some misgivings as to whether Roger's courage *could* be screwed up to the sticking-place in the morning, the Marquis retired to bed.

That morning came. The Marquis sprang from his bed, dressed hastily, and hurried off to Roger's room, to get him up and in the field betimes. It was some time before Roger could be aroused to the full sense of what was expected of him! He had a torturing headache, and felt very sick, gloomy, and irritable. He was a good deal exasperated at the almost hilarious excitement of the young Marquis, and, for the first time in his life, was sullen, gloomy, and almost snappish in his replies to his lordship.

The latter rather enjoyed his toady's ill-humour and evident reluctance. The Marquis was himself—as almost all our English aristocracy are—what Roger called "game to the back-

bone;" and, in addition to the resolute, unflinching courage of the Englishman, he had inherited from his beautiful Irish mother and her ancestors a genuine delight in a fight of any kind.

"Come, man, bustle!" he said; "I wouldn't for the world that the Frenchman should get the start of you, and be first on the field. He's a regular scamp, no doubt; but he's a plucky dog, and I dare say he's a very good shot."

"If he's a regular scamp," said Roger, stopping short, as, with a cold, damp, throbbing hand, he was tying his neckcloth, "I don't think I ought to fight him."

"Oh! but," said the Marquis, "we've no proof of it; and he's received everywhere here, and you've always met him on an equality, and he's inflicted upon you an indignity which no man of honour could put up with. Why, if he'd hit me in the face with his confounded dirty hand, I should have fought him there and then. I'm afraid I should have killed him on the spot! I must have fought him at once!"

"I wish to Heaven I had done so!" said Roger; adding, *sotto voce*, as the Marquis whistled and looked out of the window, "if I *had* fought him yesterday, it would have been all over by this time, and I shouldn't have had to fight him to-day."

In spite of the Marquis's impatience, Roger Croft made a very protracted toilet; and even when he was obliged to own that he *was* ready, he returned to his room several times, on one pretext or another. The Marquis was rather ashamed of his man, as he walked with him to the ground. Roger's knees seemed to bend and shake, and almost to give way under him. The Marquis affected not to perceive the evidence of what he inwardly anathematised as dastardly cowardice, and very unjustly called pettifogging poltroonery, inherited from the old snob his father. (The Marquis did old Croft great injustice; he had ten times the moral and physical pluck of his son.)

The spot fixed upon for the duel was a level space just outside a wood. As the Marquis, arm-in-arm with Roger, almost lugged the latter along, they heard footsteps behind them, and Roger, looking round, said,

"Stop; we're followed! Perhaps this matter has got wind; this may—be some one sent—to put a stop to—it."

"No, no, old fellow," said the Marquis; "we're not in such bad luck as that, I hope! It's only a Mr. Hicksley, a young English surgeon, who happened to be staying at the hotel, and I thought it might be just as well to have him with us in case of need. I daresay the Baron will bring some confounded French Sawbones; but I've no opinion of any surgical practice but our own. If I had a bullet in me, I shouldn't like to have it extracted by any but an English surgeon."

The possibility thus suggested made Roger reel, stagger, and almost collapse. Never had he felt as he did at that moment, save once when, as a boy, he had been obliged to sit down in the dentist's arm-chair to have a huge back-tooth extracted; and the agony of fear he suffered then was a mere trifle compared with that which now iced his blood and palsied his limbs. His tongue, hot and dry, clove to the roof of his mouth; his head grew dizzy; everything swam before him.

The Marquis, luckily, had a brandy-flask in his pocket. He compelled Roger to empty it at a draught (it contained about a wine-glass and a half). After this cordial, Roger was got to the ground; and there they were almost immediately joined by the Baron, the Count, and the Vicomte.

The ground was measured; the combatants stood opposite to each other, pistol in hand. The Marquis had whispered to Roger (who had shown symptoms of dropping his pistol, and even running away), "If you don't behave like a man to-day, I'll shoot you like a dog to-morrow!" and the moment had arrived for the signal to be given; when suddenly a tall stranger sprang out of the wood, rushed between the combatants, and cried,

"Put up your pistols, and fly! The police will be here in three minutes; they have got scent of this affair. If you do not wish to be all taken before a magistrate, and perhaps incarcerated, you had better fly before a shot has been fired!"

Upon hearing this, Roger began to talk, and to imagine that he could make a little show of courage without incurring any risk.

"Oh! come," he cried, "by Jove! this is too bad! Surely there's time for an exchange of shots?"

The Baron, livid with rage, stood opposite to Roger; one hand clenched, the other about to raise the pistol to fire. Both himself and Roger Croft were bare-headed.

"Fool!" said the stranger to the Baron; "if you fire, it must be through my body." Then drawing near to him, he whispered, "The game is up—the police are on our track! I have made this duel an excuse for getting you off. There is a carriage round the corner—fly! We shall all be guillotined if we are taken. Gentlemen," he exclaimed aloud, "this meeting must be postponed; the liberty of all concerned is at stake. Hark! hark! I hear them coming. Fly—fly—fly all!"

So saying, he took the Baron by the arm, and hurried him round the corner of the wood, and into the carriage that awaited him there. The Count and the Vicomte, lividly pale, and trembling in every limb, followed. Crack went the whip, round went the wheels—away, away they go at full speed; the Marquis, Roger Croft, and the surgeon standing on the ground, where, a few minutes later, they were surrounded by the police, and a mob in attendance on that body.

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The Marquis tried to account for their presence at the spot, and the pistol in Roger's hand, by saying they were practising pistol-shooting; but the police were not to be humbugged. They insisted on taking the whole party before the magistrate; there, during a minute examination, it came out that it had been discovered that four escaped galley-slaves, one of whom was an Englishman, had been for some time playing the part of fine gentlemen at Interlachen; that they were all gamblers, who had been sent to the galleys for cheating, and for conspiring to murder a young nobleman whom they had fleeced, and who had threatened to expose them. Their plan was, to murder him, and make it appear that he had committed suicide. These wretches, then, were the *soi-disant* Count, Vicomte, and Baron; and the Englishman—a dressy man, of gentlemanly address, who called himself Captain Rutland Danvers—was the fourth miscreant concerned in this base plot, and was a notorious blackleg, who had been obliged to leave his own country from dread of the vengeance of a man whom he had cheated.

The Marquis, Roger, and Mr. Hicksley were dismissed with a caution, after having been kept the whole bright summer day shut up in a small close office, reeking of onions and tobacco. This day Edith and Arthur had spent by the lake and in the forest. A white day it was in Love's calendar.

When the truth was known to Mrs. Croft and Gloriana, the latter was in despair; for the *soi-disant* Count, who had been bred to the stage, had completely captivated her fancy, and won her affections. Tippit and Cutts became quite desirable acquaintance in comparison with these three desperate villains and escaped convicts.

Roger Croft, who had actually stood face to face with the Baron, pistol in hand, boasted largely of his prowess, save when the Marquis was present; and Mrs. Croft was so ashamed of her own weakness and imprudence in admitting those foreign impostors to her house, and allowing them to associate with her daughters, that she resolved on at once leaving the scene of her folly and disgrace; and the Croft party set out on their travels again the next week.

CHAPTER XXX.

"What is Love? If earthly only,
Like a meteor of the night,
Shining but to leave more lonely
Hearts that hailed its transient light.
But when calm, refined, and tender,
Purified from passion's stain,
Like the moon in gentle splendour
Ruling o'er the peaceful main."

BERNARD BARTON.

MRS. CROFT resolved to complete her continental tour by a winter and spring in Paris. She had wrung from Mr. Croft a

reluctant consent to this arrangement, on condition that she would contentedly settle down at Croft Villa on her return to England, and (as he always said in winding up every letter which he sent to her), "devote herself to her duties, her husband, and her home."

Mrs. Croft was not a woman of very high principles; she did not much care what she entailed on the future, as long as she was empowered fully to enjoy the present in her own way. The having her own way was the study and delight of her life; and she generally contrived to effect it, either "by insinuation or bluster," as Peggy Lobkin has it.

After the Croft party had left Interlachen, they visited Germany, its cities and its spas, spent the latter part of the autumn and the early portion of the winter in Italy, and finally took up their abode in the Place Vendôme, Paris. Here Mrs. Croft had secured elegant apartments; and here, with introductions to the best society, sent, on his granddaughter's account, by the old Earl of Rockalpine, and a cheque for a considerable amount coaxed out of old Croft, with an increased stipend from Lord Hauteville, for Edith's board and maintenance, Mrs. Croft prepared fully to enjoy all the varied pleasures and amusements of "the City of Delights."

Mrs. Croft, although at heart rather a mean, artful, unprincipled person, was not of vulgar exterior or manners. She was tall, thin, pale, and quiet; and, being always fashionably dressed, passed muster very well, especially when accompanied by two young creatures so blooming and attractive as were the Psyche-like Edith, with her rich auburn hair, fair skin, and large dark eyes, and the brilliant brunette, pretty little Gloriana.

Arthur had not been over since the long vacation; and the Marquis, Roger Croft, and the whole of the fast set, were very busy preparing for their examinations. Two or three of them had been plucked, one had been rusticated, and one expelled; and these disasters had startled the rest out of their sensual frivolities, their idleness, vanity, and dissipation, and roused them to the necessity of study, self-denial, and some degree of steadiness.

Arthur alone, who had always had courage to resist temptation, to defy evil influence, and to despise the ridicule of the worthless and the idle—Arthur was fast approaching the goal of his ambition. While Roger Croft and the remnant of the fast set were studying night and day to endeavour to secure a bare degree, Arthur, who had always aimed at high honours, was spoken of in Oxford as sure of his "First." A First Class! That, to the self-made man, was the first step to a home, with Edith as his wife. His grandfather, old Croft, had said, if Arthur took the highest honours, he would enter him at the Bar, promote, in every way in his power, his success in that noble

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profession, place him as a pupil with a first-rate counsellor, and, once called, use all his influence to get him briefs. As a solicitor, he could do a great deal himself in that way, and influence many London attorneys to push the young barrister. In that noble and progressive career, Arthur might, with his talent, zeal, industry, and self-denial, rise to a great height, to which even Lady Hauteville *must* look up. And at that thought Arthur's heart beat high; for Edith was the prize for which he was contending.

Edith, on her side, had cultivated her own mind, and had read and reflected, and studied, with a view of making herself a helpmate worthy of a man of Arthur's intellect and knowledge. No vain, ridiculous thought of rivalry urged her on; she knew that the knowledge which is valuable in a man, would be pedantic in a woman. She did not affect to study classics, mathematics, philosophy, science; but she tried hard to master French, Italian, and German; she endeavoured to become acquainted with the best writers in her own language; she wished that Arthur might never have to blush for her ignorance of history, geography, biography, poetry.

Edith was the object of Arthur's deep, earnest, untiring study, in his little college room. For her he consumed the midnight lamp; for her he sacrificed his favourite exercise—boating on the blue river; for her he gave up the rosy morning, the sunny day, the dewy eve, the sweet moonlight, to hard reading, stern, unflinching, earnest study. Her portrait smiled on him as he read, a tress of her auburn hair warmed his heart, a "sachet," given by her, perfumed his desk—everything spoke of, breathed of, Edith.

And he was well repaid. It was for Arthur that Edith rose betimes, and gave such energetic attention to the study of modern languages, that her masters marvelled at a progress of which they never guessed the secret, and quoted her to their other pupils as a model for their imitation. It was for Arthur that she read so constantly, and tried so to remember what she read. It was for Arthur that she threw her whole soul into her drawing, her music, even her needlework; for him (and in the hope of fitting herself one day to keep his house, and to spare him trouble) she perfected herself in arithmetic, and studied book-keeping. Everything had reference to the acquirement of that excellence which alone, as she thought, in the sweet humility of her true love, could render her worthy to be the companion of his life, the mistress of his home, the wife of his bosom.

In proportion to Edith's indifference to the admiration of any and every man but Arthur, was the interest and enthusiasm she excited wherever she appeared. She had not yet been formally introduced, but Mrs. Croft took upon herself to

leave a card of Edith's at the Embassy, with her own and Gloriana's. The result of this was an invitation to a ball. To Edith, this or any other ball would have been a matter of little interest; but to this particular ball Edith looked forward with a flutter of wild ecstacy, for Arthur was to be in Paris for his Christmas holidays. Arthur would leave his card at the Embassy; he would be invited to this ball; he would be her principal partner!

The dress she should wear on the occasion became an object of intense interest now. It would be so delightful to please Arthur's refined taste, to surpass his expectations, to be the fairest of the fair in his eyes, and, what in Paris is far more important, to be the best dressed. There the toilet is the great object of woman's life. The Empress's milliner and dressmaker, the great Madame Roget, was consulted. With the enthusiasm of genius, she threw her whole heart and soul into Edith's ball-dress. She did her best for Mrs. Croft and Gloriana, but for Edith she was inspired!

Arthur had arrived, had left his card at the Embassy, had been invited. The Marquis, too, would be at the English ambassador's ball. The knowledge of this fact only made Edith engage herself for the first quadrille to Arthur, and arrange to dance as many times as possible with him, including the supper dance, without being too exclusive, and provoking ill-natured comments by their arrangements.

The dresses came home in good time. We are not going to attempt to describe them; suffice it to say that in Edith's Madame Roget had surpassed herself. Nothing in such exquisite taste, so fairy-like, so aerial, so becoming, so costly, so light, so chaste, and yet so rich, had ever been seen even in Paris. The perfection of Edith's rounded and yet sylph-like form was defined by a *corsage* fitting to perfection, and the graceful lines of her perfect figure were revealed, in spite of the delicate profusion of gossamer drapery and soft lace. Edith's dress was white, relieved by blush-roses that seemed just plucked from the tree, and which were spangled with dew. A lovely wreath of the same crowned her brow, contrasting beautifully with the rich and glossy auburn of her abundant tresses. Gloriana, the sparkling brunette, was in amber crape, trimmed with yellow roses and pearls, and Mrs. Croft in black velvet and diamonds.

Great was the excitement caused among the demonstrative French, both gentlemen and ladies, when the Croft party entered the *salons* of the Embassy. The Marquis was in close attendance on Edith, although, being engaged to dance the first dance with Arthur, she leant on his arm.

Arthur at this time was twenty, tall, well-grown, very aristocratic and gentlemanly in appearance, with a face of great

intelligence, and a smile of ineffable sweetness. His massive brow denoted genius; his large, deep-set, dark eyes were full of thought. He was very pale, as all deep-feeling and deep-thinking men are; and, all self-made nobody as he was supposed to be, and as he believed himself to be, there was not a man in the room who looked more completely the *beau idéal* of a young English nobleman. And was this the adopted, dependent, and perhaps illegitimate grandson of old Croft, the solicitor? Arthur was dressed in quiet but good taste. The Marquis, who was rather fond of finery and show (most fast men are), had rather overdone it on this occasion.

Edith, who, during her abode on the Continent, had perfected herself in the art of which she had acquired the rudiments from an Alnwick dancing-master, glided through the mazes of the crowded dance with an ease and grace that delighted even the Parisian connoisseurs, who crowded round the quadrille to see *la belle Anglaise*. Gloriana got plenty of partners, and was very much admired, but Edith was the recognised queen and undisputed belle of that splendid ball. The Marquis was more in love with her than ever. Most men find their admiration increased in proportion as the object of it is followed and worshipped by others. He could not often obtain Edith's hand, but he could hover near, and carry her shawl, her fan, her bouquet, her smelling-bottle. He could watch her every movement, and parade his admiration, his idolatry. Not so Arthur. His object was to conceal as much as possible the deep, deep love of his heart. To him Edith was as lovely and as dear in her simple white muslin or pink gingham as in all the aerial brilliancy of her ball dress. He felt dejected, disheartened, and depressed.

Edith, in her pearls, her gossamer, her laces, her blush-roses, and gazed or glanced at with half-tender adoration by the *élite* of Paris, seemed much further removed above the reach of his love than Edith in her morning dress and brown straw hat, roaming through the forest glades, sitting by the lake, and climbing the wild mountains. Poor Arthur! he could almost have wept at the thoughts that thronged his mind. At one moment he said to himself, "This brilliant, high-born beauty can never be my wife; the queen of such a scene as this can never love a nobody like me! I have deceived myself—she has deceived herself. I see now the wide distance between us." And when a timid glance of eloquent and unmistakable love stole suddenly from under Edith's long auburn lashes, and, with a smile of tenderness unutterable, she tried furtively to dispel his gloom, his thoughts, not less torturing, took this form:—"Even if she would resign all for my sake, ought I to accept—ought I to permit such a sacrifice? Does she, in her sweet ignorance of the world, her sublime humility and self-

abnegation—does she understand the full extent of the sacrifices she must make in order to be true to me? Cought I to allow her to unite her fortunes to one worse than lowly born—one who may fail, and whose success cannot, in long years of toil, ensure her the position any one of these titled admirers that are now courting her notice, could offer her at once? I feel as if I ought to sacrifice my very being to her welfare. But would it be for her welfare? To such a nature as hers, what can be so valuable as so great a love as mine? I feel a sad presentiment of some coming evil settling like a nightmare on my heart, and the dark shadows of some coming events clouding the sunshine of my soul."

With a slow step and a mournful smile Arthur at this moment approached Edith. A dance for which she was engaged to him, was about to commence. He made his way to the spot where Edith sat with Mrs. Croft and Gloriana, surrounded by admirers, who had been introduced to her, and were imploring the honour of this polka or that waltz. The Marquis was close by, waiting upon Edith, an ice in his hand, which, with great difficulty, he had obtained from the refreshment-room, and had almost persuaded Edith to take, when Arthur's arrival to claim her hand decided her upon refusing it. What a tyrant this Love is! The Marquis was a proud man, but once under Cupid's sway he was a slave; and Edith, enchanted to be rid of him, and all those (to her) wearisome admirers, blushed with delight at Arthur's approach, rose with alacrity, and placed her frank young hand in his, with a tender animation and confiding affection at which the Marquis grew pale and gloomy, and all the others red and angry.

Edith tried all she could, by a thousand little wiles and devices which Love soon imparts to womankind, to win Arthur from the dejection and anxiety which she read on his eloquent face. He smiled in answer to her gentle raillery, but it was

"——a smile
Gleaming like moonlight o'er some lonely isle,
Lighting its ruins; and it seem'd to say
That 'neath that smile the heart's cold ruins lay."

By this time the salons were full. The grandees of all nations, who generally arrive very late and depart very early, were now exchanging graceful bows and curtsies, compliments and small talk.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Oh, these are partings such as rend
The life from out young hearts; for who can guess
If ever more shall meet those mutual eyes,
Since upon dawn so sweet, such awful morn can rise?" BYRON.

"Has your ladyship seen the new English belle?" said a foreign Duke, in French, to a lady, *passée, blonde*, and with some remains of beauty, who, with a handsome, beautifully

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dressed daughter on her arm, and a diplomatic, pale, stern-looking husband by her side, had just arrived at the ball.

"No; I have seen nothing very beautiful, or very new," languidly replied the lady. "What is her name?"

"Ah! that I cannot tell you," said the Duke; "but if your ladyship will accept my arm, I can lead you to the quadrille where she is dancing; and I think you will own that a more lovely creature never came even from the Isle of Beauty."

"And is this miracle of loveliness well-dressed?"

"Exquisitely! Nothing in the room approaches her in this respect, your ladyship and your fair daughter of course excepted."

"And how does she dance?"

"Admirably!—with an ease, a grace, and a lightness quite inexpressible."

Her ladyship's curiosity was excited. She had hoped and expected that her own daughter would have been the belle of that ball; and as she was a remarkably handsome girl, a very fine dancer, and tastefully set off, perhaps, had Edith not been present, she might have carried off the palm for beauty and grace.

The crowd, which had closed round the quadrille to see Edith, made way for the Duke (himself an ambassador), and for the lady on his arm, and the young belle on hers; the stern, diplomatic husband was close beside them. Edith at that moment was gracefully advancing alone in *l'Eté* to meet Arthur. A soft blush mantled her fair cheek as she raised to his, eyes full of the light of love.

"She is indeed a beautiful person!" said the lady. "For once, Duke, my expectations are surpassed. Who is that elegant young man with whom she is dancing? and, above all, who is the lovely creature herself? I have a fancy I have seen that sweet face before, but I cannot remember where."

"I will go and inquire of our noble hostess," said the Duke. Presently he returned.

"The name of *la belle Anglaise*," he said, "is Miss Edith Lorraine; and she is here with a Mrs. Croft, and that lady's son and daughter. The son is that young man whom your ladyship admired just now; the daughter is that pretty, sprightly little brunette in amber crape, with the wreath of yellow roses in her black hair. See! she is now *balancé*ing to her partner, the young Marquis of Dunstanburgh. But what ails your ladyship? Are you not well?"

The Duke might well ask that question, for Lady Hauteville (the reader has probably suspected that it was she), yes, Lady Hauteville, Edith's mother, has seen her child for the first time for many a long year! The little, wan, moon-eyed, carrotty cripple, whom she so heartlessly sent from her, now dances gracefully before her, in face and form the loveliest creature she had ever beheld

The Duke has been called away to escort his Duchess to her carriage; convulsively Lady Hauteville clutched the arm of her pale, stern husband.

"Hauteville," she whispers, "do you see that beautiful girl in white, with the blush-roses?"

"Yes."

He was laconic, but even he had been struck by Edith's charms.

"She is Edith—our Edith! The little carrotty cripple has grown into that most beautiful of girls."

"Indeed! Then it's high time we had her home."

"I think so, too. Oh, that wily, designing woman!—that base Mrs. Croft!—how she has deceived me!"

"Nay, I remember she said Edith was strong and well. I think you have deceived yourself."

"That snob who is dancing with Edith is old Croft's grandson."

"Tush! I was thinking what an elegant young man he was. There is something about him that recalls—Ah! no matter—I am certain he is no snob."

"Old Croft's grandson *must* be a snob," said Lady Hauteville.

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The dance was over. Lady Hauteville, leaning on the arm of the Duke, who had rejoined her, suddenly met with Mrs. Croft, in the centre of a brilliant crowd of Parisian beaux and belles. The innate and cringing toadyism of Mrs. Croft's nature was seen in the abject humility of her obeisance. Lady Hauteville treated with cold hauteur the woman to whom she had entrusted her daughter. She never offered to shake hands with her, but requesting Mrs. Croft to follow her, led the way to an ante-room, and insolently announced her intention of resuming the guardianship of her daughter, and taking her back to England with her in a few days. Edith was then sent for; Lady Hauteville pressed her to her side, if not her heart, and Ida coldly embraced her long-absent sister. Edith could hardly repress her tears when she heard she was at once to take leave of the Crofts, and to accompany her mother to the Hôtel du Louvre. It pained the affectionate girl to the heart to hear Lady Hauteville so haughtily and coldly desiring Mrs. Croft to send all Edith Lorraine's things to the hotel.

"We will now return to the ball-room," said Lady Hauteville; "for your sister Ida is engaged for the supper dance."

"So am I, mamma," said Edith; and before her mother could question her, or interpose, she took the arm which Arthur who was looking out for her, offered, and was shut in with him, by the brilliant crowd which shut her out from her mother.

Well were Arthur's dark presentiments realized now. Poor Arthur! he had not the least idea of what had happened. He did not know—he had not even guessed—who the cold, fashion-

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able, scornful lady was, who had watched Edith and himself so narrowly during the last quadrille. Alas! his worst anticipations are more than equalled. They are to part—to part at once—that very night, never to meet on an equality again! He is so agitated, he can scarcely control his emotion; and her tears will drop amid the flowers of her bouquet.

The dance over, while every other pair hastens to the supper-room, Arthur leads Edith into a deserted alcove full of flowers; and there the pale and hapless lovers exchange vows of eternal constancy and deathless love; and one parting kiss seals those vows. They were slowly leaving that alcove, when the Marquis of Dunstanburgh appeared.

"I am sent by Lady Hauteville to conduct you to her side at the supper table," he said.

"My partner is escorting me thither," said Edith, proudly, clinging to Arthur's arm.

Both felt that it was the last time, for a long, dreary, indefinite period, that she would lean on that manly arm, and look up into that dear face, or he press that little taper hand to his side and gaze into her glorious eyes.

Oh! what pangs were in reserve for Edith, when her mother, who had kept a place for her and for the Marquis at the supper-table, with a haughty bow dismissed Arthur. The evening, begun in Love and Hope, ended in darkness and despair!

Edith, in spite of her mother's sneering surprise and anger, sought out Mrs. Croft, to take an affectionate leave of her and Gloriana; and holding out her hand to Arthur, with a courage for which we honour her, asked him to put on her opera cloak, and to hand her to the carriage. This was all she could do to show her preference, her constancy, her resolve; and the thought of this comforted Arthur during many a long, sleepless night.

The Dawn of Love was overcast! Lady Hauteville left Paris suddenly—no one knew why; and Edith and Arthur were parted.

The secret of Lady Hauteville's sudden departure was not known in Paris for some time, but we have no wish to keep our dear reader in the dark, and, therefore, we will at once own that it was caused by a letter from a friend in the North, which announced that the Earl of Rockalpine had had an attack of a kind very closely resembling a fit.

Lady Hauteville did not communicate to Edith the tidings she had received, else she would have discovered a fact of which she had no idea; namely, that Edith was deeply and affectionately attached to her grandfather. But no details of her child's outer or inner life, during her abode with the Crofts, were known to Lady Hauteville.

There had been a time, much as her Ladyship affected to

despise Mrs. Croft, when, as girls, they had been almost on an equality; but that was before Sir James Armstrong became a great man and a millionaire. Lady Hauteville pretended a total forgetfulness and an entire oblivion of those early days, of which, when first she met with Mrs. Croft at Rockalpine, the latter had been so proud. When first Mrs. Croft tried to recall to her Ladyship's mind that they had attended the same dancing-school, and had met at the same friends' houses at Christmas, in Newcastle, Lady Hauteville cut her short by coldly saying,

"I do not remember the circumstances to which you allude, Mrs. Croft. As far as my recollection goes, I was never permitted to visit any people who lived *in* Newcastle. Both Sir James and Lady Armstrong were so very particular with whom I associated."

Mrs. Croft had perception enough to deduce from this remark that Lady Hauteville was ashamed of her early days and their associations, and she had tact enough to avoid, in future, all reference to that Past, upon which she had hoped to build an intimacy and a friendship with Lady Hauteville.

When Lady Hauteville coldly announced to her daughters, Ida and Edith, that they must prepare at once to accompany her to England, the effect on the two girls was as different as their tempers and characters. Ida, quite thorough-bred in her coldness and impassibility, made no remark, no objection; one place was to her much the same as another, and so long as she was surrounded by the same luxuries, the same amusements, it mattered not to her whether she was in London or Paris. Self, self, self!—like so many of the daughters of Fashion, Vanity, and Ambition, she had no other idol, object, or consideration; if she cared for anybody but herself, it was for her brother Brian.

Edith, on the contrary, cared little for herself. She was as warm and enthusiastic as Ida was cold and indifferent.

"Oh, mamma!" she exclaimed, "if we are really going so soon, I hope you will let me drive at once to Mrs. Croft's, to take leave of her, of Gloriana, and——"

"And of that forward snob, old Croft's grandson," sneered Lady Hauteville. "No; I thank you, my love. My great wish is that you should, as quickly as you conveniently can, forget the existence of those plebeians."

"Forget them!" cried Edith, the tears rushing to her eyes, and burning crimson suffusing her face. "Forget those who nursed, loved, cherished, and comforted me when I was the despised little carrotty cripple, whose pale sharp face and halting gait disgusted and estranged even her own mother? Forget the constant kindness of years? Forget Mrs. Croft?—forget Gloriana? Oh, mamma!"

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ton, good breeding, and fashion, at any rate, I hope you will forget that ugly, pallid, low-bred young man, old Croft's grandson. I really don't know his name—I doubt if he have one. I remember hearing something to that effect, which, as I have so supreme a contempt for the whole Croft family, has quite escaped my memory; but I do remember all sorts of unpleasant stories about that young man's mother, old Croft's daughter—a vain, silly, low-born beauty, whom the late Lady Rockalpine foolishly educated and introduced as a lady. I believe she went wrong, and that in reality the young upstart has no name! But whether he have or not, pray banish him from your memory, Edith, even if the lovely Mrs. Croft is to be for ever enshrined there! Vulgar women are bad enough; but a snob-bish young man—oh! the idea of such a creature quite overpowers me! My Ida, hand me your vinaigrette. When I think of that young upstart, I fancy I smell cigars, and onions and garlic, and cheese and red herrings and beer, and all the horrible things such creatures delight in!"

"Arthur is no snob, mamma!" passionately exclaimed Edith, with a flood of tears. Arthur never smokes, never drinks, never touches onions or garlick, or cheese or red herrings; he is the scul of refinement—the quintessence of intellect—the pride and glory of his college and his tutors. Twice has he saved my life at the imminent peril of his own! He is the noblest, bravest, most gifted, and best of men—the most refined and well-bred of gentlemen; whatever his parentage may be, Arthur is one of Nature's noblemen! And he is so virtuous, so good, and speaks so tenderly of his mother, that I, for one, can never believe that she was aught but the angel of goodness and purity he believes her to have been. Do not be angry, mamma, when I say that I never, never can forget what he is, and what I owe him!"

"You will find you both must and can forget all about such a person!" said Lady Hauteville, as, reclining in an easy chair, she gazed at Edith's agitated features and manner with a cool mockery which Ida's handsome young face reflected in a softer sneer.

"My Ida," continued Lady Hauteville, "Edith shall take a part in Lady Bessborough's private theatricals. I'm sure she'll make a great hit in high tragedy."

"I dare say she will," coolly replied fair Ida, "only I don't think Lady Laura will resign in her favour."

"Then we'll have a performance at our own house," said Lady Hauteville; "I'm resolved Edith shall play *Belvidera* and *Mrs. Haller*."

"You will not really refuse to let me wish Mrs. Croft and her family good-bye, mamma?" sobbed Edith.

"Indeed I must do so, my love," said Lady Hauteville. "Mrs. Croft is a very vulgar person; she is, besides, a very

artful and double-dealing one! She has acted very unfairly to me in keeping me in ignorance of your recovery, the entire disappearance of any defect in your figure or your walk, and the singular change that has taken place in the colour of your hair and complexion. Yes! she has behaved most treacherously by you and by me, in thus dooming you to so long and so close an intimacy with her odious self, and her more odious family. I never can, and never will, forgive her, and I forbid you, Edith, on pain of my serious displeasure, ever to mention the name of Croft in my presence! I am a most unhappy, disappointed mother. Georgina—as you, my Ida, well know, if Edith does not—eloped with a *soi disant* Count, whom I verily believe to be nothing better than an Italian bandit—a wretch with whom she could not live, and who, I believe, tried to murder her; Augusta, Lady Richlands, harbours her and defies me. You, Ida, will enter on your fourth season, unmarried; and now you, Edith, who might atone to me in some measure, and comfort my half-broken heart and disappointed maternal ambition (for the young Marquis of Dunstanburgh evidently admires you beyond measure)—you actually return to me, after the sacrifice I made in parting with you—you return to me, I say, all I could wish, I own, in grace and beauty, but full of the most abject attachment to the plebeian family in which I so unfortunately placed you. Actually making your eyes red because I refuse to let you keep up an intimacy which any woman of fashion ought to blush to own. But, gentle as I am, I am very resolute, and when I say *no*, I mean it; therefore, while Lisette packs up your things, you, my Ida, and you, Edith, shall accompany me to Madame Roget's, to Palmyre's, and to Laure's. We must all give extensive orders for next season; and if those great *artistes* see you, Edith, and study your face, hair, complexion, and figure, they will know, when you are out of mourning, what among the new fashions of next spring will suit you.”

“Out of mourning, mamma?” said Edith, who was still weeping, “why should we go into mourning?”

“Did I say mourning?” cried Lady Hauteville, remembering herself. “What could I have been thinking of?”

“I hope there's no chance of my having to go into mourning,” said Ida, with more animation than she had hitherto shown. “I hate black, it does not become me.”

“Bathe your eyes and change your dress, Edith, for the carriage is waiting; and now, while I go and alter my attire, do you put on your bonnets and mantles. Let down your veil, Edith,” said Lady Hauteville; “luckily, I perceive you take after me, and *can* weep without your eyes and nose getting red. That is what no plebeian can do. It is a peculiarity that belongs exclusively to the thorough-bred and high-born.”

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daughters? Can she have forgotten that one of her grandfathers had been a pitman, and the other a carpenter, and that both her grandmothers had been maids-of-all-work in their youth?

Before Edith set out with her parents and her sister for England *via* Calais, she snatched a few minutes to write a few lines of affectionate farewell to Mrs. Croft and Gloriana, and a note to him whom she, in spite of her mother's contempt, recognised as the affianced lover of her youth, and her destined husband. She poured out her young heart to Arthur in the following words:—

"Arthur! dear Arthur! my first and only love! we are doomed to part; and I know not when or where we shall meet again! He who made our hearts and filled them so full of love, and bound them so closely together, will, doubtless, in His own good time, my Arthur, remove all barriers to our union! In the meanwhile, dear love, let no doubts of your Edith's truth, and faith, and constancy, disturb your mind; be sure while she lives she lives for you alone. The life you twice saved she will yet devote to you—at morning, at evening, and at noonday she will pray for her union with you. If you, her dearest one, invoke heaven at the same time, the thoughts of both will meet in boundless space, and arrive together at the throne of Grace!

"My own true love! I send you the ringlet you asked for so long ago. I have your dear lock of hair, my Arthur, in a locket hidden in my breast! Oh! Arthur! used as I am to your bright converse, and your deep, true love, with all its thousand delicate forethoughts and enchanting tenderness, how cold, how lone, how desolate I shall feel without you! Thank you, dearest and best, for all the happiness I have known through you. In haste and secrecy I write, but the day will come, *shall* come, when all the world shall know how dear, how very dear is Arthur to the heart of his

EDITH."

This note Edith contrived to send with that which she had written to Mrs. Croft by a porter of the hotel. Both letters arrived at the Place Vendôme just as Roger Croft, who had been detained in England, sore against his will, drove up to Mrs. Croft's lodgings.

His rage, disappointment, and despair knew no bounds when he found that Edith had been removed from his mother's care. In spite of Mrs. Croft's description of the insolence, coldness, and hauteur of Lady Hauteville's behaviour to her at the Ambassador's ball, Roger Croft, as soon as he had taken a warm bath, and donned a *recherché* morning costume, resolved to hasten to the Hôtel du Louvre to see Edith, and endeavour to make a favourable impression on Lady Hauteville.

Ludicrously overdressed, glittering with jewellery, scented, glossy, and the quintessence of execrable taste, Roger Croft called at the Hôtel du Louvre just as the young Marquis was handing Ida Hauteville into a carriage laden with luggage, which was to convey the Hauteville party to the station. Edith

was about to accept the Marquis's hand to enter the carriage, in her turn, when Roger Croft came up.

"How do you do, Lady Hauteville? I hope I see your ladyship in good health;" said the vulgar, pushing Roger. "How do you do, Lord Hauteville, and you, Edith, how are you—how do?" and he familiarly offered to shake hands with Edith.

Edith, her heart full of Arthur, of the happy Past and its old associations, never dreamt of refusing her hand; and Lord Hauteville, who, for some secret reasons of his own, always affected great civility to every member of the Croft family, kindly asked after Roger's parents; but Lady Hauteville, scarcely deigning to recognise the showy intruder, ordered Edith to remove at once to the other side of the carriage, and angrily saying, "Hauteville, we shall miss the train," whispered to her footman to tell the coachman to drive on. She then took a cordial leave of the young Marquis, to whom she said "*Au revoir*, at Rockalpine, my dear lord, the sooner the better;" and, with a very cold, distant bend, she dismissed Roger, who, reddening to the roots of his closely-cropped hair, raised his hat, and the Hauteville party drove off without his even seeing that Edith, in spite of Lady Hauteville, bowed her head and waved her hand to him.

As they drove along, a sudden stoppage occurred, owing to an accident in the road (an over-driven omnibus horse had fallen in the street), and a halt was the inevitable result. Before they were again in motion, a young man, in a deep reverie, drew near. At his approach Edith's colour rose to her very temples; the word "Arthur!" burst from her lips, from her heart, almost unconsciously to herself, and as unconsciously she extended her hand. Arthur stopped, raised his eyes—those large dark orbs, so full of genius and love; a blush of surprise and pleasure mantled his pale cheek; and with graceful cordiality he took Edith's extended hand.

Lady Hauteville surveyed him with a cold and disdainful scrutiny, which quite escaped him, for he saw nothing but his idolised Edith. Lord Hauteville, on the contrary, started at the sudden apparition of that noble face, that tall, slender form, as if a ghost had stood before him. A spasm contracted his brow, a deadly pallor stole over his face, a sharp pang was at his heart. He leant back in the carriage and closed his eyes, and his mind travelled in a moment back over a dreary space of twenty-four years—a ghost-haunted space!

Arthur's face and smile and form recalled (with the distinctness of yesterday) that brother who, in one fatal moment, in the Black Wood so far away, had passed from a being, radiant and noble as the youth now before him, to a bleeding corpse; and who, for twenty-four years, had been an inmate of the family vault at Rockalpine—sent thither, *by whom?*

Lord Hauteville seemed, as Arthur drew near and spoke to Edith, to see that brother once more in the flesh, before him; and the whole dreadful Past rushed back upon his heart and brain; and a deadly faintness came over him. When he recovered, the carriage was again in motion, Arthur was gone, and Lady Hauteville was scolding the pale and weeping Edith for condescending to shake hands with a member of the low Croft family.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"Invidious grave! how dost thou rend in sunder
Whom love has knit, and sympathy made one!"

ON the arrival of the Hautevilles in London, the sad truth was revealed to Edith, for a telegram had just reached Hauteville House announcing that the Earl of Rockalpine was *in extremis*. This telegram was sent by Mr. Croft, and it announced, not only that the Earl was dying, but that he was very anxious to see his dear Edith before he expired.

"Oh, there must be some mistake there," said Lady Hauteville; "that is some blunder of that stupid old Croft's. What can the Earl want to see Edith for?"

"Oh, he loves me so dearly, and I am so very, very fond of him!" sobbed Edith. "He always said he should send for me when he was dying, and I always promised to be with him."

"Dear me! it's all very extraordinary, as, indeed, everything is connected with you, Edith. I shall consult your father about taking you to Rockalpine. Death-bed scenes are not at all desirable for young girls, particularly such a nervous, hysterical, eccentric one as you are."

"Oh, mamma, I *must* go! I cannot stay away from dear, dear grandpapa, when he has sent for me to close his eyes!" said Edith. "Do take me with you!" and she fell on her knees in her grief and despair; but Lady Hauteville only said, "Let go my robe, you will tumble and soil it. I see no necessity for your going, and I do not think I shall allow it!"

Edith let go her hold on her mother's dress; and, still kneeling, buried her face in her hands, sobbing bitterly.

At this moment Lord Hauteville came in. In spite of the one dread crime which had poisoned his life, he was not half so heartless and so cruel as his wife. He listened to what Lady Hauteville said, and to Edith's words, broken as they were by sobs; and then raising her he said, "You *shall* go with us, Edith. We must set off at once; the carriage is at the door; the express starts in an hour from Euston Square—we shall only be just in time."

They travelled all night, and at six in the morning they reached Rockalpine. Edith spent the long, dreary, weary hours

in tears and prayers. Lady Hauteville's shallow head and hard heart were full of exultation at the thought that at length she should be a Countess, that the ancient coronet of Rockalpine would grace her brow, that she should wear it in the House of Lords, and take precedence of Lady this and that—and, above all, of her own daughter, Lady Richlands (as the Earldom of Rockalpine was an older one than that of Richlands). She would fain have talked on the subjects next her heart, but Edith could not, and Lord Hauteville would not, listen to her frivolous vanities, in the solemn presence of approaching Death.

Lord Hauteville's mind was full of anguish, and his breast of a vague dread, an ever-haunting horror. The thought of him, the brother who, but for his crime, ought to have inherited the title and estates about to be his own, rose on his mind as he looked from the window of the railway carriage into the gloomy distance; that brother's eyes seemed to him to gaze at him from the clouds—that brother's voice to whisper in the wind! Then came the thought of his father's funeral, and of the opening of that dread vault, closed for four-and-twenty years, and which he must bear to see re-opened! In fancy he sees his brother's coffin! Oh, what groans escape, as from his very heart! and how Lady Hauteville sneers as they catch her ear, inwardly exclaiming. "Is he a fool or a hypocrite? It is impossible he can really mourn for the old man, who has kept him for twenty years out of his title and estates, and who, by all the laws of Nature, ought to have been dead and buried long ago!"

* * * * *

The Earl still breathed when Lord Hauteville and Edith approached his bed-side. Edith, overcome with grief, sank on her knees beside the bed, took the lean, withered, old hand in hers, and covered it with her kisses and her tears. "Like a languishing lamp that just flashes to die," the Earl's eyes brightened for a moment, a smile stole over his face; he opened his arms, Edith threw herself into them.

"Good-bye—a long good-bye, my blessed little one," said the old man. "I am going, my lamb, and, thanks to you, I go to the Good Shepherd. Here is my Bible. *You* taught the old world-stained miser to love his Bible, see if I have not studied it well. You will find a list of my pensioners; let them not miss me, my child. *You* first taught me to care for others. All I have is yours."

Here Lord Hauteville started, came forward and said,

"How are you, father?"

He could think of nothing else to say.

"Good-bye, Hauteville, I wish you well," said the Earl; and then, kissing Edith tenderly, he said, "Pray for me, little one, for my time is come."

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Edith slid from his embrace to the floor, still holding the dear old hand. Suddenly she felt it relax and grow cold in her own. The word "Jesus" fell on her ear; she looked timidly up—it was all over—the Earl of Rockalpine was no more!

* * * * *

In the dead of the ensuing night, while the nurses were supposed to watch beside the corpse, which had been placed in a shell, and lay on a table in the dressing-room—and while the women, overcome by whiskey and fatigue, slept—three men, who had surreptitiously introduced themselves into the Castle, were examining the contents of one of the late Earl's trunks, which they had dragged from under the bed, and of which they had picked the lock.

One of these men knelt before the coffer, holding a bull's-eye lantern in one hand, while with the other he cautiously rummaged among the money-bags for a certain parchment, of which he was in search. A young and handsome man, but of prodigate appearance, leant on the lid of the open box, and watched the searcher; while an old man of Jewish features and with a black crape band round his white hat, and with a bunch of keys in his hand, superintended the movements of him of the fusian coat and drab gaiters.

Who and what are these three men, and what was their object? It was evident that no awe of the silent presence in the adjoining room, no dread of the King of Terrors influenced them. At the foot of the very bed on which, on the previous morning, the old Earl of Rockalpine had breathed his last, they were engaged in a search which, from the expression of their countenances, their whispers, their hurry, their pallor, their dark lantern and skeleton keys, we feel was a guilty, a nefarious enterprise.

* * * * *

Yes, the old Earl of Rockalpine, with the snows of eighty-five winters on his thin and scattered locks, and with the deep lines that a long life of avarice, suspicion, and worldly care, had indelibly ploughed into his cheeks and brow, lay in the marble rigidity of death; and, in spite of the marks with which Mammon stamps *his own*, among the sons of men, there was, on the finely-chiselled, aristocratic face of The Dead, that ineffable smile of heavenly peace which, we are told, never left the face of that "widow's son" on whom the Saviour had looked, and which we see on the still, cold lips of all who die in the Lord, and who, as the scenes of earth darken round them, beholds the heavens opening, and the triune Jehovah inviting them to a blissful eternity.

The nurse, and the old woman whose office it is in the North to lay out, or "straik," the corpse, and whose duty it is to watch

by it, were fast asleep, and a strong smell of whiskey pervaded the dressing-room.

There were many candles burning round the shell in which the old Earl lay awaiting the leaden coffin, and the outer one covered with black velvet richly emblazoned, which was ordered of the great London undertaker, Mr. G—, and was to arrive with that great Lord High Chamberlain of the King of Terrors, at Rockalpine as soon as possible. But while the hirelings slept and snored, and the light of the dark yellow wax tapers fell unheeded on the sharp rigid outlines, which, beneath the sheet that covered the cold form, betrayed Death, there were yet evidences of the fact that "there is a tear for all who die."

The season was unusually mild, and, although it was January, in sheltered nooks a few flowers lingered: and Edith had found some monthly roses and other pale blossoms in those sunny nooks, and, with some sprays of myrtle from the conservatory, she had made three wreaths, which she had placed in the old man's coffin—one on his still, cold breast, once so warm and animated for her, one at the head, and one at the foot, and the "Death Watchers" had not dared to remove them, although all their delight was in rue, rosemary, and southernwood, with which they had filled the coffin, and the dried leaves of which emitted a faint and deadly odour.

* * * * *

We have said that in the late Earl's bedroom three midnight marauders were at work, safe from intrusion, as they thought, in the dread, solemn presence of the Dead in the adjoining room, and in the deep sleep of the half-tipsy watchers. Yes, there they were, examining the contents of a trunk, which the Earl was known to keep under the head of his bed, and of which, it was said, he never trusted the key to any one, nor, indeed, ever opened it in the presence of any other person.

Some fifteen years before, the Earl had made a will leaving the whole of his long-hoarded wealth, and everything, in short, that was not strictly entailed, to Brian Lorraine, Lord Hauteville's eldest son, the same who, at Eton and Oxford, had been brought up with Roger Croft, the son of the Marquis of Dunstanburgh, the rest of the "fast set," and with Arthur; only Brian, the son of the moody fratricide, Lord Hauteville, and his worldly, ambitious, and unfeeling wife, was a bad boy, and a worse man. He was mean, crafty, cruel, at once a bully and a sneak. He was very unpopular at Eton, and narrowly escaped expulsion there. At Oxford he was shunned and "cut" by all, even of the "fast set," who hated everything base and unmanly.

Brian Lorraine, in spite of the old Norman blood in his veins, liked low company. He was fond of drinking and smoking with bad, disreputable fellows, with whom he would sit

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"cheek by jowl," apparently on an equality, taking liberties with them; but if any one of them retaliated, then he would fall back on his dignity, his birth, and expectations, and give evidences of a pride much meaner than his humility.

Lord and Lady Hauteville did all they could to reform him, and to conceal his degrading delinquencies, but they considered him a disgrace to the family. They tried sending him abroad with a strict tutor. They were especially anxious that his grandfather, the old Earl of Rockalpine, should have no inkling of his misdemeanours, as his lordship had a great notion of the rights of primogeniture, and had consequently made a will in Brian's favour; but the late Earl had, also, so intense and ineffable a horror of all that is "*fast*," "*varmint*," "*slang*," mean, profligate, and vicious, that Lord and Lady Hauteville felt quite certain that the slightest suspicion of what Brian really was, would make his lordship forbid him his house, and, still worse, exclude him from all share in his "personality."

That knowledge, in spite of all their precautions, the Earl obtained. His lordship said nothing; he appeared to take for granted all that Lady Hauteville said about dear Brian's love of study, and the illness brought on by his devotion to Latin, Greek, and Mathematics! The old man chuckled when severe illness, from this cause, was pleaded by the false, worldly mother as an excuse for her son's not being able to spend a month with his grandfather at Rockalpine Castle; for just at this time it had come to his lordship's knowledge that Brian Lorraine had been severely mauled by a set of low, drunken, cock-fighting, badger-baiting fellows, for refusing a stand-up fight with one of them, whom he had insulted.

Coeval with events so disgusting, so revolting to the aristocratic tastes and feelings of the throughbred old nobleman, was the dawn on his soul of that sudden, singular sunshine of Grace, so often reflected, from the trusting, believing heart of childhood, on the hardened, darkened despairing mind of infidel old age.

Often has some little Sunday-school girl, with her hymns, her collects, her texts, and her tracts, awakened the conscience of the aged pitman, who has passed through life in darkness, physical, moral, and spiritual; often has she been the instrument used by the All-wise to save his soul. And so, the reader will remember, it was with Edith and her grandfather.

Ere long, without any hint or intimation of his intentions to Lord and Lady Hauteville (in neither of whom he felt the slightest confidence), the old man altered his will. Everything which some years before he had left to Brian (as the eldest son of his heir), he now bequeathed to Edith. Mr. Croft, who made the new will for his lordship, knew this, and kept the old Earl's secret, except from his wife and Roger. Edith knew it from her grandfather himself; but the poor, loving child, who in-

wardly consecrated all this wealth to her devoted Arthur, and who knew how her family would grudge it to *her*, and still more to *him*, never, of course, alluded to the subject at all. Still, a rumour of a change in the old Earl's testamentary dispositions *has* reached Brian Lorraine.

There was an under-gamekeeper at that time at Rockalpine, one Jock Moss, in reality a very bad fellow, but who was a sort of crony of young Brian Lorraine's; and from such a source as this, Brian was not ashamed to derive any knowledge essential to his *interests*, as he called them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"I know a maiden, fair to see;
Take care!
She can both false and friendly be;
Beware! beware!
Trust her not,—
She is fooling thee."

LONGFELLOW.

This Jock Moss had a beautiful sister, who was parlour-maid and needlewoman at Rockalpine Castle; but she had been for some years a sort of humble companion to a lady of fashion, who had educated her to please herself, and had left her destitute! This girl had formed the ambitious design of being one day mistress at the Castle, and of ruling, with a rod of iron, the strict, exacting old housekeeper, who had kept so tight a hand over her!

Marion Moss was (as so many of the Border lasses are) singularly lovely, both in form and face, but ambitious, rapacious, plotting, gentle—but it was the gentleness of the panther—and fierce, with the fierceness of that beautiful and perilous creature. Marion Moss had a brow and a smile all candour, and a heart all guile. She played the "*Pamela*" to perfection, and Brian Lorraine, madly in love with her, having totally failed in his persevering and base attempts to get her on his own terms, had been obliged to yield to hers, and therefore had resolved on marrying her; and she had resolved on marrying him, but plenty of money was included in the prospective arrangements of both.

In spite of Brian's passionate impatience, Marion was resolved not to go to the altar with him until he had followed his grandfather to the grave, and had become possessed of the hoards of wealth included in the "personality" of the old Earl. We know that at one time the whole of that personality had been bequeathed to Brian. Formerly Lord Hauteville had been a great favourite of his father's, who had preferred him to his elder born; but many things had concurred to change the old man's feelings; and the great influx of wealth, which became Lord Hauteville's in right of his wife, at the death of her

father, the millionaire, Sir James Armstrong, had decided the old Earl on leaving his own wealth to Brian.

The knowledge of this fact made Brian fair and charming in Marion's roe-like eyes, in spite of that look of habitual intemperance so odious and disgusting on the soft face of youth. It was Marion who had discovered the great family secret, so closely concealed from the Hautevilles and all the world, save Edith and the Crofts, namely, that the will in favour of Brian Lorraine had been cancelled by the old Earl's making another and more recent one, in which all his real and personal estate, plate, money, jewels, furniture, books, horses, carriages, stock, etc., etc., were bequeathed to his youngest and most beloved grandchild, Edith Lorraine.

By dint of close and indefatigable watching, Marion had discovered that this will in favour of Edith was, after being shifted by the old Earl from one hiding-place to another, from desk to drawer, and drawer to box, and box to bag, and bag to portmanteau, finally (a little while before his last fatal illness), concealed in a trunk or strong box, curiously plated and lined with iron, so as to be fire-proof. It was stowed away with several of the most valuable of the old Earl's cases of jewels, some articles of plate in pure gold, some important title-deeds, and pocket-books full of bank-notes, and bags full of sovereigns. The will in Brian's favour had been deposited in its tin case, and in the iron safe of the London lawyer, Mr. Roper, who had drawn up the will.

Marion no sooner discovered that the old Earl was dying, and that Lord and Lady Hauteville, and, worse still, Edith, had been sent for by telegraph (Mr. Croft wording the telegram at the dying Earl's request), than she, too, sent off a letter to Brian, who was idling away his time in low haunts of vice in London. The letter ran thus:—

“ROCKALPINE CASTLE.

“MY DEAREST DEAR,—The Earl is dying; he cannot last much longer. You told me long ago that directly he ceases to breathe, your father is Earl of Rockalpine, and you—oh! how I glory in the thought!—are Lord Hauteville! How I long to hail you as my lord—your lordship! Then you want nothing but money. Well, I think I can manage that; but remember, whatever is to be done *by you know whom about you know what, must be done at once*. I know the exact spot; come down secretly by the express, get out at B—— station, meet me at father's cottage on the moor; I forgot to tell you that father's moved into what used to be Rough Rob's. Brother Jock and I will meet you there. Come with a clear head, a brave heart, and a steady hand; you'll want all three. Remember all you have at stake! Wealth which, yours, dear love, by every right, shall not, if I can help it, *pass by you*, to a whey-faced, canting little Methody. That wealth, once yours, you can afford to share it with one whom you say you love so dearly, and who, had she adored you less, would have seemed to love you more!

Your own MARION.”

Old Kit Moss, father of Marion and Jock, was a cheating, lying, old scoundrel, with a plausible tongue, an itching palm, and a thirsty throttle. At one time he had been a locksmith, with a respectable, loving wife, and a couple of rosy, curly-headed children. He had always had a propensity to drink, but while his wife lived he did not often yield to it. When she died, which was when Jock was fourteen and Marion twelve, he gave way to it at once and for ever. Then he went down, down, down! until he shrunk into the miserable, poaching, begging-letter writing, sottish old fellow he was at the time of his taking Rough Rob's hovel on the moor. Jock and Marion, who, during their mother's lifetime had been carefully reared, cared for, taught, and trained, both at school and at home, then ran wild. But when they were old enough for service, they, not liking the bare cupboard and semi-starvation, the cold hearth and rags of the drunkard's home, went out, Jock as an under-gamekeeper, Marion, first, to be educated as an hired companion to a selfish lady of rank, and, at her death, as needlewoman and parlour-maid at Rockalpine Castle; and there Marion ripened into a lovely but unprincipled woman, and Jock into a hardened, cunning, dare-evil of an under-gamekeeper.

It had occurred to the plotting but clever Marion, that in the desperate attempt she had advised Brian to make—to possess himself of and to destroy the second will, which the old Earl had made in Edith's favour—that the services of her father, who had been (as we have said) in better days a locksmith, and a capital one too, would be invaluable. The degraded and drunken old Kit Moss was ready to do anything for a guinea. He asked no questions. If Master Brian, as he still called him, wanted a lock picked, or any other job in his line done, it was nothing to him whether it was by day or by night, in castle or cottage; if he was paid well, he'd do his best.

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Brian arrived by the express train at B—, and crossing the line and the heath, was soon at Rough Rob's cottage. There he learnt that the Earl, his grandfather, was no more; he had guessed as much from the tolling of the funeral-bell that he had heard as he crossed the moor. His father, then, was the Earl of Rockalpine, and he was Lord Hauteville!

The old quondam locksmith, sober for once in his life, in anticipation of this "job," and of making up for his self-denial afterwards, was busy looking out, cleaning up, and sharpening the tools he had not seen nor used for years. He was in that state of maudlin misery and dejection that always succeeds to the excitement of strong drink; and the tools recalling as they did, happy days of honest industry and domestic comfort, he cried and moaned as he sorted and cleaned them.

The arrival of Brian did not put a stop to his moanings;

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only, instead of addressing them to himself, he addressed them to Master Brian, who, as great a tippler as himself, and on the eve of so nefarious and wicked an enterprise, was in no mood to listen to the wailings of a vague remorse and the groans of a morbid reaction.

Ere long Jock arrived at the place of rendezvous; and soon, rosy and radiant from her long, brisk walk, the hood of her red cloak setting off her glossy black hair, fine eyes, perfect features, and rich complexion, Marion Moss entered the hovel. She had dark thoughts in her mind, but she smiled a bright smile when she saw Brian; and as she greeted him by his new title of Lord Hauteville, and wished him long life to enjoy his fresh honours, her serpentine and scarlet lips, of the colour of the berries of the mountain-ash, parted so as to disclose two rows of pearl. Her tall, slight form was the perfection of symmetry; and Lord Hauteville, who had not seen her for some months, was astonished by the brilliancy of her beauty; and the passion, which absence had in some degree subdued (as it does all sensual passions), now rekindled at the blaze of her loveliness, and burnt fiercer than ever.

Marion explained that the old housekeeper was confined to her bed, ill with grief at the death of the aged Earl, whom she had served faithfully for forty years, that all the servants were collected together for company (as they always are in the house of Death) in the servants' hall, afraid to go upstairs, or to cross the hall alone! That she had stolen upstairs in the dark, and had peeped in at the door of the room where the Earl was laid out; that she had seen the still form under the sheet, and heard the three distinct snores of the red-faced, bottle-nosed Death-Watchers. Nay, more; she had stood in the light of the tapers round the coffin, and had watched them in their sleep.

"And now," she said, "if Lord Hauteville will see me safe home through the Black Wood, you, Father, and you, Jock, following in a little while, he can enter through the library window, which I've left unfastened; and you, Father, and you, Jock, must do the same. You'll have to creep upstairs in the dark; I've not lighted the lamp in the hall, and Tallboys and Puff do nothing but blubber and shake, and sit over the fire, and are afraid to stir; so they won't have seen about it. I've unlocked the bed-room door that opens on the landing, so you won't have to go through the room where the body and the death-watchers are. Not that either the former or the latter will stir a finger—but no matter, it daunts some people to be where Death is, though I'm not one of them. Once in my late Lord's bedchamber, you've only to pull the trunk from under the bed, to get possession of the will, and then be off back here with all speed; and I'll now make up a

glorious fire, and we'll burn the will to ashes. So lend a hand, Jock, and get me some peat and some of those dry old thorn roots out of the shed."

The fire was soon prepared, and Marion, with her queenly gait and elastic step, rose, and desiring Lord Hauteville to follow her, led the way across the moor.

"Wonderful creature!" said the new Lord Hauteville, as, offering her his arm, they hurried through the Black Wood. "Beautiful Marion! future Countess of Rockalpine! I wish I could look forward to placing a crown on that brow, instead of a coronet! You would indeed grace a throne, sweet love."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"She has two eyes, so soft and brown,
Take care!
She gives a side glance, and looks down;
Beware! beware!
Trust her not,—
She is fooling thee."

LONGFELLOW.

ALL happened as Marion had planned, and the midnight marauders were soon afterwards diligently pursuing their search. Old Kit Moss, with his skeleton keys in his hand; Jock, with a bull's-eye lantern in his, bringing its light to bear on the hoarded treasures of the dead man's life; and the new Lord Hauteville eagerly prying into the contents of the trunk in search of the will. That search, however, was a vain one. There were the bags of gold, the pocket-book full of bank-notes, the gold plate, the cases of jewels, the title-deeds of this farm, that estate! But the will in question was not to be found!—it was not there!

Marion, to avoid the shadow of suspicion, had rejoined the rest of the servants, male and female, assembled in the servants' hall.

* * * * *

There was a rapacious glitter in the eye of old Kit—it was reflected in that of Jock—but the presence of Lord Hauteville restrained them, else the gold and the bank-notes were very tempting. But Brian (Lord Hauteville), who was base enough to rob the dead of a will, and the living of her inheritance, had not yet sunk into a common robber. He ordered Jock and old Kit to restore the lock, fasten up the trunk, and replace it under the head of the bed.

Love (or what *he* called by the name) was at that moment the master-passion of his breast. He longed to be again with Marion—beautiful, bewitching, bewildering Marion!—who had been kinder, more tender, more loving (as they had passed arm-in-arm through the Black Wood) than he had ever known her

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before. It did not occur to him that his having become Lord Hauteville made any difference in her feelings towards him.

"I am loved! I am loved! Jubilate!" he said to himself, as, bidding his disappointed accomplices to follow, he, in hopes of overtaking Marion on her way to the hovel on the moor, stole downstairs in the dark to let himself out by the library window. But a peril, on which Lord Hauteville had not calculated, lay in wait for him.

While lying moaning in her bed, a strange fear had begun to flutter at the old housekeeper's heart. It was, that the death-watchers (prone as she well knew them to be "to keep their spirits up by pouring spirits down," and often as she had on other occasions supplied them with whiskey on the plea that "grief is dry," and "death-watching thirsty work") would get tipsy and set the house on fire. And her great dread and horror, connected with so frightful a probability, was, not that she herself, or the present Earl and Countess, or Edith (now Lady Edith Lorraine), or any of the servants, or the death-watchers themselves, should be burnt to death; but lest the only one in the house who could never feel bodily pain more, should be consumed by fire instead of going in a many-plumed hearse, followed by a train of mourning coaches, to be buried in state, as she well remembered the late Earl's father had been, and to be lowered into the vault where his ancestors, for hundreds of years, had been lying.

At this, to her, unbearable thought (for her one comfort in his death was the idea of the solemn magnificence of his funeral), the good old soul had jumped out of bed, thrown on her white wrapper, and, candle-in hand, had hurried along a corridor, and across the landing, just as the new Lord Hauteville had stolen out at the half-open door, and unseen by her (taking a peep at the old lady, and suppressing a laugh at her towering night-cap), had hurried downstairs in the dark. Once at the bottom, he groped his way across the hall, and to the library-window, and was soon once again hurrying across the garden, through the meadow, and out into the Black Wood.

The old housekeeper then made her way, with a beating heart and weeping eyes, to the dead Earl's dressing-room. The death-watchers still snored and slept, and slept and snored; but there was one watcher there, who did not, could not sleep. It was Edith, who, before retiring for the night, had stolen to the coffin-side, to print one long kiss of gratitude and love on the icy brow of the Dead. She had such good reason to believe that she had been the humble means of reconciling him to his Saviour, and of securing him a mansion among the Blest; and he, too, had so loved and cherished *her!*

"Oh, miss—I beg your pardon, my lady, I mean—Lady Edith, don't he look happy? Oh, ain't he a handsome corpse?"

And to think of these old drunken sarpients, hired and paid high to watch, and a snoring there like sows, and smelling of whiskey fit to pison one! I've a mind to shake the breath out of their vile bodies, that I have!"

"Oh, let them sleep on!" said Edith. "What can it matter?"

"Why, miss—my lady, I mean—they do say, none but wakeful watchers can keep the Evil Spirit from flying away with the dear departed soul; because, you see, my lady, just at first, the soul don't go quite away from the body like, but keeps hovering about its old abode, quite nat'ral; and they do say, that's just the time the Evil Spirit is on the look-out to pounce down on it, and fly away with it."

"Oh, never fear that," said Edith. "The Evil Spirit has no power over the soul of a believer. The Saviour takes care of his own; the Good Shepherd watches over all who love Him and believe in Him, sheep and lambs!"

"I hope you're right, miss," said the old lady, reverently kissing her dead master's hand; "but excuse me for saying, I do know from them as heard it from them who saw it, that the Evil One has carried off souls when the death-watchers slept."

* * * * *
 Meanwhile, Old Kit and his son Joek had stolen downstairs in the dark, had made their way safely out through the library window, across the grounds, through the meadows and the Black Wood, and had reached Rough Rob's hovel on the moor a few minutes after the new Lord Hauteville and Marion had arrived there.

Brian, Lord Hauteville, had overtaken Marian Moss at the entrance of the Black Wood.

"My beautiful, my beloved one!" he cried, throwing his arm round her slight waist, "what rapture to find you here, and alone!"

He was thinking only of *her*—he was in love with *her*!

She cared little or nothing for him—she only thought of raising herself, of being "My Lady;" of having wealth at will, and, above all, of being one day Countess of Rockalpine, and mistress of the old housekeeper at the Castle, whom she had always been obliged to obey so promptly, to treat with such respect and even reverence, and to call "ma'am," but who would then have to obey her, to bow down so humbly before her, and to call her "My Lady" and "Your Ladyship."

What "trifles make the sum of human things," and how important to the ambitious are some of the smallest items in the sum total of their anticipated greatness!

While Brian, Lord Hauteville, was, in spite of his title and his new dignity, thinking of nothing but Marion and her ravishing beauty—while some long-abandoned and base hopes and

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designs were, under the influence of her unwonted tenderness, again busy in his shallow brain and at his bad heart—her thoughts were not with him, save as the tool of her future greatness, the instrument to enable her to realise her ambitious hopes. He was only the lord who was to make her "My Lady," now, and the future Earl through whom she was one day to be a Countess.

Never (blind, sensual, credulous fool that he was), never at any time of their clandestine intercourse had she been less likely to forget one iota of that system which alone could induce the wedlock-loathing profligate to marry her, than now that, in the solitude of the Black Wood, she suffers him to press her to his side, and to hold her hand and cover it with kisses.

"You frighten me, dearest, you do indeed, my lord," she said. "I like to hear you say you love me, but you must not forget what I have often told you before; that to me even your love is terrible and unwelcome, if you forget the respect which the proudest lord in the land owes to the simplest village maiden who knows how to respect herself!"

The tone in which this was said awed the impetuous young lord; he was afraid. Marion was angry—he knew she *could* be very angry, and very unforgiving, too. He was no casuist—he did not know how hard it is for true Love to resent even great injuries—how prone Affection is to forgive.

Marion did not love him—she did not even like him—all eloquently as she told him with her lips and eyes that she adored him! No, she did not love him; and once, when he had seriously offended her, she had refused to speak to him or to "make it up" for three months. What if she should do so again?"

At the thought he dropped her hand, and withdrew his arm from her waist, and humbly said, "Forgive me, Marion!"

"I do forgive you with all my heart, dear love!" said the wily girl, herself taking his hand and carrying it to her warm velvet lips. "I do forgive you; nay, more—alone in this Black Wood I will have no fear, for I will call upon you to protect me against yourself, against—myself!"

"Against yourself! Oh, my angel, Marion! is it possible you need any protection against *my* love? and—oh! enchanting thought!—against *your own*? Do you, then, love me so well?"

"Hitherto, dear love," said Marion in her most beguiling tones, "I have depended solely on my own virtue: I now—no matter why—I now appeal to your honour!"

"You shall not appeal in vain, then, sublime, enchanting, incomparable, girl!" said the young lord, some latent spark of good in his darkened breast igniting at this appeal to his chivalry, his honour. "Believe me, Marion, if as a woman I love and dote on you, as a saint I honour, and obey, and reverence you!"

"Now you are my own dear noble Brian!" said Marion, "and we will not talk of love just now, it is a dangerous theme; but tell me all about the will. You have it safe, I hope?"

"No, dearest! did I not tell you of our failure? The will was *not* in that trunk at all! It was not there—it is some mistake! I am in hopes the will you fancied my old grandfather had made, he *never did make*. He had a great and a very proper idea of the rights of primogeniture; and that being the case, it is not very likely he would bequeath his fabulous wealth to the little whey-faced, carrotty cripple, my sister Edith was then!"

"How long is it since your mother last saw your sister Edith?" said Marion.

"Oh, she had never seen her since she was placed with the Crofts till they met in Paris."

"And was Lady Edith ever really a little whey-faced, carrotty cripple?" asked Marion.

"Yes; the most puny, pale, squalid, limping, silly little object I ever beheld; with a skin the colour of a primrose, a little, sharp, long face, and a quantity of carrotty hair, through which that pale, peaky face looked out as from a fire! The doctors said she'd be sadly deformed too, a hunchback, in fact, and that one leg was already much shorter than the other!"

"So much for their wisdom!" said Marion. "Lady Edith is now as tall as I am, and has the finest, most slender shape I ever saw; her hair is of a dark glossy auburn, with a golden light upon it. She is as beautiful as any angel, and moves like a queen. And I heard the Countess, your mother, say to the new Earl, your father, that the Crofts had been playing a very deep and double game, in concealing Lady Edith's perfect recovery, and the wonderful change in her appearance!"

"She is changed," said Lord Hauteville, "and so much the better for her; but if she were as lovely as Helen of Troy, that would not have made my grandfather alter his will in her favour; and I begin to hope and to believe that it's all a mistake from beginning to end."

"No! no! no!" said Marion, "it is no mistake; old Lawyer Croft drew out the will, and I was hid up in a closet, for your sake, Brian, and I even heard every word that was put into it! And I heard why the old man left everything to Lady Edith—it was because it was owing to *her* (at least, so he said) that he first began to think about his soul. Her little hymns and texts, and tracts, and collects, and prayers, had converted him. And I heard him say to old Croft that the least he could do for her, who had brought him to lay up treasures in Heaven, was to leave his earthly treasures to her, and that she was the only one who would act like the good steward in the Scriptures!"

"Well," said Lord Hauteville, "if he *was* such a fool *then*, I

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hope before he died he saw the error of his ways, and the injustice of cutting me out of what I had been in a manner promised, and that he burnt that foolish, unfair will. If it does not turn up, the one made in my favour *must* hold good; and the old man's wealth once mine, Marion, I need consult nothing but my own heart and yours, and we will be married, my beautiful, bewitching, beloved Marion! With your genius, wit, wisdom, grace, and beauty, the world will not trouble itself about the antecedents of so radiant a creature. My haughty mother, herself a *parvenu*, as I shall remind her if she refuses to visit you, may scold, and snorn, and sneer; but I believe the Lady Hauteville I shall present to the great world, will queen it there as her dainty ladyship never did! But here we are!"

Once more, before he lifted the latch, and entered her father's hovel, Marion raised his hand to her soft, warm lips, and then they sat down by the side of the noble fire which she had piled up before they went out. And in that golden and rubied light, Marion's brilliant beauty seemed to justify to Lord Hauteville what he knew the world *would* call a *mésalliance*, and his family a disgrace.

She had thrown off her cloak and hood, and the fire-light played on the flowing outline and soft curves of her perfect face and graceful form. It brought out the lustre of her black eyes and the glitter of her small, white, even teeth.

The glow on her cheek, and the fire of her glance again set the selfish sensualist calculating possibilities; for even while he meditated what the world called "a love match" and a *sacrifice*, SELF REIGNED SUPREME.

Brian, Lord Hauteville, could outrage society, offend his parents, defy opinion, lower his pride, ignore his best interests, his ambition—do anything but sacrifice *self*, or rather *selfish passion*.

And yet even he tried to think of himself as a martyr to LOVE! But Love, true Love, Love in its purest, noblest form, had nothing to do with the passionate impatience that brought the young lord, even in that rude hovel, on that stone floor, a kneeling, weeping suppliant to Marion's feet. But from this position he quickly rose, when he heard the heavy steps and gruff voices of his father and brother-in-law elect, at the wretched door of what once was Rough Rob's hovel!

CHAPTER XXXV.

"This is the house of death; the lights that steal
Thro' shrouded casements, serve but to reveal
The desolation."

ANON.

EVERYTHING was inexpressibly gloomy, still, and dreary in the darkened castle of Rockalpine. The arrangements for the

funeral of the late Earl were on so grand and so magnificent a scale (such useless pomp, expense, and ceremonial being an hereditary custom of the house of Rockalpine in consigning dust to dust), that it was impossible to fix the day of the burial earlier than at a fortnight's date from the death of the old Earl.

The new Earl of Rockalpine (to whom quiet was a purgatory, and inaction a hell, so distinctly was the "still, small voice" heard in the silence and the gloom), felt sometimes as if Reason would give way before the phantoms which Memory and Imagination conjured up.

The ghost of his brother—his bright, beautiful, gifted, affectionate, noble brother—seemed to him, whenever he strolled into the grounds (to breathe the fresh air and feel the sun, so carefully excluded from the house of Death), to beckon him to that Black Wood where "the deed that damns eternally was done"—done four-and-twenty years before, and yet vivid, fresh, distinct in his memory as an event of yesterday.

At night, his terrors took the shape of hideous nightmares. In the howl of the wind he heard his brother's moan; if he accidentally glanced from his window on the moon-lit grounds, he saw that pale, unrivalled face, that tall and noble form! Ever, to his fancy, the shade of his victim seemed, with up-raised hand, to beckon him.

Lady Rockalpine and himself were become a fashionable pair. They had separate apartments. It was her ladyship's wish—and, indeed, her determination; for though he courted her presence as a sort of protection from the phantoms he for ever conjured up, she had several times been so frightened by his nightmares, and the terrors, shrieks, and groans that accompanied them, that she had resolved to insist on separate apartments.

She knew how essential to all beauties, but especially to one on the wane, is that greatest of restoratives, "balmy sleep;" and her lord, who did not wish to have his nightmares trotted out, and paraded before the family physician, yielded in sullen silence to the arrangement she insisted on.

Everything connected with the recent funeral of his father recalled, with torturing distinctness, to the new Earl's mind, the death and burial of his brother. There were the same shrouded light, the same solemn stillness, the same woe-begone faces, stealthy steps, and low whisperings, and the same sickly, all-pervading scent of pastilles, burnt lavender, and other herbs, which the "death-watchers" were burning in the chamber of the Dead, and the odour of which diffused itself all over the Castle.

Lady Rockalpine, who hated Death, and everything connected with the "King of Terrors" (as all the vain and worldly do), tried to divert her mind by a correspondence with Mesdames Roget, Laure, and Palmyre, the celebrated Parisian

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artistes, patronized by that *blonde* Empress and Empress of *blondes*, Eugenie Impératrice.

The Countess was engaged in elaborate consultations with those great authorities, as to the most becoming style of mourning dresses, mantles, and bonnets to be adopted by herself and her daughters on their emerging from what she, like Anne Boleyn, called their "doleful prison in the Tower."

Whatever time this vain and frivolous woman did *not* spend in dress, and in consultation on this her ruling passion, she tried to get rid of in reading French novels, and in writing to, and answering letters from idle fashionables, as full of vanity and frivolity as herself.

In his Countess's company the wretched Earl of Rockalpine could, of course, find no solace. He tried the society of Edith, but she, in her deep grief at her grandfather's death, and in her great anxiety and distress about her beloved Arthur, from whom she had not heard, could converse freely but on one topic—RELIGION, and that topic was intolerable to the guilty, world-stained man, who well knew he could not serve two masters, God and Mammon, and *would not* throw off the yoke of the latter.

Ida Lorraine, now Lady Ida, whom the Countess of Rockalpine had left in town, was sent for in a great hurry by her mother, because the Countess of Richlands had invited her to Richlands Park.

Between Lady Rockalpine and her daughter, Lady Richlands, there was a perpetual warfare, on account of the abode at Richlands Park of the unhappy Georgina, Contessa di Roccabella. For, frivolous as the Countess of Rockalpine was, she had deep feelings of revenge and malice in her composition. She never forgave an insult, an injury, or even a slight. She was implacable in the case of Georgina, the unhappy Contessa, because she had disappointed, deceived, and outwitted her. She was furious against her daughter Augusta, Countess of Richlands, because she had sheltered, comforted, and upheld her wretched sister. For the same reason the Earl of Richlands was treated by Lady Rockalpine as a foe.

Again, she felt a bitter sense of anger and revenge against Mrs. Croft, for the deception which she considered the latter had practised upon her, about Edith's health and appearance. And she included in her resentment and her rage (she scarce knew why), poor Arthur Bertram, Mr. Croft's grandson; for she felt that he was just the intellectual, manly creature a girl like Edith would naturally (in so close an intimacy as theirs had been from childhood) learn to love and revere.

She had considerable shrewdness, too, and she had seen at a glance, when she beheld Edith and Arthur dancing together at the Ambassador's Ball at Paris, that they loved each other. Her daughter love old Croft's grandson!—oh, it was a thing

too degrading to contemplate! Besides, she had set her heart on Edith's marrying the young Marquis of Dunstanburgh, and she hated Arthur Bertram because she felt an instinctive conviction that he would be the barrier to so grand a match, and so desirable a union for Edith, and so delightful a connection for herself.

She hated her son Brian, Lord Hauteville, too, because he was a disgrace to the family—because he loved low company—and had blotched and blurred a naturally handsome face, and bloated and puffed out a good figure by the lowest kind of intemperance. She felt sure, too, that if he ever married, it would be some one far beneath him, and she thought of *him* with a shudder.

With regard to her affections, she had some little tenderness for Ida, and some liking for Edith (now that she was so beautiful, and so beloved by a Marquis); and she had a flimsy, demonstrative kind of friendship for some gaudy fashionables—male and female—together with a coaxing adoration of a little French poodle (a toy-dog) called Snowball; and he was, indeed, her chief companion and playmate at Rockalpine Castle.

Snowball was certainly a beautiful, affectionate, and intelligent creature, about the size of a full-grown squirrel, but covered all over, face, body and feet, with little, thick, flossy ringlets of silvery white. His face was beyond description pretty, and so were his tiny, thoroughbred paws. He could dance, beg, sit up, fetch, carry, shut the door; and, in short, was at once very accomplished and very intelligent. He was exclusive in his love for Lady Rockalpine, save in the case of Edith, to whom he vouchsafed many little tokens of favour, licking her hand with his small peach-blossom tongue, barking a little glad, musical bark at her approach, and sometimes even deigning to spring up on her lap.

* * * * *

One evening Edith, oppressed by the general gloom, and haunted by anxiety about Arthur, opened the glass door of the library, in which she had been sitting alone, and throwing a warm shawl over her head and person, walked out upon the moonlit terrace.

It was a beautiful, bright evening, very mild for the season of the year; and so much did she feel refreshed by the cool air, that she wandered on through the grounds until she came to a little summer-house which in their childhood's days (now so long ago) Edith Lorraine and Arthur Bertram had been used to call their castle, and to defend from the assaults of the little Croft girls, when they were all staying at Rockalpine.

This part of the garden was divided only by a low, iron fence from the brook and the strip of grass land which separated it from the Black Wood.

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The Black Wood had no terrors for Lady Edith; and she entered the summer-house, so full of the ghosts of the past. As Edith sank on a rustic seat, almost unconsciously to herself her secret thoughts stole from her lips in the words of a little duet, which she had been wont to sing with Arthur Bertram—

“Come to me!—come to me!
Over the dark blue sea,
I pine—I long for thee,
Choice of my heart!”

What well-known, well-loved voice catches up the strain? First pale, then red, now cold, now hot, the maiden starts up with ear attent, while a rich, manly voice responds—

“Dearest, I come to thee,
Over the dark blue sea,
Say, wilt thou dwell with me,
Never to part?”

It was no dream. A tall shadow fell on the door, as, with a bound, clearing the fences, Arthur was by his Edith's side. Yes, he was there; and, after a few moments, in which the tumultuous happiness of both forbade either to speak, Arthur explained that his grandfather, Mr. Croft, had sent for him peremptorily, to be present at the reading of the late Earl's will, but why his presence was required Arthur did not know. All he knew, all he felt, was, that he should be near his Edith, and that was enough for him.

“I came down here, my love, the day before yesterday,” he said, “and I have spent my time, chiefly, in roaming about night and day, hoping to catch a glimpse of your form in the gardens, and gazing at the light from what I heard from Mr. Croft was your window.”

Not long would Edith allow her Arthur to linger—not long would he have presumed to stay by her side.

They parted, cheered and solaced by that brief, unexpected meeting. As they clung together in a long, parting embrace, little did they dream how soon they would meet again!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“Pauline! look up, Pauline!
Thou art safe!” *Lady of Lyons.*

In the dead of the night, a shrill, wild cry of “Fire!” rang through Rockalpine Castle; and the Earl, the Countess, Lady Ida, and the terrified servants looked from their doors, in their white night-dresses, and pale as death, all asking what that shriek meant—all distinctly smelling the fire and the smoke, and all bent solely on saving themselves.

It was as the old housekeeper had feared. One of the death-watchers, in her high cauled nightcap had, in her drunken sleep, fallen against one of the wax tapers placed round the

coffin—a spark had dropped on her cap border, and in a few moments she was on fire.

Edith, who, as was her wont, before going to bed, had stolen to her grandfather's room to kiss the cold, cold brow, for the last time (for at dawn he was to be shut for ever from her sight), opened the door of the chamber of Death, just as the fire, smouldering in the garments of one of the death-watchers, was communicating itself to those of her neighbours.

Edith's piercing screams aroused them to the sense of their danger. Sobered at once, they rushed from the room, and on the landing, at the bottom of the stairs, were met by the old housekeeper, who, the first to hear that shriek of Edith's and her agonised reiterated cries of "Fire!" had roused the men-servants who slept down stairs, and who were bringing up pails of water to the scene of the conflagration.

In spite of the old housekeeper, whose sole care was for her dead master, the men *wasted* (as she called it) the water in putting out the flames that would soon have consumed the death-watchers. Meanwhile, Edith did her best to keep the raging element from her beloved grandfather's remains.

It was a strange sight. There lay the old man, from whose marble face and rigid form she had plucked the sheet, lest it should catch fire—the fire-light lending an almost life-like glow and play to his still, marble features, and Edith perilling her young life at the imminent risk of perishing by fire, to save the sacred remains of the inanimate, the senseless Dead.

Alas! she has used all the water in the room—the smoke begins to darken the air, and to choke, to smother her. The flames have luckily taken a direction away from the coffin and towards the door. Suddenly consciousness forsakes her—she sinks on the ground; when, lo! one of the windows of the room is forced open from without—the wind drives the flames fiercely towards her—but a dear voice recalls her to life—a strong arm is thrown round her!

Arthur Bertram, once again her guardian angel, raises her from the ground, and bears her in safety out of the room, just as, headed by the old housekeeper, the men-servants with cans and buckets of water rush in.

The fire is got under. The old housekeeper, at the risk of her own life, ascertains that her "blessed master's body is safe," and that he will yet be buried as his fathers were—that is, be borne in the plumed hearse, followed by the train of black coaches to the family vault. The danger over, Lord Rockalpine came forth. Arthur Bertram then explained that from a distance he had seen at the window the red glare which betrayed the fire; that he had, by aid of the terrace and the ivy, scaled the wall, and had burst in at the window, in time to save the Lady Edith. He did not add that he was wandering

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about the grounds to watch the light in her chamber, when the red glare in the window of the late Earl's dressing-room caught his eye.

The Earl asked him no questions. He coldly and haughtily thanked him, and offered him a bed at the Castle, but the manner in which he did this was so imperious and contemptuous (the Earl remarking that there were no rooms unoccupied, save in the servants' attic, but that Croft, his grandfather had occasionally slept there), that Arthur declined and took his leave—Edith, in spite of her father's presence, holding out her hands to him, and saying, "Heaven bless you, Arthur Bertram! You have again saved my life! How can I reward you?" To which Arthur had replied, "I am overpaid, Edith, in seeing you safe."

And thus they parted, the Earl angrily saying to Edith, "Go to bed. I am surprised that a daughter of mine should suffer a grandson of an attorney to address her, as that low upstart has addressed you, even in my presence. Not but what the odious and degrading familiarity began with you! Go to your room, and remember, if that young man appears before you again, I forbid you to exchange a word with him!"

Edith went in tears to her sleepless pillow, which was haunted by Arthur's dear face and form.

The Earl's pillow, too, was sleepless, and it was also haunted by the same face and form, and vividly did they recall those of one who had for four-and-twenty years been mouldering in the grave, but who seemed to live again in the shape of old Croft's detested, insulted, and despised grandson, Arthur Bertram!

The young Marquis of Dunstanburgh was, as we have said, a near neighbour of the Earl of Rockalpine's, in Northumberland. The late Earl and the late father of the present Marquis had been young men together. They had been chums at Eton and friends at Oxford; they had made (as was the fashion of their day) the "grand tour" (that is to say, travelled all over Europe) together; and, till avarice contracted the Earl's heart and soul, and diplomacy engrossed the Marquis's mind, there had been a sort of friendship between them. But when the Earl retired from the world, to hoard money at Rockalpine Castle, and the Marquis was sent as ambassador to the Court of —, their intercourse ceased.

Of the Rockalpine family, the principal seat was near A—, in Northumberland. The Marquis of Dunstanburgh had, besides his vast estate called Dunstanburgh (on the Borders), a noble park in England, and an old castle in Wales. The grounds of Rockalpine and those of Dunstanburgh ran side by side down to the North Sea, and the Black Wood of the former was only divided by a brook from a wild forest of wind-beaten firs belonging to the latter.

The young Marquis, more in love than ever with Edith Lorraine, after her appearance at the English ambassador's at Paris, and after the effect she had produced there, found that every place where she was not was a wilderness, just as every place where she *was* had seemed an Eden!

He had hinted at his attachment for Edith to her encouraging and delighted mother; and but for the sudden news of the old Earl's danger, he would have implored her ladyship's advocacy of his suit, and have entreated her permission to offer his hand and heart to her daughter Edith.

The poor girl had had a fortunate escape; for had the young Marquis positively declared himself to the then Lady Hauteville, as a suitor for her youngest daughter's hand, Edith would have found herself in a sort of purgatory. The persecutions she would have had to endure, would have rendered her life a martyrdom, and yet nothing would have induced her to yield, for she was devoted heart and soul to Arthur Bertram; and though she was far too dutiful, delicate, and right-minded to disobey even the mother who had sent her away from her for years, and marry Arthur, yet, at the same time she was determined never to become the wife of any other man.

The sudden summons to England, on account of the old Earl's alarming state, and the telegram that awaited Lord and Lady Hauteville on their arrival in town, put a stop for a short time to any further advances on the part of the Marquis of Dunstanburgh. Even Lady Rockalpine, much as she thought about the triumph of this brilliant alliance, and broadly as she hinted at it to her dozen "dearest friends" (in the world of fashion), could not indulge in any actual match-making while the old Earl lay dead in the house; but she only awaited his interment, to convert her flattering hopes into enchanting certainties; then should the young Marquis be invited to the Castle, and a formal engagement should be entered into, so that she could explain to her "dear friends" all she had hinted at, and be the envy of all the mammas of Belgravia and Mayfair, just as Edith would be that of their daughters.

But, impatient as the Countess of Rockalpine was, the young Marquis was still more so. He startled Roger Croft by the announcement that he had resolved on following Edith to Rockalpine.

The news of the old Earl's death had, by this time, reached Paris, and the young Marquis suddenly discovered that, as the nearest neighbour of the deceased, and on account of the former intimacy existing between the families at Dunstanburgh Abbey and Rockalpine Castle, he ought to attend the funeral.

"I shall then," he said to Roger Croft (little dreaming what hopes and plans he was overthrowing), "see that angelic girl, Edith, our Edith, *my* Edith, I may almost say, for I have

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hinted at my attachment for the darling, to her mother, and, spite of all that would-be fine lady's acquired *retenu* and reserve, her delight almost overpowered her."

"But Edith herself?" stammered Roger Croft, who himself loved Edith with such a love as he could feel, admired her beyond all expression, and had very long fed his ambition with the idea of marrying a *Lady* Edith, an Earl's daughter, and his cupidity, with the thought of the wealth which he knew the late Lord Rockalpine had bequeathed to her. "But Edith herself—have you any hopes?"

"*Lady* Edith Lorraine!" said the young Marquis, not a little nettled by the doubt. He spoke haughtily (he could be very haughty when he chose). "You must learn to think and speak of her not merely as the *Lady* Edith, but by a much higher title—as the Marchioness of Dunstanburgh!"

Roger Croft's brow darkened. He knew Edith had no love, no liking even, for the Marquis. His inordinate vanity made him really believe that she did admire, if not love himself. His mother had always assured him that no girl could inhabit the same house with him, without appreciating, admiring, and adoring him; and that, with regard to Arthur Bertram, she knew for a certainty that Edith's feelings towards *him* were those of a sister towards a brother.

Roger, conceited fool, coxcomb, fortune-hunter, ass, that he was, so fully believed that Edith would one day be his, that he had reckoned on her fortune as a certainty, and had even tried to borrow of a Jew, upon what he called the security of her property.

What reason could the Marquis have for speaking with such certainty of an event so ruinous to all his, Roger Croft's, hopes and plans, as a marriage between his Lordship and *Lady* Edith?

Roger Croft controlled his feelings, and tried to elicit what had passed on the subject between the Marquis, Edith, and her mother, but he was completely foiled. The great man was, as Roger afterwards told his mother, "deuced dry, and as close as wax."

The fact was, his lordship had, in reality, nothing to communicate, but he was not at all disposed to allow Roger Croft to discover that fact. His lordship's pretensions were, if not as ridiculous, quite as unfounded as those of the attorney's son. To avoid Roger Croft's ill-bred and irritating cross-questioning, the Marquis drew himself up, entrenched himself in his dignity, or, as Roger told his mother, "gave him the cold shoulder," and actually left Paris for Northumberland, without letting his toady tyrant know that he was going.

Vile was the rage, and viler still the vengeance that filled Roger Croft's bad heart at this act of haughty independence in one who hitherto (little as he suspected it) had been but as a

puppet, of which Roger Croft pulled the wires. But he was gone, and Roger was resolved to go too! Arthur Bertram had already been sent for by his grandfather; and Mrs. Croft, now Edith was gone, finding little notice was taken in Paris of herself and Gloriana, resolved to cut short her stay in that city, and to return at once to Croft Villa.

"Roger," she said to herself, "the dear, rash boy!—is so madly in love with the Lady Edith Lorraine (she liked to couple them together, even to herself), that if I am not there to counsel and to warn him, he may induce her to elope with him while she is a minor, and get into great trouble; perhaps be imprisoned for two years, as I remember that young Wakefield was, who ran away with a Miss Turner. I don't think, even if he did, that the colossal fortune the old Earl left her *absolutely* can be touched; but I'm not at all sure her father couldn't get the marriage dissolved, and my dear, beautiful Roger imprisoned! Besides, who can tell? Lady Edith can't endure the Marquis, but Gloriana is quite in love with him, and he has often been very attentive to her. Many a heart has been caught on the rebound. I feel I ought to be on the spot, both for Roger's sake and Gloriana's."

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Forty-eight hours later, Mrs. Croft and Gloriana were at Croft Villa. There, too, Arthur Bertram and Roger had met. There Mrs. Croft found them, in the library; Arthur apparently poring over a book, Roger smoking a cigar and drinking brandy-punch; but both, in reality, thinking of but one object—the Lady Edith Lorraine!

Arthur Bertram had not again presented himself at the Castle. The extreme *hauteur* and insolence of the new Earl's behaviour to him, on the night of the fire, had rendered it impossible for him to enter Edith's home again. He could not forget the contempt with which the Earl had said he could have a bed in the servants' attic, implying, as it did, that he looked upon him as little better than a menial. In the fulness of his heart he mentioned the circumstance to his grandfather, and he was startled at the effect the narrative produced on the now pale, grey, and quiet old man.

He started to his feet when Arthur mentioned the Earl's offer of a bed in the servants' attic, and, while his primrose face glowed like fire, and his pale, weak eyes seemed to emit phosphoric rays of wrath, he almost shrieked, clenching his thin hands, and stamping his feet—

"Ah! did he dare so to insult one who—— But no matter. A few days—a very few days—and he'll change his tone. A bed in the servants' attic, and for *you*! I wonder the God of Justice did not strike him dead on the spot! Ah! I have not forgotten—nay, I have hoarded up for years the memory of his

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insults to me. Arthur, listen : I am a self-made man, but I am not a low-born man. My father, once Croft of Croft, squandered his property, and I was brought up in a charity school—a charity school which my ancestors helped to found. I did not think it was known, Arthur, but that insolent lad—he was but a lad then—Wilfred Lorraine—he was not Lord Hauteville then—taunted me with it, in a room full of people—in the presence of my own servant he jeered and flouted at me, and called me ‘Blue-coat boy;’ and I vowed to be revenged on him. I never forgave him, *and I never will*. And now, now has he dared to insult you, and to offer you a bed in his servants’ attic? Oh! I’m glad of it—I’m glad of it, Arthur! Revenge is sweet—so sweet, so sweet, so sweet!” And he rubbed his thin old hands, and almost danced in his horrible and unnatural delight.

“Forgiveness is much sweeter, dear grandfather!” said Arthur, shocked and even alarmed at the unwonted excitement of the usually impassive, grave, and professionally dignified old lawyer.

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed old Croft; “I’ll forgive him when I’ve had my revenge; but not before, Arthur—not before!”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

“Come, let the burial rite be read,
The funeral song be sung.”

EDGAR POE.

THE day of the late Earl’s grand funeral approached; the Earl and Countess of Rockalpine, who felt that their son, Lord Hauteville, ought in common decency to pay the last tribute of respect to him who had, as they supposed, left him all that was not strictly entailed, left no effort untried to discover in what low haunt of dissipation this disgrace to his family was lurking.

Little did they imagine that, while the Earl had actually written to Detectives Meadows and Ferret, to urge them to find out the hiding-place of his son, that son was lurking in a little cottage on the Rockalpine estate. Little—when it became known that the beautiful parlour-maid, Marion Moss, had secretly left the Castle—little did they associate her departure with the continued absence of their profligate and self-willed son.

Yet so it was. Brian’s passion for Marion, fostered by her strange, fitful behaviour, had grown to such a madness, that even at such a time, while his grandfather lay yet unburied in his coffin, the selfish, sensual, and passionate man had but one thought, one feeling, one object in life—Marion! Marion! Marion!

One night, he suddenly appeared before her, in her father’s

and brother's absence, as she sat musing alone by the wood and peat fire, in the hovel that had once been Rough Rob's. His cheek was livid, his eyes were wild, the touch of his hand almost scorched her.

Marion was very brave, but even she was terrified. There were none near, and the expression of his eyes made her heart stand still.

It was a positive relief to her when he took a parchment from his pocket, and falling on his knees before her, spread it out on her lap.

It was a special licence. He had been absent for two days, and this had been his object.

"Marion," he cried, "I can live no longer without you! This night—this very night you must be my wife; this night or never! If you refuse me, Marion, I have another bride awaiting me. Would you know her name, cruel girl? Her name is—DEATH!"

He sprang to his feet at the word, dashed the large hot tears from his eyes, and taking a pistol from his breast-pocket, held it to his head, and was about to fire, when Marion shrieked aloud—

"No, no, no!—I consent! Brian, when you will, I will be your wife!"

She sank back fainting on the old wooden settle in the ingle nook, and he was again at her feet; again the large tears gushed forth, and he covered her hands with kisses. At length he said—

"Marion, my love—my bride—my wife, all is arranged! At the Mill Cottage, where I have been hiding, your father, Jock, and a clergyman—an old college friend of mine—await us. That must be your home—my home, beloved one, till the day of the funeral, when, by my grandfather's will, fabulous wealth will be ours."

Marion started and turned pale,—What if the other, the second will, should yet be found?

He read her thoughts, drew back, and thrust his hand into his breast.

"No! no!" she cried, "I am ready. I will go with you to the Mill Cottage. I little thought," she added with a pout, "to have been married in this old gown!"

"I will make that up to you, dear love! You shall blaze in diamonds and white satin, as the fairest bride at the birthday Drawing Room."

These words decided Marion. What other chance had she of being "My Lady," or of going to Court?

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At the Mill Cottage, in the presence of old Kit and Jock, the Rev. Copal Blackatter, a disreputable hack parson, joined the

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hands of Brian, Lord Hauteville, bachelor, and Marion Moss, spinster. By special licence such a marriage was valid.

The Rev. Copal Blackatter, old Kit, and Jock hurried away to get tipsy at the nearest public-house, and the bride and bridegroom, Lord and Lady Hauteville, remained at the Mill Cottage.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"The maiden's vanity, the lover's passion,
Must always end in something of this fashion:
She frets to find him weary of her charms—
He thinks no fetters heavier than her arms." LASCELLES.

THE evening before the funeral, Marion, Lady Hauteville, who had been ill from nervous excitement at the idea of being actually "My Lady," was lying on a sofa near the window, in the absence of Lord Hauteville, who already began to pine for some new excitement, and to grow weary of his bride, and the monotonous confinement of the Mill Cottage.

The little maid of the mill was sitting with her ladyship, for company to the latter, and had fallen asleep over her knitting, when suddenly the faint remaining light was darkened, and a shadow thrown on a novel Marion was reading; and looking round, she beheld a strange, red, black-whiskered face peering in at her through the cottage window-pane.

Instinctively she felt it was a Detective. She was right; it was Detective Meadows. Ever since the receipt of the Earl's letter, he had been engaged in a vain search after Lord Hauteville. At last he had got a clue—he was on his track—and withdrawing from the window, he concealed himself behind a tree until Lord Hauteville (about midnight) arrived at his bridal home, when Mr. Meadows followed him into the little cottage parlour.

The red face, sharp black eyes, and bushy dark whiskers, of Detective Meadows were not quite unknown to Lord Hauteville.

It was the first time the clever Detective had been tracking his lordship; but many of those with whom Hauteville, when he was Brian Lorraine, had delighted to associate, had been the objects of the Detective's astute and persevering pursuit. Prize-fighters who had killed their men: jockeys who had played some deep, unfair game; gamblers who kept some secret hell—as with all such outcasts of society Lord Hauteville had been wont to associate, the face of Detective Meadows was familiar to him.

Marion, who was still lying on her couch reading a novel when her husband returned, and who, though she did not love him, was much nettled at his long absence, and the sudden indifference which had succeeded to his passionate idolatry, did not look up when her lord entered. She pouted her pretty lips

and went on reading, pretending not to see him; but her heightened colour and quickened breathing showed that she was well aware of his presence. They had had a little tiff before he went out, and she, conscious that a few days before he would not have rested till she had forgiven him, had been boiling over with indignation at this, to her incomprehensible change in the man of whom she had so long been the tyrant, but who could now retaliate.

Had Marion known the human heart better, she would have been aware that while Love as an affection increases *after* marriage, Love as a passion seldom survives the honeymoon! and, with some very coarse natures, as in the case of Brian, Lord Hauteville, it is extinguished in a few days.

Lord Hauteville, who, on his side (now completely sated) began to repent of his silly love-match, and to hate the fetters which already galled him, entered the little cottage parlour with an insolent, reckless air, puffing a cigar, smelling of spirits, and occasionally, as he took his cigar from his mouth, singing his once-favourite song, called "Bachelor's Fare":—

"Free from satiety,
Care, and anxiety,
Charms of variety
Fall to his share.
Bacchus's blisses,
And Venus's kisses—
This, boys—this is
The bachelor's fare."

As he rounded off the last words, Detective Meadows touched him on the shoulder.

"Hallo, Meadows, old boy! what do you want with me?" said Lord Hauteville.

"Well, my lord," said the Detective, "'taint hardly in my line, but my lord, your father, up at the Castle, there, he wrote to me to try to find out your hiding-place. It's a little private job, puts a trifle or so in my pocket, and it's all for your good. So I've persevered till I got a clue, and when once I get a clue, the work's as good as done.

"Oh! hang it! I know that," said Lord Hauteville; "you need not blow your own trumpet here! But what does my father want with me, all in such a deuce of a hurry? The last sweetmeats that passed between us amounted to a threat to kick me out of doors!"

"Well, no, my lord, it's quite t'other," said Detective Meadows. "I'm sure the Right Honourable Earl of Rockalpine means all for your good, and I don't think it's any breach of confidence in me to read you his lordship's letters to me. I hope I ain't in no ways incommoding the lady."

"Oh! not at all," said Marion, in her blandest tones.

"She had at the first sound of the Detective's voice looked

up in some alarm from her book, and changed her recumbent posture to a sitting one.

"I always like to show my respect for the ladies," said Meadows:—

'Which manly hearts should guard the fair,' "

"Let me hear my father's letter, if you please Mr. Meadows," said Lord Hauteville, curtly.

"Certainly, my lord; leastways, all that concerns your lordship:—

"Sir,—You once showed considerable talent, address, and zeal in discovering for me the retreat of my son after that affair in Dean Street——,"

"Was it you, Meadows, put my father on my track, then?" said Hauteville.

"To be sure it was. Who else could have done it? If there is such a man, I don't know him; and what's more, if I did, I'd take off my hat to him any time in the day. Why Ferret tried it, and was dead beat."

"You're a clever fellow, Meadows," said Lord Hauteville.

"Go on. What does the *Relieving Officer* say next?"

"Why, he goes on to observe," said Meadows:—

"I remember I then told you how much I appreciated your services, and I now require them again. I can, in no way which I can devise, discover the address of my son, now Lord Hauteville. His grandfather, the late Earl of Rockalpine, is to be buried on the 13th instant; this is the 6th. As he is heir by his grandfather's will to all the real and personal estate, and as he is, I believe, sole executor and residuary legatee, it is of paramount importance that he should attend the funeral, and be present at the reading of the will. I am ashamed to advertise for him openly: I have already done so indirectly. If you will put every engine in your power to work, and discover my son's retreat——"

"Ah," said Meadows, checking himself, "all the rest is nothing to the purpose; but just this bit of a P.S. is:—

"If you succeed in discovering my son's retreat, and in getting him to hear reason, tell him from me that I am willing to shake hands with him over my father's coffin; that bygones shall be bygones, as far as I am concerned; and I hope Lord Hauteville will for ever cast aside the associates and the follies of Brian Lorraine. The funeral cannot take place till the 13th instant; therefore my son will, if you are fortunate in your search, have plenty of time to order his mourning—which he can at once do of Poole, whose bill I have paid for him. I hope to see Lord Hauteville at the Castle as soon as possible after you have discovered his retreat. You see I reckon confidently on your success; and remain, sir, your obedient servant,

"ROCKALPINE."

"Well, my Lord," said Detective Meadows, "that's the long and the short of it. I don't deny that you've a *fair* excuse, my lord"—and he bowed to Marion—"a very fair excuse; but my Lord Rockalpine has done the 'ansome thing by you. It isn't

every father that'll pay a long chalk of his own free will; so I hope you'll meet him half way. There's the old Earl lying dead up there; and though he's died in a ripe old age, yet Death in the 'ouse—a father's death—often softens a man's 'art, and——"

"I'd no idea my father would ever have paid that bill of Poole's," said Lord Hauteville. "Why he refused me ten pounds the last time I wrote to him about it!"

"As I said before, Death in the 'ouse alters men's minds and softens their 'arts; it sets us a-thinking and a-thinking who'll go next, and——"

"Meadows, I'll go up to the Castle at once with you," said Lord Hauteville, "if it is not too late."

"Never too late to mend, my lord!" said Meadows, who felt as if he had already fingered the reward, and secured the appointment for his son, which the Earl of Rockalpine offered.

"But you won't go, and leave me here alone, Brian?" said Marion.

"Well, I don't think it would be very pleasant for me, or any of the parties concerned, were you to accompany me to the Castle."

"In course not," said Detective Meadows; adding, as Lord Hauteville sauntered out, puffing his cigar, and merely nodding to Marion, "Love in a cottage for me! Lor', never fret, my dear, nor cry your pretty eyes out! he'll come back in double-quick time, and no mistake, never fear; and if he don't, there's as good fish in the sea as ever wor caught. So give us a kiss, there's a dear girl! The game's up with him, I can see."

"Wretch! impudent wretch!" cried Marion, as she gave the too gallant Detective a resounding slap in the face; "I am his wife—I AM LADY HAUTEVILLE!" and she drew her fine form up to its full height, while her beautiful black eyes flashed fire, and her cheeks glowed with rage and wounded pride.

"WALKER!" said the Detective—

"I'm no young man from the country,
So you can't come over me!"

"However, if you aren't agreeable, I shan't break my 'art. So, good night; I hear my lord calling. Good night, miss."

"I am his wife, I tell you, you low villain!"

"Ay, ay; anybody's wife—everybody's wife—somebody else's wife!" and with a wink and a nod, and thrusting his tongue into his cheek, Detective Meadows threw up the parlour-window, bolted out on to the little grass-plot, and overtook his lordship at the entrance to the Black Wood.

Whatever the Earl of Rockalpine and his son, Lord Hauteville, felt at this reconciliation in the House of Death, after a total estrangement of many years, neither betrayed any

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emotion. They shook hands over the now closed coffin of the old lord, whose remains had been removed to the library from the dressing-room, which was partly destroyed by the fire we have already described; and the new Earl then explained to his son why the funeral could not take place at once, namely, that the outer coffin was to be of so costly and elaborate a description (so richly embossed and emblazoned), that Mr. G——, the undertaker, could not promise to have it ready till the thirteenth. "And now, Hauteville," he said, "I must go and settle with Meadows. I believe your sisters are gone to bed, but I think you will find your mother (who keeps London hours in the country) up and in the drawing-room. But hark! who can be ringing at the castle gates at this hour? I fancy I heard wheels just now! There's the great bell again! What can it be?"

The Earl was ghastly white, cold, and shaking in every limb. That perpetual tormentor, a bad conscience, kept him (as it had done for twenty-five years) for ever on the *qui vive*. An unwonted noise at night, the approach of a policeman, a crowd in the street in which he lived—anything, sufficed to terrify him.

Meanwhile Lord Hauteville, without noticing his father's abject terror, ran down stairs to inquire who was ringing the castle bell at that unwonted hour.

Lord Rockalpine dreaded to go down, but he had not nerve enough to stay alone with the coffin that contained his father's corpse. He resolved to hasten to the drawing-room to Lady Rockalpine, and there to await the explanation of the loud and oft-repeated rings at the castle bell.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"My lord! what mean those stains of blood and mire—
That cheek of ashen hue—that glance of ire?" LASCELLES.

THE mystery was soon explained; for—pale, agitated, and stained with blood and dust—the young Marquis of Dunstanburgh was shown into the drawing-room of the Castle. The wheels, the noise of which the Earl had heard even in the chamber of Death, were those of *his* carriage, and the account he gave was as follows:—

He said he had arrived at Dunstanburgh the evening before, and had driven over to Bessborough Hall to dine with his sister, Lady Bessborough.

Bessborough Hall was in the same direction as Rockalpine Castle, but three miles beyond the latter. He was on his way back to Dunstanburgh Abbey, at about half-past eleven, his old coachman driving him, and his groom riding before to open the gates, when, as they were passing the outskirts of the Black Wood, just where it joined his own forest of firs, through

which there was a carriage-road, he was suddenly waked out of a sleep into which he had fallen by the appearance at the carriage window of a mounted highwayman, as he supposed; for he wore a black crape mask over the upper part of his face, and held in his hand a pistol, on the bright muzzle of which the moon shone. The wretch was about to fire, and he—the Marquis—not being armed—must have been killed on the spot, when the groom, who had stopped behind to fasten the gate that divided the Black Wood from Dunstanburgh Forest, suddenly dashed up, his fiery thoroughbred horse compelling the robber's steed to back; and the brave young fellow, who was luckily armed with a double-barrelled pistol, lodged the contents of one barrel in the first highwayman's brains, and discharged the other at a second robber (whom he unfortunately missed).

The highwaymen were three in number; and as the old coachman was about to let off a blunderbuss, which had been his travelling companion for many years, the two robbers who were not wounded galloped off at full speed, old Braggs, the coachman firing at them as they fled, but without effect.

"I felt some compunction," said the Marquis, "about leaving the wretch (who had fallen from his horse) weltering in his blood; but while I was bending down to examine his wound a bullet whizzed past my head, and entered the trunk of a tree close by. Convinced by this that the peril was by no means past, we set off at full speed. We then drove on towards Dunstanburgh," added the Marquis, "when it struck me that by that time the miscreants would be gone, and that if we returned to the spot, and examined the person and pockets of the man my groom had shot, we might obtain some clue as to who and what these fellows were; for the race of highwaymen has so completely died out, that I could scarcely believe they could be in reality 'knights of the road.'

"Old Baggs, my coachman, and Topsum, my groom, were very anxious to investigate this mystery. They will not believe that plunder was the object of these miscreants; they are convinced it was MURDER—MY MURDER!

"To satisfy my own mind and theirs, I returned to the spot. About a quarter of an hour had elapsed since we had left it, but yet, strange to say, the dead man and the horse were gone! We had seen the fellow drop to the ground, and had beheld him lying dead on the grass, with his steed grazing near him, and, before I resolved on going back myself, I had meant to send some of the men from the Abbey to bring the body to the 'Chequers;' but it was gone! The wretches, however, must have been lurking somewhere among the trees: for a shot was fired from a distance, and, though the ball was almost spent, it hit my groom, Topsum, in the right arm. Warned by this

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that we were not acting wisely in lingering in the Black Wood, and Topsum growing faint from pain and loss of blood, I bound up his arm as well as I could, and I resolved (as the Castle was close at hand, and the Abbey two miles off) to ride Topsum's horse myself, place him in the carriage, and crave your hospitality for the night."

"It is very lucky, Dunstanburgh," said the Earl, "that Meadows, the Detective, happens (by a singular chance) to be now in the Castle. With your leave, I will send him to you when you go (as I suppose you would like to do at once) to your room."

"I shall expect Dunstanburgh to return to me, after he has washed off that dreadful blood and changed his things for some of yours, Rockalpine," said the Countess. "I expect him to tea with me."

The Marquis bowed. At tea with the mother, he could talk of the daughter. But he agreed to see Meadows, who longed to be on the track of the supposed highwaymen.

Lord Hauteville, who never felt at home with those of his own rank, did not choose to help to entertain the Marquis. He retired to bed, and the late ardent lover was soon fast asleep in the Castle, while his bride of a week was crying on her pillow in the cottage—not from wounded love, but wounded vanity.

The Earl of Rockalpine, immensely relieved to find that the solution of this strange visit had no reference to him, welcomed the young Marquis as warmly as so cold and stern a host could. Lady Rockalpine, wearied to death of her own company and the monotony of her life at the Castle, was all smiles and good humour.

While the Marquis was shown to his room, and supplied with whatever he required from the Earl's wardrobe, and while he gave a detailed account of the attack to Detective Meadows, Lady Rockalpine slipped into her dressing-room, to smooth her still fine hair, touch up her complexion, her lips, and eyebrows, exchanging her dull, heavy dress for one lighter and more becoming, and add a brooch and a few other ornaments to her attire. Revived in beauty, fragrant with some new *bouquet*, graceful and gay, her ladyship presided at the tea she had ordered for her unexpected guest. A bright wood and coal fire, piled up artistically, burned in the huge, cavernous grate. The room was lighted up. Her ladyship's tea-table was covered with a snow-white damask cloth; the bright silver and the delicate china reflected the lights and the fire; the tea was perfection, the muffins and the buttered toast, the apricot and the quince marmalade, could not be surpassed; and the young Marquis, hungry after his adventure in the Black Wood, fully enjoyed his delicate repast. The Marquis thought again and again how delightful it would be when he was married to

Edith, to have so engaging, admiring, and sympathising a mother-in-law! and they talked of the attack on his lordship in the wood, until they had exhausted that topic, and then he led the discourse to the theme next his heart!—EDITH. Neither Edith's mother nor her admirer suffered any doubt of *her* consent to enter into the bright future they were mapping out between them.

It was three o'clock before they retired to rest. The Marquis, who was a kind master, went to Topsum's chamber before he sought his own, and, finding that Mrs. Prosser had dressed the groom's wound (it was only a flesh wound), and had administered a soothing draught, under the influence of which Topsum slept soundly, the young lover retired to his own apartments—*apartments* could be prepared for *him*, though Arthur Bertram, who had saved Edith's life, could only have had a garret among the servants. Dunstanburgh dreamt of Edith. In that dream she was arrayed as a bride—all orange blossom, lace, white satin, and pearls, tears, smiles, and blushes; but when he tried to clasp her to his heart, the fair form shrunk into a skeleton arrayed in a shroud, and a voice said, "THY BRIDE IS DEATH!"

CHAPTER XL.

"The morn is up again—the dewy morn,
With breath all incense, and with cheek all bloom,
Laughing the clouds away; as if in scorn." BYRON.

THE next morning, as soon as it was light, Edith rose from her sleepless couch; she was so miserable when she thought of the reception her father had given to her heart's idol, her beloved Arthur, and that, too, just after he had again saved her life, at the imminent risk of his own! To treat *him* so haughtily, so coldly—to offer *him* a room in the servants' garret! He, so gentle, so dignified, so refined! What if he *were* old Croft's grandson? He had the heart and the bearing of Prince Arthur, himself! And that *her* father should try to humble *him*! In the solitude of her own chamber, her cheeks burned, her tears gushed forth, and her bosom swelled at the thought. Poor Edith sank on her knees by her bedside, and tried to pray—to pray for faith, hope, resignation—to pray for Arthur, and the happy home they had so often pictured to themselves as one day to be theirs. Presently she heard a low tap at her door; she rose and admitted Phœbe, the maid who waited on herself and Ida.

"I thought I heard you stirring, my lady," said Phœbe, "so I have brought your hot water. And, if you please, my lady, this note was given me just now by a village lad, with orders to give it to you when you were alone."

Edith tried to look unconcerned as she took it, but she blushed and trembled when she recognised Arthur's handwriting. Phoebe left the room. Edith tore open the note. It was hastily written and blotted—could it be with tears? It ran thus:—

“DEAREST!—A quarrel has arisen between the M. of D. and myself—he has insulted me grossly. It seems he is jealous of what he calls my insolent familiarity with one whose parents encourage his addresses. I did not know he had declared himself. Alas! I have long suspected that he loved you. Whatever happens, do not too readily condemn your devoted, most unhappy

ARTHUR.”

This strange note added to Edith's distress and discomfort, and, unable to bear the confinement of her chamber while she felt so restless and impatient, she hastily completed her toilet, put on her hat and cloak, and stole down stairs, and out into the garden.

Edith took out Arthur's singular note, and read it again and again. “Whatever happens do not condemn your devoted, unhappy Arthur.” As she pondered, with a white cheek and sinking heart, on these words, the morning breeze fluttered the paper in her hand, and she saw, as it opened the leaves, that there was a P.S. on the other side. She eagerly read—

“I hope in this hour of trial to be able to act up to my principles. I try, too, to have entire faith in your love, your constancy. What can the M. of D. mean by his confidence that you will be his? and by what right has he dared to insult so vilely one . . . My brain is on fire! Adieu!”

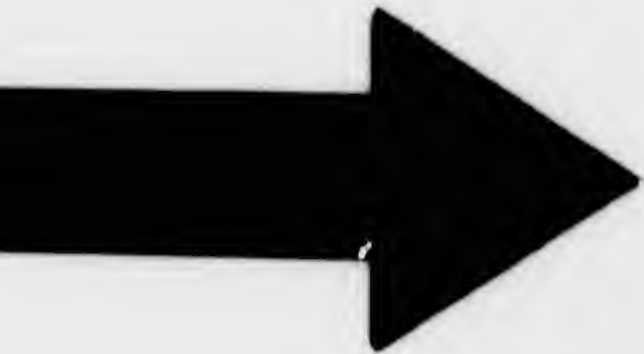
Edith thrust the note into her bosom, and walked hurriedly, but with an uneven step, along the paths, and across the lawn, crisp and glittering with hoar frost. An old bloodhound, who was always loose at night, and who, a terror to foes, was gentle as a lamb to his friends—Edith particularly—came up, his long, silken tan ears hanging by the side of his grave, solemn, handsome face; and poking his black, cold nose into Edith's hand, and climbing up her side with his thoroughbred forepaws, he seemed to beg leave to follow her.

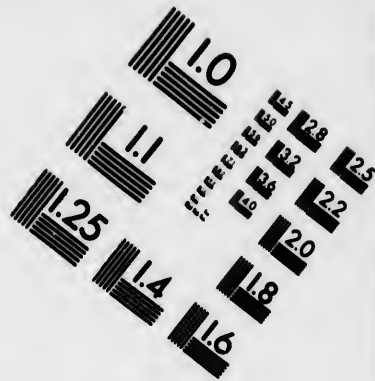
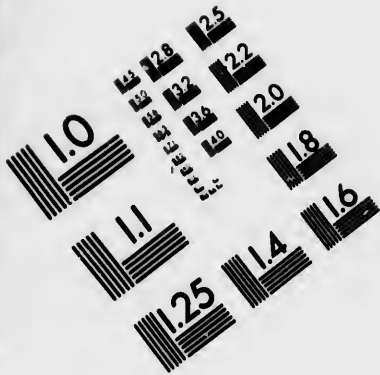
Sick at heart with suspense and fear, her pulse throbbing with the indignation a loving woman always feels at the thought of an insult to her dearest one; doubtful how to act, and shivering with a vague presentiment of coming evil, Edith was yet glad of the bloodhound's company. She loved old Hubert, and coaxed and patted him absently, and with a cold hand, as they went on together.

Edith had heard of the Marquis's adventure of the night before. She was aware that he was sleeping in the Castle, for Phoebe had come into her room after she was in bed and asleep, and had waked her up to tell her the wonderful news.

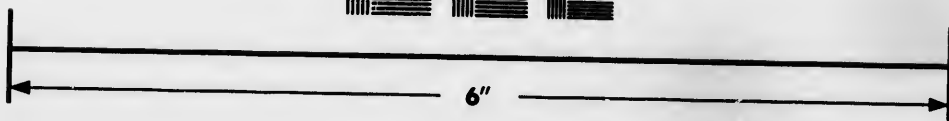
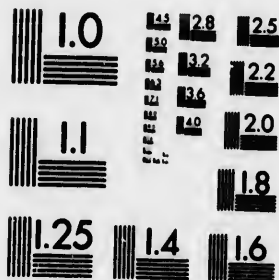
Edith walked on through the shrubbery to the summer-







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house where she had met Arthur. As the reader knows, it was separated only by a hedge from the strip of grass-land that connected it with the Black Wood. Here, to her surprise, Hubert made a dead stop, whined, sniffed, grew excited, smelt the ground, uttered a low cry, and bounding over the hedge, ran quickly along, his nose on the ground all the way, till he was lost to her view in the dark depths of the Black Wood.

Edith called him back in vain; when, lo! her eye following the direction of his footsteps, she saw on the leaves and the blades of grass some dark crimson drops, at sight of which she grew cold and faint; and she knew that the bloodhound was on the track—the track of blood—for she felt certain that those goutts were of human gore, and were somehow connected with the attack on the young Marquis in the Black Wood on the previous night.

Edith sank down on the steps of the summer-house, and tried to collect her thoughts.

She had not a very vivid recollection of the details of Phœbe's wonderful story of the night before; for she was fast asleep, and dreaming of Interlachen and Arthur, when Phœbe came in, sent by Lady Ida, to tell her sister that the Marquis had been attacked by highwaymen in the Black Wood, and was actually at that moment closeted with Detective Meadows in the state apartments. Edith remembered that Phœbe had said that young Topsum—his lordship's handsome, dapper young groom—was wounded in the arm (for Edith was always alive to suffering in any shape); and she remembered, too, that the Marquis had escaped unhurt, and that Phœbe had said (on the authority of old Baggs), that the villains were no common highwaymen—that they wanted to *murder* his lord, *not to rob him*.

But all this, which filled her heart with horror now, had scarcely affected her the night before; for then the Marquis alone was concerned. Now, she could not help associating Arthur's quarrel with Dunstanburgh with this mysterious affair; not that she for a moment allowed a shadow of suspicion of Arthur's honour to cross her heart. The Marquis might have so grossly insulted him, that even he, in spite of his Christian horror of duelling, might have been unable to act up to his own high standard of forbearance and endurance. In the hour of trial he might (for the warm blood of youth flowed in his veins)—he might have forgotten the resolution he had so often expressed, never under any circumstances to suffer himself to be induced to take a part in what he called a cold-blooded murder, with malice prepense, to blacken it.

That was possible—just barely possible—but very unlikely, Edith thought; for the Marquis was not only a nobleman, he was a gentleman, and she did not think he would have so far forgotten himself as to strike her Arthur, or inflict any other

personal and intolerable indignity on his dear and sacred person. And even if he had done so, Arthur, in the exasperation of the moment, might have knocked him down, but he would not have called him out.

Edith had known Arthur so intimately from his childhood, she was so perfectly acquainted with his feelings, his thoughts, his modes of action—she knew him so thoroughly, he had so often talked freely to her of what he never spoke of to the world (only betraying it by his deeds)—the deep religion, the Christianity of his heart—that Edith felt certain he could never deliberately do an unchristian act. This cowardly attack on the Marquis in the Black Wood could in no way be connected with his quarrel with Arthur.

She started and stepped aside as she pondered these things in her mind, for as she gathered up the folds of her black dress, she perceived that the hem of her white petticoat was stained with blood. Edith shook as with an ague when she perceived the deadly stain, and heartily she wished herself back in her own chamber.

It was a very lonely part of the grounds, and there was not a creature to be seen, a leaf stirring; when, just as she had decided on retracing their steps, Hubert came bounding back to her, with something in his mouth, which he dropped at her feet. It was a round straw hat, with a black crape mask fastened to it, both stained with blood, as were the bloodhound's jowl and dewlap. But—oh! horror of horrors—that hat! As she gazes on it, a deadly faintness comes over her, for it is a hat—a round, straw hat—belonging to Arthur, and which he had bought in Switzerland. The bit of black ribbon that bound it, and that was tied round the crown, had been put on by herself; and on the head-lining were the initials "A. B.," marked by her, with her own auburn hair.

She well remembered the happy summer day, in a dark pine forest, the ground of which was studded with wild strawberries, when, as she sat embroidering a collar, while Arthur read "Lucille" to her, she had playfully taken a long hair of golden brown from one of her plaits, and had marked the head-lining of the hat he had thrown on the grass at her feet, with those dear initials, "A. B."

And now, how comes that hat—which Arthur so valued, so treasured, for the sake of that very mark—to be spotted, blotted with blood, and stained with earth, and to have that black crape mask attached to it?

The blood-hound stood looking up into Edith's face for applause, wagging his tail, licking her hand, and placing his fore-paws on her shoulders in his triumph and glee.

And Edith—what made her pick up that hat, and that black crape mask? And why did she ascend the steps of the sum-

mer-house, and, opening the door, sink half-fainting on the first seat she met with? And what, too, in that summer-house, is Hubert sniffing at through the closed door of the cupboard?

Edith starts to her feet; the cupboard is only secured by a button—she opens it. What does she behold? An overcoat, a pair of boots, and a pocket-handkerchief, all spotted with blood and mire, all well known to her as Arthur's; and in the further corner a wash-hand-basin, which had evidently been recently used and emptied, but at the bottom of which was blood! blood!

Oh! what had Arthur to do with this blood? Was it his, or, worse still, had he shed it? Impossible! The thought was treason to her beloved. Oh! if she could but see him—but ask him what it all meant!

There was a loft, where apples and pears had been at one time kept, at the top of the summer-house; a small light ladder placed against the trap-door formed the access to it. This it was that, as children, Arthur and herself had been used to ascend, in their defence of their castle against the invaders, the little Crofts, and their custom was to run up the ladder, draw it up after them at the approach of the enemy, and shut down the trap-door.

And now, gazing in dismay, doubt, and terror from the window, Edith perceives the person whom, from her maid's description, she knows to be Detective Meadows, with several other men coming towards the summer-house. Some vague, mysterious foreshadowing of evil and peril to her Arthur (connected with his blood-stained garments), prompts her to catch them up, with the washing-basin, and with steps winged by fear, darting up the ladder, she drew it up after her, and closed the trap-door, just as she heard the voices and steps of Detective Meadows and his companions, as they halted and held a council of war outside the summer-house.

Hubert had left her side; he had darted off again, sniffing at the ground as he went, and following the track of blood back into the Black Wood.

CHAPTER XLI.

"Love oftimes in the haughtiest knight
His castest conquest sees—

The plume that leads the foremost fight,
The toy to every breeze."

SIR E. BULWER LYTTON.

EDITH'S heart beat quick; she hears the party ascending the steps, and entering the summer-house. She listens—her soul is in her ear! She distinguishes the voices of the Marquis of Dunstanburgh and Roger Croft. Lord Hauteville, too, was of the party; for a hunt of any kind brings men of all descriptions together, and little as Lord Hauteville liked the young

Marquis, an investigation of this kind, with Detective Meadows at its head, was irresistible. The Earl of Rockalpine, alone, felt no inclination to take part in a search that must lead him to a place he shunned and loathed beyond all others on earth—the Black Wood.

Edith, from the spot in the loft where she was kneeling, her ear close to the trap-door, distinctly heard Roger Croft say,

"I wonder who has removed the ladder, and shut the trap-door of the loft?"

"Very likely the under-gardener, sir," said one of the men; "he often wants that ladder."

"Let's have a squint into the cupboard, Detective," said Roger Croft.

"Nothing here, sir," said Detective Meadows.

"And what did you expect to find there?" asked the young Marquis; "eh, Roger?"

"I? Oh! I didn't expect to find anything particular," said Roger; "only one never knows what *may* turn up, when a horrible deed like this has been attempted. It's just possible that the nearest place of shelter might contain some clue; one of the assassins might have hidden up here, or stowed away his weapon, or his disguise, or something."

"Well I vote we push on," said Lord Hauteville; "we're losing precious time. Let's get to the spot where Dunstanburgh was attacked. There may be footsteps or something there—there's nothing here."

He left the summer-house, followed by Detective Meadows, the young Marquis and Roger Croft remaining for some minutes behind.

"Excuse me, Dunstanburgh," said Roger Croft, "but is there any person in the world who owes you a grudge?"

"No," said the young Marquis, colouring; "not that I know of—at any rate, no one who would be capable of anything so mean and dastardly as assassination."

"But have you had a quarrel with any one, Dunstanburgh? I'm an old friend and a schoolfellow, and I think the friendship of so many years entitles me to sift a matter in which your safety is concerned."

"Well, then, Roger I've had a desperate quarrel with Arthur Bertram."

"Ha!" cried Roger. "Tell me the particulars."

"Oh! I was to blame; and if Bertram hadn't been so deuced cool and uppish, I'd gladly have made *l'amende honorable*; but, as it was, he put me in a dence of a passion, and I forgot myself so far as to call him a bastard, and to threaten him with a horse-whipping."

"But when did this happen?" asked Roger, eagerly.

"Well to begin at the beginning," said the Marquis. "I must

tell you that my sister, Lady Bessborough, knowing I was coming down to Dunstanburgh, happened to ask me to call at Madame La Mode's, in Piccadilly, in order to bring her down some head-dress, which she was to wear, as Anne Boleyn, at Lord Egerton's fancy ball, at the Priory. She was afraid it would not come in time, and wanted me to make sure of it. So I called at old La Mode's and was shown up into the milliner's show-rooms, where fourteen or fifteen pretty girls were wasting their bloom, youth, and beauty, to set off that of their wealthier and happier sisters. Poor things! what thin fingers, hollow eyes, and pale cheeks I saw assembled there! The forewoman, a hideous old maid, explained to me that my sister's Anne Boleyn head-dress was not quite ready. I found out, afterwards, that it was not even begun; but she said it should be sent by post, etc., etc., etc., and I left her shop, and sauntered into the jeweller's, next door, to see about some studs I had ordered, when I came suddenly upon Arthur Bertram. He was standing with his back towards me, but I knew him at a glance. He was fitting, with the help of the jeweller, a small miniature portrait, on ivory, and a lock of hair into a gold setting. The lock of hair arrested my attention. There is but one head in the world from which that hair *could* have been severed. As he unwound it to its full length—its extraordinary length, I may say—and a ray of sun lighted up that golden gloss, so rare on brown hair—so peculiar, indeed, to one only—suspicion grew into certainty, and I felt my blood boil. That blood was not cooled when, after the hair was placed under the crystal (Bertram would not let any fingers but his own touch it), I saw the other side of the locket, as, absorbed in its contemplation, he held it in his hands before his eyes. It was an exquisite miniature of—of—of Edith Lorraine."

Roger started—nay, grew white.

"Yes, there could be no mistake about it. There is no other face so full at once of feeling, intellect, beauty, charm! There was the fair full brow, shaded by these waves of golden brown; the large, deep-set, dark-blue eyes, so full of light; the little delicate nose; the enchanting mouth; the sweet smile; the very dimple in the left cheek, and in the round chin. But, God of heaven! Roger, there was a look of deep love, which I have never seen in that haunting face. Roger, you know how I love, how I idolize Edith. You have often assured me my love is reciprocated, as far as a young creature so gentle and so timid may reciprocate an unacknowledged passion; you have often assured me that Edith Lorraine has only a sister's feelings towards Arthur Bertram; and now—now, when I have revealed my adoration of Edith to her mother, *who has all but promised her to me*—now, that I only wait for the funeral of the late Earl is well over to declare myself to the present one, and to the

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heavenly girl herself—now, I know that Arthur Bertram and Edith Lorraine are lovers, for ought I know, betrothed lovers; and if so, all I live for, care for on earth, is taken from me, the Marquis of Dunstanburgh, to be given to that bastard (for such I believe him to be), yes, to be given to that bastard, Arthur Bertram! And he thus becomes far wealthier than I am, for the rose of the world, the pearl above price, is his; and I envy, I hate, I curse him!”

“Ah! but,” said Roger, “I think you jump too rapidly to a conclusion, so torturing to yourself, so disgraceful to Lady Edith, so distressing to her friends.”

“How so? Did I not see her bright tress in his fingers—her portrait smiling at him?”

“But he may have got both by stealth; or she may have commissioned him to get the miniature and the hair set, as a surprise for her mother or her sister; or she may, looking upon him as the adopted brother of so many years, from whom she is now suddenly parted, have given them to him—not as a love-gift, but just as a sister might.”

“No, no, no! The paper in which they were wrapped up lay on the counter before him; and though he caught it up in a great hurry, I had already seen the words, in her delicate and beautiful hand, ‘Keep this, my own Arthur, until the original is yours.’”

CHAPTER XLII.

“What guardian angel’s like a woman’s love?” LASCELLES.

“THAT’s a sticker, I own,” said Roger, livid in his turn with rage, jealousy, and envy. “I wonder you didn’t snatch the locket from his hand, and kick him out of the shop.”

“Two can play at that game,” said the Marquis; “and Bertram’s a very strong, active fellow, and about the best wrestler going. Besides, fancy my name getting into the papers as connected with such an assault, and about Lady Edith Lorraine, too! No; I kept out of his sight, and very soon afterwards he left the shop. I saw no more of him till yesterday evening, when, on my way to dine at Bessborough Hall, I passed the Black Wood. As it was rather a steep ascent, I got out of the carriage to walk up hill, and I came suddenly on this fellow Bertram, sitting on the trunk of a felled tree, and gazing at the very miniature I told you of. I came upon him so suddenly, that he dropped it. Before he was aware, I believe, who I was, I darted at it, and picked it up. He snatched at it in vain; I resisted, and being, I own, in a deuce of a rage, I said: ‘Let me know, sir, if you please, by what authority you have obtained possession of’ a portrait and a lock of hair of Lady Edith Lorraine’s?’

"'I will answer that question,' he replied, very coolly, 'when you tell me by what right you put it.'

"He was so cool and quiet, that I was quite off my guard, when suddenly closing with me, he snatched the locket out of my hand, and pushed me—I don't know whether intentionally or accidentally—from the raised footpath (you know it well—the gangway they call it), some six feet in depth, into the road. Luckily the carriage and servants had turned the corner, and thus the latter did not see the indignity offered to their master. I was mad with rage, and soon clambered up the bank; and when I saw him putting the locket in his bosom, I felt as if I could have strangled him then and there. My blood was boiling—his seemed quite cool. Fool that I was, I shouted in my blind rage, 'I demand that portrait! You can have no right to the miniature of a lady whose mother encourages my addresses!'

"That encouragement will stand you in no stead if the Lady Edith herself declines them, as I strongly suspect she will do,' he said, very calmly, and with a most provoking smile on his confoundedly fine face.

"'And yours, I suppose, she will accept, eh? and prefer a low bastard to the Marquis of Dunstanburgh?' I said, resolved to close with him, and have a tussel for the picture.

"At the word *bastard*, he started, and turned first very white, and then very red.

"'You are a Marquis,' he said, 'but you are no gentleman; I am no bastard, and I am a gentleman—we do not meet on an equality. You are aiming at getting possession of this picture; now listen—you shall have my heart's blood first. If you approach me, I will throw you again. I could wrestle (as you well know) with two like you when I was eighteen. But stand off; I don't want to disgrace or to punish you, and before your own servants, too. See—they are come back to look for you.'

"'Bastard! base, low-born bastard!' I said—'for you are nothing else—you *shall* give me the satisfaction that none but a coward would refuse. Meet me on Dunstanburgh Flats at noon to-morrow. There is no place so safe, lonely, and remote. Bring any one you please as your second. We are both good shots; let pistols be our weapons. A boat shall be in readiness, in case I fall, to row you off to my yacht, and *vice versa*.'

"'I am no *duellist*—or rather no MURDERER,' said the young bastard, with the air of a prince.

"'But you shall be the former,' I cried; 'I hope to prevent your being the latter. If you refuse to meet me, I'll post you all over England, and horsewhip you wherever we meet. I shall expect you at Dunstanburgh Flats to-morrow, at noon; you know the spot well. You know the alternative, too,' I shouted, hoarse with passion. 'Bastard! will not the Lady Edith be

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"I will be there," he said, white with rage; and I descended the bank, entered my carriage, and saw him no more. And now, Roger Croft," added the Marquis, "we are old friends, and I know you hate this Bertram, and for my sake, too, as much as I do; and so I ask you to be my second. I know, under existing laws, it is a great risk. If either of us fall—and one of us *must* and *shall*, for we cannot both breathe freely in the same world—you will have to go abroad for a time. You may be much bothered, and therefore, if you give me this proof of your regard, you deserve well of me in return. I have no relations, except two married sisters, both very wealthy; my large estates are, as you know, entailed; but all that is *not* entailed—all my personality, and twenty thousand pounds—I leave to you. I made my will last night; it is properly signed, sealed, and witnessed. Nay, no thanks; what I offer you I can well spare if I fall; and as I have no one I care a pin for, it is no great proof of affection. But answer me at once—will you be my second?"

There was something to Edith's ear very strange, hoarse, and hollow in the voice in which, after a long pause, Roger Croft answered—

"I WILL!"

"We have not much time to spare," said the Marquis; "for we *must* join in the search in the Black Wood, and present ourselves at the Countess's breakfast table. We can then slip out on some excuse or other, and I will drive you over to Dunstanburgh."

"Agreed," said Roger; "but I don't think that fellow Bertram will *show up*; nay, more, I've a great notion that he's at the bottom of the attempt to pick you off last night; and, all things considered, I think one would almost be justified in having him before a magistrate—the old Rector would do—who, I dare say, would see the thing in the true light, and commit him at once."

"No," said the Marquis; "I don't believe he'd anything to do with the attack of last night. There's something fine about the fellow, after all. I shouldn't like to take an unfair advantage of him, but I should be very glad to give him his *quietus* in a fair and equal combat—man to man. I've told you what I have done for you; even at the worst you can't take any harm. If I fall, your fortune's made; if Bertram's picked off, I'll do the same for you by deed of gift, and we'll leave the country together for a time, till it's all blown over. When we return, we may find that the fair Edith has dried her tears."

"Oh! no doubt of that," said Roger. "If a living dog is better than a dead lion, how much better must a living lion be than a dead dog? Besides, women have such short memories.

Look at all your disconsolate widows—all weeds one month, and all orange blossoms the next. If there's a transferable thing in the world, it's a woman's heart. That's the ticket!"

They left the summer-house as Roger spoke; and Edith, sick at heart, and the cold drops standing like beads on her brow, (for she had heard every word that the Marquis and Roger Croft had spoken), prayed where she still knelt by the trap-door—prayed fervently to her Father in heaven for guidance and strength, and for inspiration how to act, so as to save her Arthur from being murdered, or—more dreadful still—from being a murderer.

Edith rose from her knees, refreshed and comforted in spirit, and quite resolved how to act.

Dunstanburgh Flats were about five miles from Rockalpine. They owed their name to a number of broad, flat slabs of rock (of large size), which were only visible at low water, and were embedded in firm, smooth, level sand, which when the tide was out, was some acres in extent, and was curiously fenced in by a ridge or rampart of rocks.

This strange spot was on the Dunstanburgh estate, and on all that wild coast there was no place so lonely and desolate; for there were many traditions connected with it, and ghosts of shipwrecked mariners were said to meet and dance by moonlight, at low water, on the Flats and the level sand; and even at noon, when the tide was out, there was an impression among the superstitious peasantry that the spot was "na' canny," and that it was haunted. The rocks that shut in the Flats were an excellent place for crabs, periwinkles, limpets, and whelks; and it had been a very favourite resort of Edith's, Arthur's, and the little Crofts, when they were children, and, with nursery-maids, donkeys and panniers, when picnicking by the sea.

Edith was well acquainted with a comparatively short cut to the Flats, and she was determined that she would be there by noon, to prevent the hostile meeting, which must (considering the vindictive and jealous feelings the young Marquis had expressed) end either in the taking of her Arthur's life, or the ruin of his peace and prospects on earth, and perhaps, through all eternity.

Edith looked at her watch; it was half-past eight. She had not breakfasted—she had taken nothing that morning, and she felt faint and sinking. She felt that she required some refreshment to enable her to carry out her scheme; and, to avert suspicion, she felt she ought to appear at the family breakfast-table. Her plan was, to leave it as soon as possible, make her escape through the gardens into the Black Wood, and thence across the moor, down to the sea-beach, and along the rocky coast to Dunstanburgh Flats. She knew that the Marquis and Roger, who were going to drive a great part of the way, would take a much longer and more circuitous route, but one which would

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render it impossible that they should meet with her. As for Arthur, she did not know what road he would take to that deadly rendezvous; but even if he took the short cut, so well known to them in childhood, and they met among the rocks, or in the Black Wood, or on the moor, what matter? She would have the better opportunity of dissuading him from listening to the call of worldly honour, when opposed to the direct commandment of his Maker; and though her cheek flushed, and her heart beat high, at the thought of that possible meeting, she would not let even the misconception the Marquis and Roger might put upon it prevent her doing what she felt to be her duty.

There was a pile of straw in one corner of the loft, and carefully Edith hid up the blood-stained hat, black mask, overcoat, boots, and basin under that pile.

"I do not conceal them," she said to herself, "because I believe it possible that the best, the kindest, and the most noble of men has suddenly changed from a Christian gentleman into a vile, cowardly assassin; but I have a heart-sickening suspicion that my Arthur is the object of some base, crafty, and remorseless plot, which the successful concealment of these things may tend to avert."

"Roger Croft, too (she thought), what could be his object in trying to persuade the Marquis that she, Edith Lorraine, loved him, and did not love Arthur? He must know—he could not but know—that the society of the Marquis was rather distasteful to her than otherwise. He must have seen how very, very dear Arthur was to her heart. She had done her best, and so had her young lover, to conceal their mutual and passionate love from the world; but the son of Mrs. Croft, the brother of Gloriana—how could he be deceived? Besides, he had constantly, when alone with her, tried to disparage and ridicule Arthur, and to make indirect attempts at winning her for himself; and her defence of her beloved had always called forth his most malignant sarcasms and spiteful inuendoes. And now, what could be his object in firing up the Marquis against Arthur, and giving him hopes, which he must know to be groundless, of his lordship's obtaining her hand—her heart.

After listening for some time, and hearing nothing but the waving of the fir-trees against the windows of the summer-house, Edith opened the trap-door, let down the slight ladder she had drawn up after her, and stepping softly down, she was in the little sitting-room. Edith then withdrew the ladder; she opened a window at the back of the summer-house, and let the ladder out (with some difficulty, but she did effect it); and as the snow lay about a foot thick on that cold, northern, shaded side of the little building, it sunk into the soft white deposit, and was seen no more. Edith then looked about her for a long

pole with an iron hook at the end of it, with which, as children, they had been wont to pull down and fasten the trap-door. There was a little inner recess, quite dark, and full of tools, cucumber-frames, flower-pots, etc., etc. Edith groped about there, in hopes of finding the pole; as she did so, she heard voices and steps approaching the summer-house. She drew back into a dark corner; her heart beat wildly. What if she should be found there? How could she explain or account for her presence? What if they should get a ladder, and search the loft? She distinguished Roger's voice—that odious voice, always disliked, and now detested; for now her quick, womanly instinct told her he was aiming at the destruction of her beloved.

"I say, Meadows," cried Roger, "shall we have another squint at the summer-house?"

Meadows replied, "No, sir; it's only wasting time."

"Right enough there, old boy," said Lord Hauteville; "and if you're as sharp-set as I am, you'll be glad to be looking at something better than that rat-hole. I'm for grub. Come, Roger, let's push on."

The next moment, to Edith's great relief, they were all gone save Hubert, who, perhaps conscious of her presence, remained sniffing at the door, and whining, too, until convinced that the men who had so terrified her must have reached the house.

Edith came forth, and, rushing across the crisp snow, through the shrubbery, and across the gardens into the conservatory, which communicated with the state drawing-room, escaped, unperceived by any one, to her own room. There she hastily changed her dress, smoothed her hair, made a suitable toilet, and fitted herself to attend to the summons of the breakfast bell, which rang a muffled peal, out of respect to the presence of Death in the house, about a quarter of an hour after she had re-entered her room; but before Edith went down to the breakfast-room, she entered Ida's boudoir, and, to her surprise, found that young lady flushed, excited, and in tears. Astonished at any emotion in one generally so impassive, Edith inquired what had happened to discompose her sister. To her surprise, Ida said,

"Is it possible you do not know? Hauteville, our brother, our only brother—poor Brian of *my* nursery days, not *yours*—is come back! He was very kind to me when I was a little girl, and I am so fond of him. Oh! I have often cried when I have been awake at night, to think that I did not know where he was, and that papa had forbidden him the house."

Edith embraced Ida. She had no idea Ida could love anything or care for anybody.

"Let us go down to welcome him, Edith," said Ida; "I hear he is in the butler's pantry with old Malmsey and the steward.

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We dare not welcome him before mamma; let us go down to tell him how glad we are to have him back again."

Edith gladly agreed; and the two girls, entering the old butler's room, embraced the prodigal. Ida, the taller, finer woman, wept on his breast, to his great surprise; and Edith, the lovely sylph, looked up into his face to try to see something to love in it. In vain! in vain! The goodness Ida remembered had been blotted out and blotched by habitual intemperance; but even he was a little touched by Ida's emotion, and he felt abashed at the thought how little he deserved her love. Meanwhile, the bald old butler stood at a respectful distance, his hands behind him, looking on; and the steward, a jolly old fellow, peeped in at the door, well pleased to witness the prodigal's return.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"Murder most foul, as in the best it is;
But this most foul, base, and unnatural!" SHAKESPEARE,

THE Countess of Rockalpine, who habitually breakfasted in her own apartments, and seldom left them till the dinner-like luncheon was announced, was up betimes, out of compliment to the young Marquis. She was exquisitely dressed, her cheeks and lips were delicately tinted, and her still handsome face was sunny with smiles. She took her seat at the breakfast-table, and began, by a little flow of complimentary small-talk, to enliven the rather silent and somewhat gloomy party. No one who saw Lady Rockalpine looking so pretty and so animated, smiling so sweetly, and so becomingly dressed, could have recognised the dull, sallow, discontented woman, who of late had never spoken but to scold, reproach, complain, or bewail herself—dressed richly, of course—for she had nothing that was not costly—but latterly without any attention to the becoming, or any interest in the appearance.

Lady Ida, like her mother, made the most of her charms; but Edith, without a thought of her appearance (for her whole heart, soul, and mind were engrossed by Arthur's peril), was the sole object of the Marquis's thoughts; and Roger Croft, whom Lord Hauteville had invited to breakfast at the Castle, as he had been so active in the fruitless search in the Black Wood, could hardly withdraw his crafty eyes from Edith's beauty.

The family was not yet in mourning, and therefore Lady Rockalpine, who detested black, which was very unbecoming to her, was dressed in a ruby velvet wrapper, trimmed with ermine; and a Marie Stuart head-dress of point lace was matched by a collar and sleeves of the same. Ida was in lilac silk, and her hair exquisitely dressed; but Edith, who had

hastily arrayed herself in what came first to hand, had yet, strange to say, never appeared to greater advantage. She was flushed with the excitement of her feelings; her hair was brushed hastily off her fine forehead, and a black velvet Zouave jacket, and black *glacé* silk skirt, set off her fair skin by the force of contrast. Edith could not bear to put on anything but black, while her grandfather lay dead in the Castle.

Lord Rockalpine was silent and reserved. He seldom spoke at breakfast, and was generally absorbed by the *Times*. He did not appear to listen to the conversation at all; but had any one been disposed to watch him, a nervous twitching of his mouth and nostrils, and a deadlier pallor on his pale, plaster-of-Paris-like face, would have betrayed the interest with which he listened to the account of the search in the Black Wood, and to Hauteville's comments on the impertinence of some idle trespasser, in defacing one of the finest trees with initials and hieroglyphics.

The Countess of Rockalpine, when breakfast was over, tried to persuade the Marquis to remain at the Castle.

"The present melancholy state of things here," she said, "debars us all from music, billiards, or any other amusement worth speaking of; but if you and Edith, my lord, will play a game of chess, I will bring my work and watch the game, and Ida and I will have a bet upon it."

To Edith's great relief, the Marquis excused himself (with extreme reluctance), for he longed to be with Edith; but his dreadful appointment must be kept, and so, with many apologies, he pleaded business, but begged leave to accept the challenge on some more favourable opportunity. Lady Rockalpine, upon this, exclaimed—

"Let it be this evening, then Marquis! Nay, don't refuse. You must give us your company to dinner; and after dinner I will back you, and Ida shall back Edith; and I hope, for my sake, you'll give *all* your attention to the game," she added archly.

And the young Marquis glanced at Edith, and said—

"I will do my best, Countess; but I will not promise an impossibility."

The breakfast-party broke up, when the Marquis and Roger announced that they must set out at once for Dunstanburgh. Lord Hauteville felt that he ought to return to Marion, his bride, whom he had left, offended and alone, at the Mill Cottage; but the company of Detective Meadows, with whom he had agreed to "crack a bottle" at the "Rockalpine Arms," (while consulting what steps were to be taken about the attack on the Marquis), was much more to his taste.

"Marion was all very well," he said to himself, "and I was madly in love with her before I made her 'my lady' and my

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wife; but now she's an ill-tempered, fault-finding, quarrelsome bore, teasing me to own her, although, until my grandfather's will is read, and I'm independent of them all, it would be madness. I can't think what made me such a fool as to marry! Now she's mine, I don't care a hang about her; and as for beauty, her face and form, which seemed so bewitching, have no charm for me now. I declare, every maid about the Castle seems to me prettier than Marion!"

Such ever is, sooner or later, the reaction in the heart and mind of the sensualist, when once the object of his passion becomes his. And brief and evanescent as the empire of Marion over Hauteville, is that of personal beauty over the heart where love is a *passion* not an *affection*.

The Marquis and Roger Croft gone, the Countess retired to her boudoir, to write to her "dear friends" about the "darling Marquis," her "dear Dunstanburgh," and to luxuriate in the last terrible photographs of vanity, passion, and crime published by the younger Dumas.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"Oh! 'tis not, Hinda, in the power
Of Fancy's most terrific touch
To paint thy pangs in that dread hour,
Thy silent agony—'twas such
As those who feel could paint full well;
But none e'er felt and liv'd to tell."

Lalla Rookh.

EDITH, while Lady Ida was consulting with Phœbe about her dress for that evening, and while her father was still hidden up behind the *Times*, hastily put on her hat and cloak, and slipped unperceived downstairs into the drawing-room, and through the conservatory into the garden.

She had glanced at a splendid French clock that stood on the mantel-piece in the state drawing-room, and saw with dismay that it was already so late that it would require the utmost speed on her part for her to reach the Dunstanburgh Flats in time to prevent the duel she so dreaded. Poor Edith! she hurried along as though life (and more than life—all that made life dear) depended on her speed; she was in the Black Wood almost before she knew how she got there. As she passed the little grassy amphitheatre enclosed by the evergreens, which were now much taller, darker, and more umbrageous than at the time of her uncle's murder, she glanced nervously at the spot; for even in childhood, and in company with Arthur and the little Crofts, she could never pass the place where she had been told that the foul murder had been done, without a shudder and a dread. And now she was alone in the Black Wood, and she heard (from within the fence formed by the closely interlaced and intertwined branches of those dark evergreens) a sob and a moan! Terror-stricken, she stood transfixed, while a sudden

gust of wind raised and blew aside a dark bough, and revealed to her view a wild, hairy-looking man, grizzled, rudely clad, and middle-aged, and by his side a tall, dark woman, with the remains of great beauty of form and face, but barefoot and careworn. Both were travel-stained and ragged.

"'Twas here he fell, Mary," said the man; "but well ye know 't was no shot from my gun—the first gun he ever fired off, and that I teachd him to fire off, and he loved as a boy, as he never loved his own Manton in after-life—it was no shot from that gun that laid him low. But I've been a poor hunted, luckless victim from that hour, Mary; nothing has prospered with yer poor Rob! Oh! why did I flee, like a guilty thing, and leave a bad name behind me—a murderer's name? I'd be glad to be taken and tried now."

"Oh, Rob, Rob!" said his poor wife, "ye'll break my heart wid yer wild talk! Come away wid me. Ye'll be taken here, as the young lord—leastways, as was young then—tould me; and ye'll be hanged, and I'll not live to see it."

"And that's all the rason I haven't give myself up years ago, Mary," said Rough Rob; for if ever a man had an angel sent him in the shape of a wife, that angel was you, Mary. Oh, the good, kind, blessed help and comfort you've been to me!"

Edith had no time to hear more. She had but one glimpse of the pair—Rough Rob kneeling on the spot where the young lord had fallen, knocking the tears out of his eyes, and Mary bending over him and weeping on his shoulder. The same gust of wind that revealed that scene, by raising the dark bough, had the next instant closed it again; but Edith, who had often heard from the poor on the Rockalpine estate, and from the servants at the Castle and at Rock Villa, every detail connected with her uncle's murder, was familiar with the names of Rough Rob and his wife Mary, and felt that she gazed on the supposed murderer. The thought added to her anxiety to get out of the Black Wood as soon as possible. To prevent the impending duel she had sped along like one pursued, but she found terror was able to add wings to her feet, when, looking back at the scene of the murder, she saw Rough Rob's unshorn face peering out through the dark boughs of the wall of evergreens, and soon after beheld him and his tall Mary moving towards her. With the swiftness of the roe she gained the purple moor, pitying, as she did so, every hare and deer, and every other hunted thing; for she felt at that moment what it is to be pursued—what it is to fly for your life.

She reached the sea-beach in safety; it was low water. She crept behind a rock, and looked round at the Black Wood. She saw Rough Rob and his wife emerge from it, and prepare to cross the moor; but—angel of mercy!—to her inexpressible relief, she sees them moving rapidly on in the opposite direction!

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She had felt a wild terror, lest, seeing her, they should imagine they might be detected, and that Rough Rob, whom she had always heard of as a bloodthirsty and savage murderer, might kill her, to prevent the possibility of her betraying him.

With a fervent thanksgiving for her rescue from an imaginary peril, which, to her, had seemed so imminent and appalling, Edith hurried along the smooth, hard, shining sands, and picked her way among the dwarf rocks.

The task of getting to Dunstanburgh Flats, by the short cut which she remembered so well, was far more difficult than it had been in her childhood. Great pieces of rock had fallen, and blocked up the once familiar pathway.

There were large, deep pools of clear salt water, in which the dark seaweed, with its translucent leaves and round pods floated, and where the young crabs sidled. Over some of these pools Edith was able to jump, but others were so broad that she was compelled to wade through them.

The dread and the terror of being too late was busy at her heart, and the fear that she had lost her way maddened her with anxiety; when suddenly two bare-legged boys, whose brown skins, glittering black eyes, raven hair, and wild garb betrayed the gipsy, and who had been crab-hunting, appeared among the rocks. Edith knew that a gipsy's tent had for some time been pitched on the heath, and that Madge—Gipsy Madge, who, before she went abroad, had told Arthur's fortune, and prophesied that he would wear a coronet, and live in a castle—had been seen in the Black Wood. She imagined that these boys were Madge's, or, at least, of the tribe, and hastening towards them she cried out,

"Am I going right for Dunstanburgh Flats?"

The boys returned no answer; they appeared to be making with all speed for the village. Edith got up to them. They were lividly pale, and the younger one was crying bitterly.

"What's the matter, my little man?" said Edith.

The boys were silent.

"Am I far from the Flats?" she asked.

"Oh, leddy! gang na' to the Flats," said the elder boy.

"Why not?" said Edith.

"There's murder has jist been dune up there. Jock and I were hid up behind the rocks, looking for crabs, when we saw twa lairds coming that gate; and as ane stoupit to pick up a shell, t'other hit un a heavy blow *here*, with a knobbed stick, about the ear, and he fell down like a stane, and t'other fell to, and repated the blow, till his brain wor all about the rocks, and he stark. Oh, gang na' to the Flats, leddy! He'll maybe serve you the like. We've creepit awa' to get bock hame—we're so afeard."

But Edith knew no fear. What if her beloved, her betrothed Arthur, had been murdered by Roger Croft or the Marquis?

She gained the Fiats. Ah! what a cry burst from her very heart! There lay the dead body of the young Marquis of Dunstanburgh, Roger Croft kneeling beside him, and Arthur Bertram vainly struggling in the grasp of three men, who were binding him, and preparing to lead him away.

"Arthur! dear Arthur!" cried Edith, rushing up to him; "what is this?"

"Lady Edith," cried Roger, hoarse with passion, "this is no place for you—no scene for you. The Marquis of Dunstanburgh came here alone. I saw him alive at the Abbey an hour ago. It seems that Arthur Bertram, there, and he, were going to fight a duel. I find my friend, and butchered, as you see, and no one near but that ruffian!"

"He is no ruffian—he is no murderer!" cried Edith. "My life upon it, he is innocent!"

"Heaven bless you, my angel Edith!" cried Arthur Bertram. "I call God to witness I am innocent. I came here alone, *unarmed*, to persuade Lord Dunstanburgh not to risk making himself or me a murderer or an outcast. I found him butchered as you see, and quite dead; but I had no hand in his death, Edith, so help me Heaven!"

"I believe you, dearest," cried Edith; "and I know Heaven will help you!"

CHAPTER XLV.

"Alas! the love of woman! it is known
To be a lovely and a fearful thing,
For all of hers upon that die is thrown."

BYRON.

GREAT, indeed, was the excitement felt not only in Northumberland, but throughout the British empire, when it became known that the young Marquis of Dunstanburgh had been murdered.

As yet little was known of his real nature; he was too young to have taken any very active part in politics, or as a landlord, but what little bias he had shown was towards a spirit of "Liberal Conservatism"—no contradiction in terms, for there are such things as liberal Conservatives and illiberal Radicals. His own party had expected a good deal of him, for he had a good deal in his power, and generally those who want nothing have a good deal forced upon them. As a great landowner, everything that he had done, since his majority (only of nine months' standing), had been popular. He had generous impulses and a strong will; he had lowered the rents of some of his tenants, and had raised none. His tenants, judging from this, thought they had lost in him an excellent landlord, and their grief and indignation were very great indeed.

Public reprobation set in like a tide against Arthur Bertram. Even before the coroner's inquest had been held, every one seemed to take it for granted that he had done this base and cruel murder—done it of malice prepense—under the influence of jealousy and revenge, perhaps, also, of disappointed love; for the name of Lady Edith Lorraine began to be whispered about as connected with this dreadful tragedy. And again scraggy necks (much scraggier than before) were stretched, and again quaint old heads (now palsied) met over the tea-tables at Rockalpine and at Alnwick; and though Death had thinned the ranks (which Time, however, was beginning to fill up from another generation), again the memory of Clarissa Croft was assailed, and old trembling hands, thin and with knotted joints and veins, like blue cordage, raked up her ashes, and the old scandal was revived; and the same bitter tongues that had blamed the former Lady Rockalpine for bringing up Clarissa Croft with her sons, now anathematized the present Countess for having placed the Lady Edith in Mr. Croft's family, and brought about all this evil by promoting what the Hon. Melissa Trumpington, head of the spinster coterie, called "unequal intimacies," and "an improper fusion of the patrician and plebeian elements; and, in short, a dangerous domestication of a young lady of high rank (an Earl's daughter) with a low-born agent's bastard grandson!"

Even among the poor of Rockalpine and its neighbourhood (where Arthur and Edith were known and loved), no doubt of the young man's guilt was entertained; but horror of his crime was mixed up with intense pity for the disappointed love, the jealous anguish, the despair which, they agreed, must have maddened him into the commission of so dreadful a crime.

Lady Rockalpine was vehement in her denunciations of the base-born, black-hearted assassin, as she called Arthur Bertram, and in her lamentations over the aristocratic, handsome, noble-hearted young Marquis.

The Earl was paler, more silent, and more reserved than ever. The word, "MURDER" was a knell to his heart; the question "GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY" shook his very soul, and palsied him with a vague, ever-haunting dread.

Roger Croft was become quite popular at the Castle and with the Countess of Rockalpine, because he was so furious against the MURDERER, so anxious to bring him to justice, and because he expressed such passionate and disconsolate grief at the dreadful fate of him whom he called his noble patron and beloved friend. He always came to the Castle dressed in the deepest mourning, and armed with a large, white, clerical, cambric pocket-handkerchief, in which he buried his face when any allusion was made to the Marquis and his terrible fate.

The Lady Ida, whose solitary affection was for a very unworthy object—namely, her brother, Lord Hautoville—spent her time in vain endeavours to reclaim him, and to make the Castle less dull and wearisome to him. And Edith, who had been brought back—she knew not how—from Dunstanburgh Flats, in a syncope which had succeeded to the terrible excitement of the scene of blood, was lying, prostrated by despair, on her couch in her darkened room; now wild with terror as she thought of the possibility, nay, the probability, that her beloved Arthur might be tried, condemned, and executed for a crime of which she felt that he was innocent; now melting into tears over the memory of the happy past; now kneeling in fervent prayer to Him who alone could succour and save him.

The momentous question of "GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY," never for one moment occurred to her mind. She felt as certain of her Arthur's innocence as of her own. Terrible and dark suspicions were fast growing into certainties, as she thought upon all the circumstances connected with his ghastly murder.

But while her heart throbbed, and her cheeks burned with indignation, at the idea of Arthur's being even suspected of so foul a crime, reason would be heard, a chill would creep over her, and she would grow cold and white, as the circumstantial evidence rose up in such irresistible force, that she was obliged to own to her own heart, that, were any other than Arthur concerned, her judgment would pronounce a very different verdict.

The coroner's inquest was held at Dunstanburgh Abbey, on the very day preceding that fixed for the old Earl's funeral. Edith had heard from Phoebe of the important investigation, and at what hour it was to take place. She did not appear to take much notice of the announcement when Phoebe, full of news, brought it to her.

She still lay on her bed, white, wan, listless, and dishevelled, as she had been for forty-eight hours; but any one who had watched her closely would have seen the colour rush to her pale cheeks, tears sparkle in her large, dark, sleepless eyes, a proud resolve animate her languid form, and her little hand close, as with some strong determination. Still she said nothing.

Phoebe, who was a good, sympathising, feeling girl, brought a tempting breakfast, on a tray covered with a snow-white damask cloth, and placed it on a little table by Edith's bedside. Since Arthur had been taken prisoner on suspicion of the young Marquis's murder, Edith had not broken her fast.

She had not attempted to rise, to dress herself, or to arouse herself in any way, from the torpor of grief and despair which had succeeded to her deer swoon on Dunstanburgh Flats.

Phoebe, whose constant opinion was that her young mistress

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was crossed in love, and was not quite right in her mind, left the room, saying to herself, "I've heard mother say that those that ain't quite right in their heads won't eat before any one."

The good girl was in hopes that, if left to herself, Lady Edith would "eat hearty" after her long fast, and she went into the next room, to prepare her young lady's bath and toilet.

And Lady Edith verified Phœbe's philosophy; for the resolution she had formed required not merely all her mental, but all her bodily strength. She therefore forced herself to eat and drink, and when Phœbe was gone downstairs, Lady Edith rose, refreshed and invigorated her sinking frame with a bath, dressed herself with care, put on her hat and cloak, stole timidly down into the deserted drawing-rooms, entered the conservatory, and passed out into the shrubbery.

Lady Edith found her way through a gap in the hedge that divided the gardens from the brook and the Black Wood.

She hurried through the Black Wood, scarce pausing to glance at the fatal spot where her uncle had been murdered. She came out upon the purple moor, looked at her watch, and said, "I have no time to spare. Alas! I doubt, weak and ill as I feel, whether I shall be enabled to reach the Abbey in time."

Still on, on, sped Edith; and presently a man, driving a little common-looking, rough cob, in a shabby chaise, passed her on the road.

The man wore a slouched hat and an old overcoat. His face was a good deal concealed, for his hat was pulled down, and his coloured choker drawn up, while a quantity of shaggy, grizzled hair mingled with a thick ragged frill of beard and whisker.

"Can I offer you a lift, lady?" said the man, civilly.

"Which way are you going, friend?" asked Edith.

"To Dunstanburgh Abbey, lady?" said the man. "I have to drive there, for one as is on the inquest."

"I will make it worth your while to drive very quick," said Edith; and seating herself by the man's side, they set off as fast as the cob's short legs could carry them.

"This here's a ghastly murder—ain't it, lady?" said the man.

"It is, indeed," faltered Edith.

"Have you heard the rights on it, lady?" asked her companion.

"Yes—no—I don't know," said Edith trembling.

"If you has, lady, no one else hasn't; but I've formed my opinion—leastways my wife has, which she always selects an opinion for I, and she ain't often wrong either, she ain't—and we don't hold with them as thinks that young Arthur Bertram done this murder."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say so!" exclaimed Edith.

"But what will the jury say?"

"Oh, they'll find him guilty, and no mistake. *They* mostly

gets the wrong sow by the ear, lady—begging your pardon for speaking so free—they can't see an inch beyond their nose, not they. They'll find an innocent man guilty and commit him for murder, and blight his life, and break his heart, and the heart of his wife of his buzzom. They goes by appearances, which it's nine times out of ten they goes agin the innocent and in favour of the guilty."

"Ah, but," said Edith, "*the truth is great, and will prevail. The innocent may suffer for a time, but in the long run they are justified, and the guilty brought to shame and punishment.*"

Edith started—the chaise stopped short in the middle of the road—the strange rough man by her side fell on his knees, as he sobbed out—for his tears gushed forth like rain, while he held her hands in his—"Bless you, bless you, lady, for these words! 'The innocent *shall* be justified, and the guilty brought to shame and punishment.' Oh, the comfort of those words to a poor hunted cretur, victim of another's crime! Them words'll gladden my poor girl's heart, too—it's well-nigh broke—we've borne a heavy burden so long. Oh, lady, if angels ever were made without wings, which we knows ain't loikely, I'd believe you was one!" He then resumed his seat, and drove on; and Edith, not a little frightened at his vehemence, and doubting his sanity, remained silent until they came in view of a noble pile—the antique Abbey of Dunstanburgh—standing in a beautiful park. And Edith shuddered to think, as the sunlight flashed from the windows, whose blinds were all drawn down, and the fir-trees waved in the breeze, how sightless were the eyes, how still the form, of the young lord of that noble mansion!

Edith could not choose but weep, when she recollected how he had loved her, how the cheek now cold and pale in death had glowed at her approach, how he had ever tried to please her, how generous he had been to old Hackney-Coach, how kind to Arthur; and now, cut off in the bloom and spring of life, to be lying, cruelly butchered, in his own ancestral halls!

At this moment a loud yell—a horrible yell of triumph and execration—reached Edith's ear; and she beheld a crowd assembled at the park gates, and perceived that the discordant noise she had heard was called forth by the appearance at a little distance of a fly, with a policeman on the box.

"That's their way with any poor hunted cretur that's accused, right or wrong; they never stops to ask themselves, '*Now mightn't he be innocent?*' Oh, no; the unenlightened brutes never thinks what's going on in his poor thumping heart! Oh, them howls! I knows 'em well. I've heerd 'em afore, and so has my poor gal, the worse luck; and so we may again," he muttered to himself. "And if it is to be, I only wish it wor

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over. If it worn't for Moll and her grief, I'd be thankful to be hanged out of this misery."

"I will get down here," said Edith, putting some silver into the man's hand, and springing from the chaise.

She took a path that led away from the park entrance to a little postern-gate in the wall of a large fruit-garden—a gate well known to her in former days, when she was the little carrotty cripple at Rockalpine. For the old head-gardener was very fond of Arthur and herself, and would often give them cuttings of geraniums, when he was pruning the plants, and fill their basket with any fruit that happened to be in season.

This little postern-gate was a good way from the entrance to the park, but yet Edith could distinctly hear the yells of execration that filled the air; and her heart sank, and her soul sickened, for she knew they were called forth by the arrival of Arthur, the supposed murderer.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"All tongues accuse him, and all hearts condemn
I know him innocent, and here I hurl
My curse, my deep anathema, on them
Who seek to crush and stain my priceless pearl!
Has he but one on earth to cling to—one unhappy girl?"
LASCELLES.

HALF fainting with the violence of her emotions, Edith sunk on the step of the door in the wall. Here the poor girl sat for some time, rocking herself to and fro in her despair, when a loud and prolonged repetition of the groans and howls of the mob roused her, and starting to her feet, she knocked at the little door in the wall. As no answer came, Edith, who in former times had known how to open it (when neither locked or bolted inside), lifted the latch, and found herself in the deserted fruit-garden. The old gardener, who was much attached to the family, and to his young lord especially, was among the crowd assembled to receive the accused with groans, yells, and hisses.

Edith Lorraine sank down on a bench near the gardener's door. The yells of execration which reached her ear made her heart beat and her cheek burn. She knew that it was her Arthur's arrival that called them forth. Indeed, had not the police interfered, the mob would have torn Arthur to pieces.

"Down with the bastard!—the blood-thirsty, ungrateful bastard! Down with Arthur Bertram!" cried one.

"Rather say *up* with him," said another; "up high as the gibbet, at any rate!"

"Set a beggar on horseback, and we all know whither he'll ride!" cried a third.

Edith could not repress a burst of scalding tears as she thought of what Arthur must feel—her noble, delicate, sensitive

Arthur! She figured him to herself, worn, jaded, weary, pallid, with one hectic spot on each cheek.

"Oh! I hope he will keep the tears back, and not let them fill his beloved, beautiful eyes," she said to herself. "It would be such a triumph to those ruffians to make him weep!"

All was still; no sound louder than the wind among the leafless trees was to be heard. Edith felt certain that the examination—on which so much depended for her beloved, and therefore for her—was going on.

"Why am I *here*?" she said to herself; "why do I shrink like a coward from the part it is my duty to play? How often has his brave daring saved my life? And now that he has more than twenty lives at stake, I am afraid to do and say my little all to help him! What do I fear?—a sneer, a stare, a smile, a jeer? And shall *they* weigh in the balance against Arthur's life—his honour? No; forbid it, love and constancy!"

Edith rose, pale but resolved, and made her way through the fruit-garden, the shrubbery, and the parterre, to the Abbey. There were people outside, and among them was a policeman. Edith spoke to him in a whisper. He knew who she was; he listened with great deference to what she said, and at once making way for her to pass, ushered her into the dining-hall, where the coroner's inquest was sitting. Large as was the hall, it was crowded. The jury had just returned from viewing the body in the adjoining room, the library. Where Edith stood, she could see into that room as the last juryman left it. For one instant, before the door was closed, Edith distinctly beheld **THE CORPSE!** A woman in attendance almost instantly drew a sheet over the convulsed, discoloured features and the rigid form, but that glimpse of one who had died a violent death, often reappeared to poor Edith in her day and night dreams—a ghastly sight of horror and of dread, never, never to be effaced from her memory!

A good deal of surprise was felt and expressed at the absence of old Lawyer Croft; and certainly, as he never failed to attend inquests much less important, and always took a prominent part in them, it was a singular and mysterious circumstance. The fact was that, late the night before, while waiting alone in his dressing-room, and in his wrapper, his son Roger had suddenly appeared before him, and had hurriedly informed him that Lord Rockalpine who was at Sunderland on private business of great importance connected with the murder of the young Marquis, required his immediate attendance. Roger added that, as his trap was at the door, he would drive his father down to B—, where a boat, which would at once convey him to Sunderland, was awaiting him.

"I must be back in time for the inquest," said old Croft.

"So you shall, and no mistake," said Roger; adding, *sotto*

voce, "if you are, old cock, I'm a greater fool than I take myself for."

In ten minutes they set out together.

Roger Croft was present at the inquest. He kept his handkerchief almost constantly to his eyes, and frequently seemed almost convulsed and overpowered by his grief. He had not as yet perceived Edith, who, in her garden hat, a double gossamer veil over her pale face, and her form shrouded in a thick and ample black cloak, stood among the crowd at the entrance, a tall policeman by her side, and the strange, rough man who had brought her to the Abbey in the pony-chaise standing before her, his broad shoulders completely concealing her from the more select and aristocratic portion of the audience at the upper end of the large dining-hall.

The jury having, as we have said, examined the body, and heard the report of the surgeon who had made the *post mortem* examination, a rigid examination commenced.

Oh! how Edith's heart throbbed, and how her cheeks flushed, and her eyes flashed through their tears when Arthur was led in between two policemen! It had been a dull and sunless day, but at that moment the sun came out, and a golden gush of light passing through the stained glass windows settled like a halo round the noble head, and pale but princely face of Arthur Bertram, THE ACCUSED.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"Why do you use me thus?"

Hamlet.

How wonderful is the effect of "the human face divine" (when it really deserves that epithet) on the minds of men, and more so still, on those of women!

As Arthur Bertram stood erect, his arms folded, his countenance pale, and, "more in sorrow than in anger," meeting with a clear, fearless, unclouded eye, and a frank, open brow, the flushed, frowning faces of the jury, the witnesses, and the crowd, a change of feeling in his favour passed like electricity from heart to heart—a doubt of his guilt was busy in every bosom. Every one instinctively felt that these were not the mien, the bearing, the face, of a vile, a cowardly assassin. And yet, as the investigation proceeded, how irresistible became the force of the circumstantial evidence against him!

The witnesses were very few, but their examination and cross-examination by the prisoner occupied a long time. The principal one was Roger Croft.

He deposed that the late Marquis of Dunstanburgh—one of his oldest and dearest friends, his schoolfellow at Eton, his intimate at college, his travelling companion abroad, and his inseparable associate at home—had confided to him that he had

unfortunately provoked a quarrel with the young man of the name of Arthur Bertram.

In reply to a question by one of the jurymen, Roger Croft, with apparent unwillingness, acknowledged that Arthur Bertram was a relation of his own—an illegitimate child of his father's only daughter by his first wife, Clarissa Croft.

As Roger Croft lisped out this venom, Arthur was observed to turn, first very red, and then very pale, to clench his fist, and to fix his flashing eyes on Roger, who averted his sly and snake-like glance, and grew livid with rage and terror.

Roger Croft proceeded to say, that from early boyhood there had been great ill-will on the part of the prisoner towards the noble, the warm-hearted, but rash and demonstrative deceased. Croft averred (how falsely!) that the Marquis had early maintained that a boy of the unfortunate and disgraceful birth of the accused had no right at Eton, at Oxford, and among the youthful nobility and gentry of the land.

"I mention these circumstances, Mr. Foreman, and gentlemen of the Jury," lisped Roger Croft, "out of no ill-will to the miserable assassin—I beg pardon, I would *prejudge* no one—I mean the miserable accused; for though the loss of the noble friend who was to me as a brother has well-nigh broken my heart, I love justice better than I loved my friend; and if the prisoner's guilt admits of a doubt, I know our merciful laws, administered by a jury of enlightened Englishmen, will give him the benefit of that doubt. But that there was ill-will on the part of the prisoner from a very early age, does not admit of a question."

Here Roger Croft was calmly and coldly cross-examined by the prisoner, and the facts elicited were—that the enmity that *had* existed at Eton, was between Roger Croft and himself, not between the young Marquis of Dunstanburgh—then Lord Pontecraft—and himself; that on one memorable occasion there was a fight of two hours' duration at Eton, between Roger Croft of fifteen, and Arthur Bertram of twelve, in which fight Roger Croft's front teeth were broken. Of this all present had evidence, both in the gap in Roger's ugly mouth, and in the thick lisp with which he spoke. Arthur added that on that occasion the late Marquis had threatened to cut Roger Croft for fighting so small a boy, had called him a coward and a bully, and had presented Arthur with a watch—his own watch, the young lord's first watch—inside the silver case of which he had himself scratched with his penknife—

"By this watch, A. B. of 12, fought R. C. of 15, two hours, and licked him well.
PONTECRAFT."

The watch was here handed to the jury.

Roger Croft here wanted to know whether all this "bosh and

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boast," as he called it, was not perfectly irrelevant. The Foreman remarked that it was, of course, important to the accused to disprove the assertion that evil feeling and ill-will had long been smouldering in his breast against the noble deceased.

"Mr. Foreman, and gentlemen of the jury," said Arthur (and oh! how every tone of his dear, well-known voice woke the echoes of Edith's heart), "there was no ill-will, no bad feeling, between the late lamented deceased and myself. So far from it, on one occasion, at Interlachen, when an effort of mine to save the life of a young lady of our travelling party was crowned with success, and his lordship thought I had shown some bravery in risking my worthless life to save that of the lady in question, he generously offered me his interest, his patronage, and pecuniary assistance to any amount necessary to my attaining any object in life on which I had set my heart."

"Gentlemen of the jury," lisped Roger Croft, "the Munchausen-like adventures of one who draws such a very long bow as Mr. Arthur Bertram does, will take up your time and mine till *Bull's Noon*. Will it be out of course for me to ask him whether or not he had any quarrel with the late lamented deceased?—whether there was not a *delicate* cause of bitter rivalry and enmity between them?—whether the late Marquis had not struck him on one occasion, and threatened to horse-whip him?—and whether he did not go to Dunstanburgh Flats in answer to a challenge from his lordship—a challenge to bring with him a second, and fight a duel with pistols on the Flats?"

To each of these questions, as put by the Foreman, Arthur Bertram was compelled by truth to reply in the affirmative; but while they were put, he was repeatedly warned that he was *not bound to criminate himself*, or to answer any question tending to that effect.

"Mr. Foreman," said Arthur, in a loud, clear voice, and with a heightened colour, "allow me, once for all, and with due deference, to say, *that* advice is thrown away upon me. I *cannot* criminate myself, for I am innocent—as innocent as yourself, or any other man present—of this vile, base, and bloody murder! I call God to witness that I am innocent. To the question of 'GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY,' I can, with my hand on my heart, and my eyes to the heavens and to the mountains whence help may yet come, proclaim that I am innocent. *Yes, I am innocent, so help me God!*"

Here a juror asked why, if Mr. Arthur Bertram *meant* to fight a *duel* on the Flats, he went there without a second, and, as far as the evidence went, without pistols?

"I did *not* go there to fight a duel, gentlemen," said Arthur Bertram. "I *abhor* duelling: *I consider it to be deliberate murder, with malice prepense*. I went to the Flats *unattended* and

unarmed, and I meant to say to the noble deceased" (and here Arthur deliberately turned, and fixed his eyes on Roger Croft, who, at the mention of the *deceased*, hid his face in his handkerchief), "My lord, a mean, venomous, lying slander has come between us. You struck me in an ungoverned moment, and I, in self-defence, knocked you down—we are quits; as man to man, I say, there let it rest. I honour God's commandments—I *will do no murder*. Let us calmly discuss the point at issue between us, and whatever man can do, in justice to himself and others, to meet your wishes and promote your views, I will do. But though I am not a Marquis, though you have branded me—as I believe, so help me Heaven! most unjustly—with the vile name of BASTARD, and thus blackened the name, and assailed the honour of my dead mother, I am ready to forgive all. Let us exchange forgiveness. But if you refuse to do so—if you still cling to a barbarous and now exploded code of honour, and compel me to stand before you at twelve paces, I warn you *that I shall fire in the air*, and that—if I fall—you will be a MURDERER! It is possible none but your own conscience will accuse you if I do fall—none will avenge *me*—perhaps none will inquire into the fate of the unhappy, nameless outcast; but I warn you (for you are not all evil), there is a judge who will condemn you, and that judge is—CONSCIENCE!"

A murmur of applause followed this excited outburst of Arthur Bertram's heart. It was instantly suppressed, and Roger Croft remarked, that all this was mere verbiage, and trifling with the jury's valuable time; that it mattered very little what fine Christian oration Mr. Arthur Bertram had meant to address to the Marquis, since the matter lay in a nutshell. His late dear and noble friend had told him of a quarrel and personal conflict which had taken place, relative to a young lady and her picture, in the Black Wood of Rockalpine. (Here there was great evidence of interest.) That he, the late Marquis, considering his honour as a gentleman at stake, had asked him, Roger Croft, to be his second. That he, Roger Croft, not having the *very* high-flown notions of the accused about duelling, had agreed to be his lordship's second. That they were on their way to the spot agreed upon, when it struck him, Roger Croft, that, in case of an accident, it would be very desirable to have a surgeon at hand; and that, begging the Marquis to proceed to the Flats, he had hurried back as fast as he could to Dunstanburgh, to engage the services of Mr. Puckridge. Mr. Puckridge was not at home, but was expected every moment; and he, Roger Croft, had left a message, begging him to come at once to the Flats. He had then hurried off to rejoin his noble friend, whom he had left twenty minutes before in high health and spirits. Here Roger Croft covered his face with his handkerchief, and sobbed out,

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"I never saw him alive again. He lay on the Flats, or rather in a chasm between them, a mangled corpse, and no one near him but the accused, who pretended to be *approaching* the spot."

By a juror,—

"Was there any blood on the dress or person of the accused?"

"I cannot tell. At the horrible sight of my noble friend lying in a pool of blood, a dizziness came over me, and I sank down by his side. When I came to myself, I believe my cries reached the ears of two policemen who were on duty near the Flats. They took Bertram into custody—how could they do otherwise?"

The two policemen were here minutely cross-examined, and their statements corresponded in all respects with that of Roger Croft.

The brows of the jury darkened. The foreman asked if there were no other witnesses.

Here, pale but resolute, Edith Lorraine, with the tall policeman clearing the way for her, came forward.

"*I am a witness for the accused,*" she cried; "*I am here to state all I know.*"

Roger Croft, livid with rage, scowled from beneath his flaxen eyebrows at the brave and noble girl.

Arthur Bertram's colour rose to his temples; he started, and held out his hands as if to greet and bless her. It was but the impulse of a moment; the next he remembered himself, and drew back, murmuring,

"Heaven guide and reward thee, my angel Edith!"

By order of the foreman, Lady Edith was at once accommodated with an arm-chair. She was firm, composed, and collected, although many of the nobility and gentry of the county were assembled there. She had but one object—to save her Arthur. Firmly convinced of his innocence, she was there at that terrible inquest, in the midst of that dense crowd,—that ghastly, and for ever still and silent one, close at hand!

Bravery in woman is always admired to enthusiasm by Englishmen: and in Edith's bravery there was nothing masculine. There was not one iota of the "show off" of the Amazon, the heroine of romance, about *her*. She was perfectly simple, quiet, unaffected, dignified.

The foreman requested her, with a deference due to her rank, her sex, and the sublime heroism of her bearing, to raise her veil. In doing so, Edith's large garden-hat fell off, and she did not attempt to pick it up. Some gentlemen darted forward to do so; but Edith held it by the strings in her hand. She was not afraid that the searching rays of the sun should fall on her face; she had nothing to conceal—nothing of which

she was ashamed. She gloried in her love for Arthur; and though, with true maiden modesty, she never alluded to the feeling that bound them together, in every word she spoke, she betrayed the reverence, the tenderness, the admiration, the confidence, which, in a true woman's heart always are the attendants on Love.

And Edith sat in that high-backed, crimson-cushioned arm-chair, her long, rich, auburn hair dishevelled, and hanging in clusters on her shoulders; her expressive face, pale, save when a flush mantled it; her dark, splendid, violet eyes, now flashing fire, now shining through tears; her white, taper hands ungloved, and her graceful form draped by her large, black velvet cloak. There was not a man present who did not gaze at her with intense admiration, which deepened as, by the wisdom of her remarks, the closeness of her natural logic, and the eloquence of her sweet tongue, she began to turn the tide in favour of her beloved Arthur. "Oh! how her heart beat, how her cheeks burned, how her eyes brightened, and her hopes rose, as she fancied she perceived a bias in favour of a verdict not inculcating her Arthur.

She repeated, word for word, not sparing herself in the least, all she had overheard from the loft of the summer-house; but she took care not to mention the articles she had secreted there. She made no secret of the intense interest in Arthur which had taken her to the Flats to prevent the duel; and it was evident that the account of her meeting with the gipsy boys among the cliffs caused intense excitement in all present. Arthur started to his feet (he had been allowed a seat), and, clasping his hands with a wild burst of joy, exclaimed,

"Thank God, thank God! there *were* witnesses there of that deed of blood and treachery!"

Roger Croft with a heavy groan fell back, and was carried insensible out of the hall.

The jury instructed the officers to institute a search for the gipsy boys, and the inquest was adjourned accordingly.

Lord Hauteville, who was present at the meeting, took charge of his sister, Lady Edith, back to the Castle. She stole to her own room, where, as soon as the news of her appearance at the inquest reached Lady Rockalpine, she was visited by a storm of maternal anger, reproach, and vituperation. Edith was ordered, on pain of her mother's repudiation and eternal displeasure, not to attempt again to disgrace her family by parading her devotion to a base-born murderer.

As all attempts to discover the gipsy boys had completely failed, and the proceedings could be postponed no longer in a case of such importance, the inquest had been resumed after a week's delay. Edith had done all she could do. The excitement over, her strength gave way; a succession of fainting-fits

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ensued, and at the time to which the inquest was postponed, Edith was lying dangerously ill with a low fever of a most alarming kind; and even her worldly and vindictive mother forbore the triumph of informing her that, in spite of all she had done and dared, the Coroner's inquest had returned a verdict of WILFUL MURDER against Arthur Bertram, and that he was committed to M—— gaol, to await his trial at the Spring Assizes.

* * * * *
The old Earl of Rockalpine lay at rest in the family vault. Mrs. Prosser, the housekeeper, was at ease in her mind. Her master (in spite of all the strange events that had crowded in) was conveyed, with all due pomp and parade, in the richly-plumed hearse, and followed by the full complement of mourning coaches, to his last long home. The day of the funeral was one of intense agony to the new Earl. He could not avoid seeing his brother's coffin when his father's was lowered into the vault. Lord Hauteville behaved with due decorum. The poor, to whom of late the Earl had been so true a friend, wept and wailed; but Edith—the only real mourner of the family—was lying between life and death, unable to follow her benefactor to the grave, as she had meant to do, and quite unconscious that those bells tolled for him.

After the funeral the will was read. *Mr. Croft was still absent.*

The will produced was that made when Lord Hauteville was a boy, and by which the late Earl left to *him* all his real and personal property; all, in fact, that was not entailed on his son—all that, by the subsequent will in Edith's favour (so mysteriously abstracted, and, like old Croft, not forthcoming), ought to have been Edith's.

Lord Hauteville, who had only awaited the reading of this will, no sooner became aware of its contents, than he took his leave, repaired at once to the Mill Cottage, where Marion had wisely resolved quietly to await his return, and where, dressed to great advantage, and in high beauty, she expected his restoration to his senses and to her.

Lord Hauteville, in high good-humour at his accession of wealth, promised his ambitious and delighted bride to take her at once to London, to purchase a suitable *trousseau*, to publish their marriage, and to introduce her as Lady Hauteville.

That very afternoon she was seen at the — Station, her beauty making her the object of universal attention, even to an old traveller, who, in gazing upon her, got his foot under a truck, and swore and roared lustily.

Off she goes in a first-class carriage, Lord Hauteville (for the nonce) quite a model husband. How long this will last we will not presume to prophesy; but a vain, unprincipled, ambitious woman of the lower orders, and a profligate, dissipated young nobleman never *did* form a happy marriage, and, we believe, never can, and never will.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

“ Good Heaven, whose darling attribute, we find,
Is boundless grace and mercy to mankind,
Abhors the cruel, and the deeds of night
By wondrous ways reveals in open light.
Murder may pass unpunished for a time,
But tardy justice will o’ertake the crime.”

ANON.

THE Earl of Rockalpine had pleaded indisposition, and had taken to his bed, to account for and excuse his non-attendance at the inquest on the body of the young Marquis of Dunstanburgh. All the noblemen and gentlemen in the neighbourhood took an intense interest in this horrible and ghastly murder of a young Peer, so powerful, so popular, so beloved, and so unoffending; and indeed, but for his affected indisposition, the absence of the nearest neighbour—the head of the family most intimate with the deceased nobleman—must have caused great remark, and general surprise and disapprobation.

A murder of any kind always awoke countless demons in the breast of the new Earl of Rockalpine. CONSCIENCE (seldom in a very deep sleep in his breast) arose, and awoke Remorse, Terror, Horror, Despair, Anguish! The bed—the grand state bed—the downy bed, with its purple-velvet hangings, its coronet, its supporters (which formed the bed-posts), its swelling pillows edged with lace, its fine snowy linen sheets, so delicately frilled, its fragrance, and its costly luxury—all yielded no ease, no comfort, no rest, no sleep, to the FRATRICIDE! To him, it was that bed of thorns which a guilty conscience always spreads, whether in castle or cottage, hall or hovel—on the narrow pallet and flock mattress of Poverty, or on the stubble down and under the gorgeous canopy of Rank and Wealth. Vainly he tried to rest his throbbing, hot, and aching head on those swelling and downy pillows; serpents seemed to him to creep from beneath them, to coil around them, and to raise their horrid heads and fix their cold eyes on him, and to hiss in his ear the word “FRATRICIDE!”

He was alone—quite alone—always alone, whether in the solitude of a crowd, or that of his own chamber.

Nothing so isolates the heart, the mind, the soul of man, as the consciousness of an unsuspected, unacknowledged crime. He who has a secret which no one *can* share, ghastly memories of horror and guilt, not buried, but hidden in the dark recesses of his soul—he, whose whole life is haunted by terrors of which no living being has any knowledge or conception—what intimacy, what sympathy, what friendship can he enjoy? He knows, he feels, that the very men who court, and praise, and honour him, and who bewail his being so very reserved, and silent, and inaccessible, would, if they knew what he had done, turn from him with horror and loathing, and perhaps be the very first to give him up to justice. He felt that his whole life

was one lie; for what else were the reforms, the charities, the philanthropic undertakings, the moral lectures, the pious speeches, schemes, speculations, and plans of a Murderer—a Fratricide?

Poor wretch! As he lay in his darkened room on the first day of the inquest, how the pale ghosts of the Past thronged his chamber, and seemed to gather round his bed! He had taken latterly to opium, morphia, and other strong sedatives, to stupefy Conscience, paralyse Memory, and lull Thought to rest. Alas! even the sleep the narcotics produced was haunted by hideous visions, dreams, and nightmares: and the reaction was so terrible as to resemble madness, and often to tempt him to suicide!

He had just swallowed a strong dose of opium, and had given orders that he might not be disturbed. He need not have feared interruption. There was nothing of the sweet officiousness of woman's love in his vain, cold, fashionable wife. Edith, who felt for all who lived, and whose feelings of filial duty were so deep and strong—Edith, had she been at home, would probably have knocked at her father's door, to know if she could do anything to comfort him and to cheer him. But the reader knows where Edith was on the first day of the inquest; and in her absence no one approached the Earl's chamber.

Alas! alas! much as he dreaded the ghoul and ghost-haunted solitude of that chamber of horrors, he dreaded still more the outer world, where, in the broad daylight, people were, as he well knew, gathering in knots, and talking, with pale faces and bated breath of the murder on the Flats, and comparing it with that ghastly deed of blood in the Black Wood, of five-and-twenty years ago. He felt an instinctive consciousness that the comparison of those two foul and bloody murders *must* suggest itself to every mind. There were such strong points of similarity in the two crimes. The age of the victims was the same. Both were noble, both in the early prime of manhood. Both were so popular, so beloved, that neither could have been supposed ever to have made an enemy, or to have excited the ill-will of any human being. And yet both were murdered in the open face of day, on their own ancestral estates; and in both cases suspicion fell on innocent men.

Rough Rob was (as the livid quaking Earl too well knew) perfectly innocent of the crime of which the verdict at the inquest found him guilty, and for which he was committed to M— gaol. And the Earl of Rockalpine felt a strong, an irresistible conviction, that Arthur Bertram was as guiltless of this deed of blood and guilt as Rough Rob was of that ghastly murder in the Black Wood, twenty-five long years ago. And yet the same verdict of Wilful Murder was recorded against him, and he was now lying in the same gaol from which Rough Rob had escaped.

Oh! what a mockery was this! What a moral does this great man's abject fate convey! What power have Title, Rank, Wealth, Power, Reputation, if the conscience is burdened with a secret crime?

The state bed shakes, the purple velvet hangings quiver, for the wretched inmate of that costly bed, the great and potent Lord of Rockalpine, is writhing with Remorse, palsied with Despair, quaking with abject Terror!

Sons of Labour, slaves of the Loom, or of the Soil! sleep—sleep soundly on your truckle beds, if “the princely heart of innocence” beats in your breasts; and if, on some brief holiday, you read this “ower true tale,” compare your state with that of guilty Grandeur, and go forth to your daily toil for your daily bread, content!

Towards evening the wretched Earl of Rockalpine, worn out with the agony of his mind, and overcome by the fumes of the opium he had swallowed, sank into a troubled, nightmare-ridden sleep. It seemed to him, that he awoke with a start from a vivid dream of early days of love—of his brother Hauteville, of his mother, the fair Countess of Rockalpine, and of that beautiful Clarissa Croft, her *protégé*, whom both himself and his brother had so madly loved. He fancied that he awoke with a start from this dream, and sat up in his bed; when a stream of moonlight gushed through some holes in the closed shutters of his windows, filling the centre of the room with a slanting column of silvery light, and flooding with radiance the rich carpet of velvet pile.

The moonlight was odious to the guilty man, and he was about to spring out of bed, to draw the purple velvet window-curtains close, and exclude its radiance, when a cold wind seemed to pass over his face and person, and an invisible hand to force him back upon his pillow. And then he fancied that while he lay there, icy cold, damp with horror, and perfectly motionless and powerless, three forms, larger, younger, and, if possible, more beautiful than those he had just seen in his dream, and known in life, appeared in that column of moonlight—first as faint outlines, and then, by degrees, as maturing into perfect though semi-transparent figures.

The “spirits” seemed to Lord Rockalpine to advance towards his bedside; and in the stately beauty of those majestic forms, and the melancholy radiance of those angelic but reproachful faces, the cold, still motionless Earl recognised his mother, his brother, and the object of his first wild, passion love, Clarissa Croft! And it seemed to him that his mother led Clarissa by the hand to his bedside, and pointed to a wedding-ring on her finger, and that his brother, taking her other hand, said,

“Wilfred, behold Lady Hauteville!”

And in extending his arm, the white drapery which his elder brother wore was blown aside, and a large stain of blood showed the spot where the fratricide had shot him to the heart! And then his murdered brother said with a melancholy sternness,

"Cain! Cain! knowest thou me? Dost thou remember the twenty-second of October, and the Black Wood? Arthur is innocent!—Arthur Lorraine, the real Earl of Rockalpine, son of thy murdered elder brother, Lord Hauteville, and of Clarissa, his wife, is innocent! Use, then, thy blood-bought power to defeat his enemies, and to prove his innocence; restore to him the rights, titles, and estates, which are his, because they would have been mine. Confess thy crime—give thyself up to justice; death of the body is preferable to that of the soul. Seek out my Clarissa's father; remind him of his vow to see my Arthur righted as soon as our father was no more, and my son of age. Bid him publish my marriage, and clear my wife's honour, and prove my son's legitimacy: he has the proofs. I come to thee, to tell thee, that thy tortures, thy torments, thy days of anguish, and thy sleepless nights, are known to us in our blissful home on high; and we come (permitted to do so) to tell thee how thou mayest win eternal pardon. Choose, then, thy doom. Confess, resign, restore. Do justice to the son, thou who didst slay the father. Confess thy crime, give thyself up to justice on earth, and ensure mercy and pardon on high. Resign thy blood-bought honours, Usurper—Murderer—Fratricide!"

"No, no, no!" shrieked wildly and aloud the Earl of Rockalpine. "Hence—avaunt! Ye are false spirits—ye would beguile me to my ruin! My brother had no wife—no son; or, if Arthur Bertram be his son (and I own the vivid likeness has often struck me), he is—he must be illegitimate! There is no Earl of Rockalpine save myself!"

"Arthur Lorraine is the true Earl of Rockalpine," said in a sepulchral voice what seemed to the excited Fratricide to be his brother's ghost. "Confess, repent, resign, restore, or perish eternally!"

"Never, never! I will never confess aught, resign aught, restore aught!" wildly shrieked Lord Rockalpine, springing out of bed, and upsetting, as he did so, a marble statue of Wilfred, first Earl of Rockalpine. The Earl himself fell to the ground, stunned, and senseless; for in falling he had struck his temple against the pedestal.

The noise of the heavy fall of the marble statue was heard in the room beneath the Earl's. It was a sort of boudoir, in which the Countess of Rockalpine and Lady Ida were seated. The former was lecturing the latter on the favour and encouragement she showed to her dissolute brother, and on the miserable result of her own "seasons" in town.

"Oh, heavens! what is that?" cried Lady Ida, starting to

her feet. "What a heavy fall, and in papa's room, too! Oh! what can it be?"

She was very pale, and her hands, tightly clasped, were pressed on her bosom.

"Perhaps your father has had a fit of some kind," said Lady Rockalpine. "Ring the bell for Leblond and Mrs. Prosser" (his valet and the old housekeeper). "I am a great deal too nervous and excitable to venture upstairs, after hearing that heavy fall. Your father has been very poorly, and has looked and acted in a very strange way, ever since we have been here," added her ladyship; "there's no knowing what may have happened!"

"Oh, heavens! what do you mean, mamma?" cried Lady Ida, rushing out of the room, and darting upstairs, followed by Mrs. Prosser and the Earl's valet, Leblond, whom she met at the door.

The Earl's door was locked, but Mrs. Prosser had a pass-key. Leblond, who had at one time lived with a gambler who had committed suicide, tried to persuade the Lady Ida to retire.

But Ida was a girl of some character, originality, and resolution. She was the first to enter the room, to rush to her father's side, to bend over him, and try with her handkerchief to staunch the blood that welled up and streamed from his temple.

Mrs. Prosser and Leblond lifted the Earl on to a sofa at the foot of his bed, restoratives were administered, and consciousness was restored.

The Earl then explained, that in getting out of bed to exclude the moonlight, which prevented his sleeping, he had stumbled, knocked down the marble statue of his ancestor, and fallen over it, striking his temple against the pedestal. He made no allusion whatever to his dream, or to the mysterious and ghostly visitants who were the cause of his leaving his bed.

He persuaded himself, or endeavoured to do so, that the vision of departed spirits, which had at first paralysed and then maddened him, formed in reality part of a frightful nightmare and hideous dream, caused by the strong dose of opium with which he had tried to drown the voice of *conscience*. Perhaps he was right—perhaps it *was* merely a dream. Be that as it may, he had no wish to dream such a dream again; and he requested the Lady Ida to bring the *Times*, and read to him; and he ordered Leblond to make up a bed on the sofa at the foot of his couch.

Alas, alas! even while the Lady Ida read a glowing article on the results of the reformatories and prison discipline which he himself had originated, and which proclaimed him as the benefactor of his species, he still saw with his mind's eye that trio of departed spirits—he beheld that blot of gore on his brother's side—he heard those words—

"ARTHUR LORRAINE IS EARL OF ROCKALPINE! CONFESS, RESIGN, RESTORE, OR PERISH ETERNALLY!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

"'If widowhood should be my fate,' she said,
 'No widow's cap shall e'er deform my head.
 Think you my silken tresses I'll conceal,
 And simulate a woe I cannot feel?
 Not in dear Paris the first year I'll spend
 (Each darling Frenchman is the widow's friend!)
 In Longchamps soon it shall be mine to rove,
 And dreary black I will exchange for *mauve*,
 Jet butterflies upon my breast I'll wear,
 And fix them in my folds of flaxen hair.
 This is the deepest mourning I'll assume
 For one who made my life a living tomb.'"

LASCELLES.

MEANWHILE, Lady Rockalpine had quietly settled it in her own mind, that the Earl had either had a fit, or that *something worse had happened*. A thousand frivolous fancies crowded through the Countess's shallow brain, before Mrs. Prosser, as *she* thought herself in duty bound to do, presented herself before her ladyship to quiet the fears and allay the anxiety which the good old soul imagined *must* fill the wife's heart on this occasion. Yes, before the Countess knew that nothing serious or fatal had befallen the Earl, she had resolved never, *in any case*, to disfigure her still pretty face by wearing an English widow's cap. She had determined to escape all censure, on this head, from the noble matronage of England, by retiring to the Continent during the first year of her widowhood. She had almost made up her mind how soon *mauve*, violet, and silvery grey might be substituted for *black*, which was very unbecoming to her complexion, and therefore, odious to her. What visions of freedom, boundless wealth at her own disposal (for her own fortune was very large, and her jointure splendid)—what continental gaiety, beaux, flatteries, homage, and dissipation—what visions of white bonnets and jet butterflies were put to flight when Mrs. Prosser, with many low curtsies, explained the real state of the case. However, Lady Rockalpine had tact enough to "assume a virtue if she had it not," and to simulate an anxiety and relief she was far from feeling.

On the next day, as the reader knows, the funeral of the late Earl took place. Lord Rockalpine was sufficiently recovered to attend, and to be present at the reading of his father's will; after which ceremony he quitted Rockalpine by the latest train which left A— at 11:30. He felt his heart grow somewhat lighter as he drove through the park (drawn by a pair of fleet horses) on his way to the station. He had suffered such mental anguish during his stay at Rockalpine, that to him the thought of London, of the House of Peers (in which he would now have to take his place), of committees, debates, meetings, clubs, parliamentary and ministerial dinners, and the constant presence of his private secretary, were a comfort and relief.

The recollection of the dream or vision of the ghostly trio

faded as he thought of the excitement and absorbing interest of his public career; when suddenly, at an angle of the road, lying down under a gnome-like thorn, he beheld a man and woman of the lower orders. The woman's head was on the man's shoulder, and her hand was clasped in his.

The moon came from behind a cloud at this moment, and her rays fell full on those two figures, who, startled by the sound of the carriage wheels, both looked up at once; and the Earl drew back in his carriage, for, at a glance, he recognised ROUGH ROB and his wife MARY!

The sight of Rough Rob, associated, as he always was, in the Earl's mind with the chance of detection, drove all hope and tranquility from his breast; and again the ague of fear was upon him, and again, looking, in spite of himself, from the carriage window, the ghostly trio of the night before seemed to move hand in hand over the wild moor, and to gaze at him with mournful menace in their eyes, while, with hands raised as if to warn, they flitted away, and disappeared in the dark, distant depths of the Black Wood. Was it the vision of a morbid and excited fancy, or *do* departed spirits really revisit the earth? We incline to believe—But, no; let the reader decide for himself.

One day Lady Ida, who was moped to death at the Castle, and who was never so happy as when she was on horseback, not having her own favourite steed with her in the country, requested that Wildfire, a very spirited horse, which she had once ridden with her father, might be saddled, as she felt disposed for a good gallop. Lady Ida never looked so well as she did on horseback. She was a fearless rider, and, attended only by a groom, she set off, determining not to return till dinner-time, and thus get rid of the dull monotonous succession of hours between an early luncheon and a late dinner.

Lady Ida, who, though she did not understand Edith's nature, and could not sympathise with her secret sorrow, felt some interest in so sweet and suffering a sister, looked in at Edith's sick-room before she set out for her ride.

Edith lay pale and wan on her bed; her eyes were closed, but she was not asleep. She looked up at the slight noise that Lady Ida made, in drawing back the bed-curtains, and said, gently holding out her thin, burning hand to her sister—

"How bright and blooming you look, Ida! I see you are equipped for riding; where are you going?"

"Over the hills and far away—anywhere out of this Castle Dolorous. I am moped to death; I can endure it no longer."

"But what horse are you going to ride?" asked Edith.

"You haven't got your own Atalanta, here, have you?"

"Oh, no! but I have ordered Rogers to saddle Wildfire."

"Oh, don't ride that fiery-spirited, powerful horse!" said

Edith. "Hauteville could not manage him—he's a hunter, too."

"Never mind; I can manage him, and I should like to follow the hounds to-day—my blood stagnates here! Good-bye. I wish you were able to come with me."

"Ah!" thought Edith, as the large tears filled her eyes, "the last time I rode was at Interlachen, on the day when Arthur risked his life to save me, when I fell into the Death Valley! Poor, beloved Arthur, where art thou now?"

Lady Ida did not show herself to her mother. The Countess, herself very timid on horseback, would have raised a hundred objections to Ida's riding Wildfire—visions of broken limbs, hump-backs, concussion of the brain, death, would have passed through the Countess's brain. This Lady Ida knew full well. So she stole downstairs, flitting from pillar to pillar like a sunbeam; her golden hair floating from beneath her black velvet hat, and her dark-green habit setting off to great advantage the slender proportions of her tall, graceful figure. Lady Ida placed her little elegant, well-shod foot in the groom's hand, and with one bound the practised horsewoman was on Wildfire's glossy back. How he arched his noble neck and tossed his beautiful thoroughbred head, and seemed proud (as he curveted and caracoled) of his lovely burden!

Lady Ida rode gaily away, followed by the groom, and she tried all Wildfire's paces—walk, trot, canter, gallop—and found them all perfect; and she patted his neck, and felt as if she could command the world; when suddenly "the horn of the huntsman was heard on the hill!"

Wildfire snorted, pricked up his ears, and was off, fleet as the wind, in the direction whence the sound came.

Vainly Lady Ida tried to draw him in, to moderate his pace. Another blast of the horn reached his ears, and swift as lightning away he went, leaving the groom, white with terror, far, far behind. On, on, on dashed Wildfire! Lady Ida had no power to guide him; all she could do was to keep on his back. Nothing stopped him, and to her horror she saw him rushing wildly on to the cliffs that overhung the sea.

She gave herself up for lost, and with a wild cry implored her Father in Heaven to save her. She was within a few feet of the edge of the cliff, and all her efforts to pull in Wildfire were vain.

Her strained arms had lost all strength, her whole frame trembled with terror and excitement, and large tears streamed down her white cheeks. A minute more, and she sees, she feels that Wildfire and herself must go over the rocks into the foaming sea—when suddenly a man, who had been lying on the edge of the cliff, started up, caught Wildfire by the bridle, stopped his mad career, and with great strength held him in, while Lady

Ida slipped from her perilous eminence on to a ledge of grass-grown rock.

"How shall I thank you?" said the trembling Lady Ida, taking out her purse.

"Oh, I want no thanks, my lady," said the man; "for though I sees now you ain't the Lady Edith Lorraine, you've got a look of her."

"I am her sister," said Ida, forcing the contents of her purse on her deliverer.

"Well, then," said the man, "you tell her that Rough Rob, the poor hunted cretur she was so afeard on the other day in the Black Wood, saved your life, and would her'n, or that of any of the family, for the sake of him who's in heaven, and whose blood Rough Rob's so falsely accused of shedding, though he'd have died to save him any day. And tell her, too, not to fret; her true love shan't swing for a crime he never done—he's too like him that was murdered in the Black Wood five-and-twenty years ago. Tell her I'm on the track of them gipsy-lads that saw the murder done. I'm a poor half-crazed, hunted cretur myself—forced to herd with gipsies, and hide in caves and holes, and wear a knife at my side, never knowing who'll attack me; but I won't go on so, I'll stand my trial like a man. And now, my lady, if you aren't afeard to mount, I'll lead you back to the road, and there we'll find the groom, and I'd advise you to have the saddles changed, and let the man ride this spirited cretur; he ain't fit for a lady to mount—he's a hunter, he is."

Lady Ida followed Rough Rob's advice, and got home on the groom's horse in safety. She told Edith of her strange *rencontre*, and Edith drew some comfort from Rough Rob's promise.

CHAPTER L.

"She never told her love, but let
Concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sate, like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief."

SHAKESPEARE.

YES, Arthur Bertram was committed to M— gaol, there to await his trial for the murder of the Marquis of Dunstanburgh.

And Edith Lorraine was still lying on her bed, in a very delicate state of health; unconscious of the verdict of Wilful Murder recorded against her beloved; unconscious of the suppression of the will, by which her grandfather had left all his real and personal property, all the hoards of a life, to her; unconscious that all that should have been hers was now to come into the possession of the profligate young Lord Hauteville, her brother, and Marion his wife; and that *she*, who had so looked forward to enrich-

ing her Arthur, was, owing to the disappearance of the late Earl's will in her favour, left entirely dependent on her parents; one of whom never concerned himself about her, while the other was much exasperated against her by her attendance at the inquest, and the devotion to Arthur Bertram which she had so publicly displayed.

The Countess of Rockalpine, who longed to quit the Castle with her favourite daughter, Lady Ida, professed to think very lightly of Edith's disorder, and had fixed the day for her own departure, having resolved to leave Edith in the care of Mrs. Croft and Mrs. Prosser, until she had recovered her strength.

The only peril that attended her stay at Mrs. Croft's was now removed.

Arthur Bertram was in prison, awaiting his trial for murder. There was no danger from that source; but both Lord and Lady Rockalpine, though from very different motives, wished to keep up a good understanding with Mr. and Mrs. Croft; and Roger Croft had paid such obsequious court to the Countess, that she had decided he was a very agreeable, useful, and obliging young man. She had that passion for news, or rather gossip, which belongs to very small minds and very narrow hearts; and Roger had most successfully pandered to this weakness.

The topic next in interest to that of the murder of the young Marquis, and the arrest and committal of Arthur Bertram, was the entire disappearance of old Mr. Croft.

It will be remembered that on the night preceding the day fixed for the inquest, and two days before the funeral of the late Earl and the reading of his will, Roger Croft suddenly appeared in his father's apartment, and induced him to leave the Villa and proceed with him to B—, where a boat awaited him (on mysterious business connected with the Earl of Rockalpine). Since that time old Croft had not been heard of. His absence at the inquest on the young Marquis of Dunstanburgh, and still more, his not being present at the late Earl's funeral and at the reading of his will, would have excited great surprise and animadversion, but that Mr. Roger Croft explained to all inquirers, that his father's absence was inevitable, and that he was well aware that important affairs of the Earl's kept him away at such a time.

For some weeks Roger Croft, by a variety of excuses and explanations, satisfied the curiosity of his mother and sister Gloriana about his father's absence; but at length Mrs. Croft became very uneasy at never receiving one line from her husband. Gloriana, who loved her father, more than shared her mother's anxiety; and Roger Croft, while reassuring them, was obliged to own that his father's absence was strangely protracted.

He even proposed (if it lasted much longer) to set out for the

spot to which he averred that the Earl of Rockalpine had sent Mr. Croft, to ascertain that he was well, and that no evil had befallen him.

The Countess of Rockalpine and the Lady Ida Lorraine left the Castle, after the former had arranged with Mrs. Croft that Edith, in the course of a few days, should be removed to Croft Villa.

A little change for the better had taken place in Edith; and Phœbe, who was much attached to her young mistress, greatly preferred staying with the Lady Edith in the country, to following the Lady Ida to London. No wonder she did not wish to leave the country. The secret of this preference lay not entirely in love of the Lady Edith or the country, though the former was become a strong motive with pretty Phœbe; but a more potent influence still was at work. Pretty Phœbe was in love with a handsome young farmer on the Rockalpine estate, and he was desperately in love with her. He had asked her to go with him to Alnwick Fair, which was to be held in a few days. Old Potts, his father, and Mrs. Potts, his mother, with Miss Potts and her sweetheart, were to be of the party, and Phœbe hoped that Joe would propose at the fair.

Very soon Phœbe's tender and careful nursing wrought a happy change in the Lady Edith's state.

Phœbe, who, had her young mistress not been a good deal better, would not have had the conscience to ask for a holiday, nor the heart to enjoy one, had taken great care to conquer in herself the natural love of gossip, and the delight in creating a sensation.

She had kept carefully concealed from Lady Edith the fact that Mr. Arthur Bertram had been committed to M—— gaol on a charge of murder, and poor Edith fondly hoped that the inquest was still adjourned.

She was afraid to make any inquiries about Arthur, for she felt that she could not speak about him without revealing the secret of her heart to Phœbe; but she resolved when Phœbe was gone to the fair, and Mrs. Prosser was waiting on her at tea, to make a few inquiries of the good old lady, who would, perhaps, not suspect, as a younger woman might, the intense interest she took in her answers, and in everything that concerned Arthur Bertram.

At the end of the week—and it was then Thursday—Lady Edith was to be removed to Croft Villa; and then she hoped that Arthur, set at liberty, would join the family; and that Love and Hope would again smile on their re-united lives!

What a bright day was that, on which pretty Phœbe, rosy as the morn, and very neatly and becomingly dressed, sprang into the smart gig, which her dear Joe Potts drove up to the back entrance to the Castle! How proud and pleased she felt! Her eyes were as blue as the bunch of forget-me-nots stuck in-

side and outside her peaked straw bonnet. Her hair and eyebrows were black, and the former was glossy and rippled. She had a neat black silk paletot, and a dark blue silk dress, short enough to show a taper ankle and pretty little foot in a Balmoral boot.

Her Joe was a fine young farmer; but he was a good deal spoilt, to our taste, by the way in which his hat was stuck on one side, and by a cigar in his mouth.

But Phoebe was in love; and, for her, whatever Joe did was right.

Miss Potts was driven by her lover in his dog-cart, and a younger sister went with them.

The old Potts, though he could, as he said, lay his hand on five thousand pounds if he could on a shilling, went in his own tilt cart with his wife. He was a jolly, red-faced farmer of sixty, in top-boots and in a coloured choker, and she was a fat, motherly woman, in a coal-scuttle bonnet, a large cloth shawl, a well-preserved black silk dress, still fresh and glossy—though it had formed the chief glory of her scanty, frugal *trousseau* thirty years before, and boasted a short waist, *gigôt* sleeves, great latitude of back, and very little longitude of skirt—and was adorned with a small tippet. She wore a pair of green thread gloves. She was armed with a bag and a huge umbrella, and she kept strict watch on those valuable articles, and on her husband's pockets. She was a sensible woman. She thought Joe would be all the steadier if he had a wife to look after him, and she thought Phoebe Freke the very girl to suit him.

The fair was well attended, and presented a very lively, animated spectacle. The booths were gay with bright ribbons, trinkets, toys, gilt gingerbread, spice-nuts, brandy-snaps, oranges, apples, nuts, almonds. There were shows in abundance and lively music. Here "THE PIG-FACED GENTLEMAN" was painted larger than life, with a pipe in his mouth; there the "FAT LADY" was represented with all the attributes of a prize sow. There the grand theatre formed the centre of attraction; the manager, dressed like a huntsman, trumpeted forth the praises of his *corps dramatique*, and announced the approaching performance of "a hentirely new sensation drama, called *The Red Hindiam, hor the Bloody Scalp of the Murdered Bride of the Back Woods;*" while, to add to the reality, the Red Indian himself bowed and grinned from the platform outside the booth, and invited the public to "walk up."

Old Potts and his jolly dame were much annoyed by the application of a *scratcher* to the back of Mrs. Potts by a young scamp. She ultimately, however, caught the young scoundrel in the fact, and belaboured him with her umbrella until he roared and bellowed out for mercy, to the great delight of the

crowd, who shouted out, "Well done! Go it, old girl! Give it him well! Lay it on thick!" and so on, until, from sheer fatigue, the old dame let the culprit go, giving him as he went a final poke in the back with the ferule of her umbrella. With this solitary exception, everything went smoothly, gaily, merrily at the fair.

Phoebe Freke returned to the Castle with her pockets full of gingerbread nuts and fairings; and, better still, with a pretty gold and turquoise ring on the engaged finger of her little dimpled hand. She had seen the "Pig-faced Gentleman," the "Fat Lady," *The Red Indian, or the Bloody Scalp of the Bride of the Back Woods*; she had seen her Joe carry off sundry wooden lemons, apples, tin snuff-boxes, and china dogs at "throwing the bar," win pockets-full of nuts at rifle-shooting, and knock all the pipes out of Aunt Sally's mouth; she had been with him in a swing and on a "merry-go-round," and, on the whole, she had spent a delightful day at the fair with her now affianced Joë.

CHAPTER LI.

"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and pious take
These for a hermitage."

ANON.

AND what were the feelings of Arthur Bertram, when he found himself the inmate of M—— gaol? Alas! even when the hisses and howls of the mob who had followed him to prison died away in the distance, shut out by the thick stone walls, did he cease to hear that maddening sound? No; their echo was still in his ears. It seemed as if, as long as life lasted, he could never cease to hear those yells—"Down with the murderer!" "Blood for blood!" "Hanging's too good for him!" Even the gaoler, who knew the young Marquis of Dunstanburgh personally, and had received some kindnesses from him since his accession to the title, and had hopes of an appointment for his son through his lordship's influence—even *he* scowled with more than a gaoler's wonted ferocity at poor Arthur, and answered with more than professional gruffness a few questions the accused gasped out as to the probable duration of his imprisonment.

Arthur threw himself, in an agony of grief and despair, on the little iron settle with its wretched mattress; and, hiding his face in his hands, tears, of which the source was love for Edith, forced themselves through his now thin fingers, and sobs convulsed his once manly, noble breast.

The gaoler glanced at him over his shrugged shoulders with an expression of ineffable contempt.

"There's a poor, snivelling, blubbering chap!" he muttered

between his teeth; "a mean sneak, that can get behind a man and knock him on the head and stab him in the back, all the same as a forriner, but can't stand by what he's done—a miserable creature as ain't true to hisself. He 'ont die geame, not he! for that he's guilty, and will be found guilty, and hanged, there can't be no doubt. Look at un a blubbering there! That 'ud convince any reasonable being what sort of a chap he is! Well, I does like to seo 'em geame to the back-bone, and if they've done the thing that is wrong, standing to it, and true to themselves—true to the last, as a body may say."

With these words, he shot another glance of supreme contempt at Arthur Bertram, who still lay on the settle unconscious of the gaoler's presence, and of all save the ruin of his hopes, and the darkness that had closed round him like a pall.

"And to think that such a sneak as that" (muttered the gaoler as he went his way along the stone passage, at the end of which was Arthur's cell), "to think that the likes of he should have sent the Most Noble the Markis of Dunstanburgh clean out of this world, and that afore Jem's got his appointment and been purvided for! If it ain't enough to make a man cuss and swear, I don't know what is. Such a fine figure of a man as the Markis wor, and so pleasant-like and affable. Well, I ain't fond of seeing 'em hanged in a gen'ral way, but I'll see that chap strung up, that I will, and no mistake. Why, he hadn't even the sperit to offer to stand a glass, a snivelling sneak of a chap! GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?—why, the judge and jury will see at a glance, as I do, that he's one of your stab-in-the-back fellows. Heigho! I'll go and have a glass of something stiffish along of Bob the Burglar. He'll hang for it this time, and no mistake, for he knocked old Miser Miles on the head, that's sartain sure; but then he done it in self-defence, when Miser Miles was just going to shoot him like a dog, and he's as merry as a grig. He don't lie on *his* bed a-shaking and a-blubbering—he'll die geame, he will; but that young chap's a regular muff, what's called a hassassin, that what he is. Drat him! I've good cause to cuss him, and Jem not purvided for, which he was sure of an appointment but for that snivelling hassassin there!"

The gaoler did not judge Arthur more harshly than did the world in general. The feeling so universal in the neighbourhood of Dunstanburgh and Rockalpine spread itself over the whole kingdom. The papers were full of further particulars of the mysterious and horrible murder of the young Marquis. The leading journal had an eloquent article on murders in general, and, with many saving clauses about not prejudicing the public mind and not prejudging this individual case, contrived to prejudice the whole world at home and abroad and to prejudice and precondemn the unhappy Arthur Bertram.

And now, shall we venture to ask the reader what opinion he has formed upon this momentous question of "GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?"

We know, and we trust that all who have read this "over true tale," know and feel, that of deliberate, premeditated murder Arthur Bertram was quite incapable. But we know, too, that passion will occasionally master the best and wisest among us; we know that he loved Edith Lorraine with a love which fell very little short of that idolatry which is forbidden by Him who cannot err; we know that the Marquis's jealousy was such that it had already urged him to use exasperating words, and even personal violence, to Arthur Bertram—that a conflict had already taken place between them on the confines of the Black Wood.

We will suppose that Arthur went forth to carry out to the full his Christian principles and pious abhorrence of duelling. He, the successful lover—he who, whatever his birth, his low estate, his wretched fortunes—he who had, in spite of all, won from the maiden they both adored, a preference and a favour for which the Most Noble the Marquis of Dunstanburgh, lord of so many noble estates, and of such fabulous wealth, had sued so long in vain! Is it impossible that, meeting on those lone Flats, before Roger Croft joined them, Arthur Bertram, armed with a loaded stick, solely for self-defence, may have met with the young Marquis in an angry, an insulting, a maddening state of exasperated feeling, and may have been so provoked, so outraged, as to have struck him in self-defence, and unintentionally to have slain him? The Marquis may have used language of the most irritating, insulting kind. He did so once before, and may have done so again. He may have struck his rival on the face; and Arthur Bertram is a man. We know how often a blow has proved fatal, which was never meant to injure seriously.

We only put these questions hypothetically, and in answer to the solemn, momentous question of, "GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?"

Surely, if it were so, Arthur's crime would be one which, could the facts of the case be proved to be what we have suggested as not quite impossible, the sternest judge and jury would consider "JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDE."

But was it so? The evidence of the surgeons who made the *post-mortem* examination proved that the blow or blows of which the young Marquis died must have been struck from behind. And how, in the case we have supposed, could Arthur have struck his rival from behind?

Alas! alas! how can the truth ever be brought to light? Arthur swore at the inquest, and at the adjourned inquest, that when he reached Dunstanburgh Flats, he found the Marquis lying on his face between the fissure of the rocks, in a pool of

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blood, and quite dead; and that Roger Croft, coming up at that moment from the direction of the Abbey, at once accused him of the murder. That his (Roger's) shouts brought some coast-guardsmen and policemen to the spot; and that when Lady Edith Lorraine arrived at the Flats, he was in their custody. Everything, then, would tend to throw the started suspicion on Arthur Bertram.

The only witnesses that could throw any light on this ghastly mystery, were those gipsy-boys whom Edith met so suddenly among the cliffs, and who were actual witnesses of this deed of blood and guilt. It is just possible, if they could be produced, and examined separately, and were called upon in open court to identify among many the murderer of the Marquis, that Arthur Bertram's innocence might be established, or his guilt proved. At present, a stronger chain of circumstantial evidence has seldom linked crime with detection.

The knobbed and loaded stick produced at the inquest, and on which clotted blood and flaxen hair made even men grow white and faint, WAS ARTHUR'S!—he had bought it for self-protection on a walking tour. With that loaded stick the deed was done—that was proved beyond a doubt; for the wounds at the back of the young Marquis's head corresponded exactly with the loaded knob of the knotted stick.

All efforts to obtain any clue to the whereabouts of the gipsy-boys had failed *in toto*, so that the Coroner had decided to waste no more time in bringing the adjourned inquest to a close, and had conveyed to the minds of the Jury a suspicion very strong in his own mind, that the gipsy-lads existed only in the excited and somewhat morbid fancy of the eccentric young lady who had so strangely appeared on the Flats just after the murder, and, more strangely still, had, as it were, dropped from the clouds during the inquest, and insisted on giving her evidence.

That the idea of these gipsy-boys was either the result of hallucination or cunning, became a general impression; and as time wore on, and nothing was heard of them, those who had believed in them shook their heads, and said—

"Poor young lady! how she loves that vile murderer!"

CHAPTER LII.

"The quality of mercy is not strained;
It falleth like the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the plain beneath."
SHAKESPEARE.

ROGER CROFT had completely quieted the fears of his mother and Gloriana, by professing to go away for some days in search of his father and returning, repeated the story that he was quite well, but was prevented writing by a sprain which he had given to the thumb of his right hand, and which rendered writing painful

to him. He added, that he was progressing favourably with the business Lord Rockalpine had confided to him, and that his return might be confidently expected ere long.

Edith was now again an inhabitant of Croft Villa, and Mrs. Croft began to hope that, as the Marquis had been murdered, and the wretched Arthur Bertram, whom she had always hated, would no doubt be hanged for that murder, her darling Roger would in the end win Edith, and that the lost will would be found and proved, and Edith thus become one of the wealthiest and best of matches.

"As for Arthur's being hanged bringing any disgrace on us," she said, "that's all nonsense. Mr. Croft, who doted on his ill-conducted baggage of a daughter, made a great fool of himself in bringing up the base-born brat as a gentleman. But the fact is, in point of law, bastards have no relations; and, therefore, Arthur (wicked ruffian) is no relation of ours. Of course it's very horrible, to think of anyone one has known from his infancy, and seen playing with one's own angel children, coming to the scaffold. But these bastards are almost always bad; and I was a poor, timid, weak young thing at the time, or I should have set my face against his introduction into my family, and have said: 'Mr. Croft, you may trample *me* in the dust, you may cut *me* in halves, but you shall not force a bastard upon my true-born babes. I know what I owe to my children, if you have no sense of propriety and decency towards them.'"

Roger Croft did his utmost to ingratiate himself with Lady Edith Lorraine, but in vain. She more than disliked, she loathed him, and pleaded indisposition as an excuse for confining herself almost constantly to her own room.

This plea could not well be disputed, for every tinge of colour had forsaken her cheeks; she was wasted almost to a shadow, and the late rounded, blooming, bright-eyed girl had now in her face and form the shadowy, touching beauty of a sorrowing angel.

Roger Croft had two heavy cares on his bad heart: one was the inexplicable disappearance of the late Earl of Rockalpine's will from an iron safe, of which he had a forged key, and in which he knew that his father kept it; and the other, worse still, was the total failure of all his attempts to interest in his favour the idol of his base soul, the Lady Edith Lorraine.

There was in the immediate neighbourhood of M— gaol a house—we will not call it a convent—in which dwelt a number of ladies—Protestant ladies of rank and wealth—who had retired from the world, and had given themselves up to good works. They were Sisters of MERCY in every sense of the word; and Edith, having met one of them by the death-bed of a poor cottager, had formed a sort of intimacy with the sisterhood, some of whom, much to the annoyance of Roger Croft

and his mother, visited lady Edith occasionally at Croft Villa; and sometimes Edith, when the Crofts were absent, took a little walk to some poor pensioner's cottage with one of these "Sisters." Gloriana alone knew of these walks, but she was a fast friend of Edith's.

Edith opened her heart to the sweet, sympathising, saintly Sisters; and they, by their pity, their faith, and their pious counsels, saved her from despair.

* * * * *

One evening, Arthur, in his lone cell, was engaged upon his defence, for the time of his trial approached. He had seen counsel of eminence, and consulted with them; but he had resolved to plead his cause himself. He saw that Sergeant Quibble, and Mr. Eitherside, Q.C., did not believe in his innocence; and he felt that, though their verbal eloquence might excite the imagination, it could never convince the minds of a wise judge and a dispassionate jury.

"I will say what is true," he exclaimed. "I will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," he cried. "And O Father in heaven! and O Saviour of sinful men! grant me the power to do my own wretched case justice, and I pray Thee to put it in the hearts of judge and jury to discern the truth, and to act uprightly."

Arthur was on his knees, uttering this prayer, when the gaoler, who had been won from his wrath and contempt by his prisoner's calm and gentle fortitude, came in, and said, "Two of them English nuns was come to pray and preach." This the gaoler said with a sort of sneer.

Arthur started to his feet, and at that moment the sun came out from behind a cloud, shining for the first time that day, and its rays fell in a full stream on two forms that stood in the doorway. One was a tall, pale, thin, middle-aged Sister of Mercy, in the dress of her order; the other was robed in black, and wore a hood and a thick veil. Could she be a novice?

The elder lady motioned to the gaoler to withdraw; when he was gone, she held out her hand to Arthur, who had risen to welcome her, and led him up to her companion, who had sunk on a stone bench. She then gently raised her young companion's veil, and Arthur, falling on his knees with a wild cry of surprise and joy, recognised the pale wan face and wasted form of his heart's idol, his Edith; while she, poor girl, overcome at the sight of the change wrought in her beloved by confinement and grief, fell forward into his arms in a deep and deathlike swoon.

CHAPTER LIII.

"Would I were with thee every day and hour,
Which now I spend so sadly, far from thee;
Would that my form possessed the magic power
To follow where my sinking heart would be;
Would I were with thee!"

THE HON. MRS. CAROLINE NORTON.

THE Sister of Mercy who had so kindly accompanied poor Edith to her Arthur's prison, was one of those saintly women who, no matter whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, are true Christians, and seem sent from heaven to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep themselves unspotted from the world.

Sister Sympathy (such was the name of Edith's friend) was a lady of high birth and ample fortune. She was one of the "Marys" of earth, and she *had* chosen that good part which should not be taken from her. Such women seem, indeed, like angels without wings.

Wherever Sorrow, Sickness, Shame, and Penitence groaned and wept, there Sister Sympathy's pale, sweet face, her soft, white, helping hands, and graceful, black-robed form, was seen. There her soft, low voice was heard; there her influence (at once cheering and softening) was felt, and there her wealth diffused comfort and help. She stole from the poor cottages to the hospital wards or the wretched prison, like a sunbeam. Where *she* had been, the cupboard was no longer bare, the grate fireless, the children barefoot. The feverish patient, tossing on the hospital bed, grew calm and cool as Sister Sympathy poured into his wounds the oil of comfort and the wine of help. She bathed the burning brow with fragrant waters, and smoothed the hot pillow, and the sufferer blessed her and slept. She stole to the captive's side, and whispered of hope and faith; and, lo! there was light in the dark cell, and comfort in the sinking heart.

And now, with Arthur's help, she has restored Edith to consciousness, and has seated her by her lover's side; and she looked from the grated window, while Arthur held the maiden of his bosom in a long embrace, and while they exchanged a few whispered words of welcome and of love.

Sister Sympathy knew all—Edith had confided everything to her; she knew, too, what love was, for she had loved in her bright and beautiful youth, now so long passed away; Death had claimed her beloved one, almost at the altar. Not satisfied with robbing her of her little world of love and light, the "fell sergeant" had enlisted in his black band, her father, mother, sister, brothers; and for some time Amabel St. Ormond prayed that she, too, might be taken. But it was not to be; there was work for her to do, and she must do it, before going to her rest.

Heavenly Love then filled the heart of the passionate child of earth, and the beautiful young daughter of rank, wealth, and fashion became a Sister of Mercy—Sister Sympathy, friend of the friendless, and head of a holy band of pious ladies devoted to good works.

Lady Edith Lorraine had first met Sister Sympathy in the cottage homes of her own and her late grandfather's poor pensioners. The unhappy soon respond to the voice of pity, and ere long Sister Sympathy had won Edith's confidence, and had become the gentle girl's best friend, guide, adviser, oracle!

Sister Sympathy had a strong mind, a stout heart, great powers of reasoning, a fund of natural logic, and an unerring instinct in her estimation of character. The organs of perception and reflection gave fulness to the pale, noble brow of Sister Sympathy. From all that Edith told her, Sister Sympathy felt almost convinced of Arthur's innocence; but, before she quite made up her mind, she wished to see him, and to hear his own account of the dreadful and fatal occurrence on Dunstanburgh Flats. If it proved, as Sister Sympathy felt pretty nearly sure it would, that her impression, after seeing and conversing with Arthur, was all in his favour, then she had a plan in her wise head and warm heart for proving his innocence; and she had resolved to spare no trouble, no expense, to help the friendless young man, if she felt certain of the holy truth and justice of his cause.

Lady Edith, after a few moments of passionate tenderness, tore herself from Arthur's fond embrace, and, going up to Sister Sympathy, begged her to question and cross-question Arthur Bertram as to all the particulars of the dreadful event which had brought him to his present woful plight and doleful prison. Sister Sympathy complied; she drew a chair close to the little pallet on which Arthur and Edith sat hand-in-hand, and Arthur, at her request, entered into the minutest details of all those occurrences with which the reader is familiar. As he proceeded, the convincing eloquence of truth found its way to Sister Sympathy's heart and mind; her soft eyes brightened and sparkled through their tears, her pale cheeks became first a soft pink, and then a bright scarlet; her little white hand united itself to that which Arthur held tightly clasped in his own, namely, that of Edith; and when he had done, she said,

"Cheer up, my Edith—dear child, cheer up! My children, do not despond. And you, Arthur Bertram, tell your story in court as you have told it to me, and I do not believe that any twelve Englishmen can be empanelled as a jury who will find you guilty, or any judge on the English bench condemn you."

"Oh! bless you, thank you, for those dear words!" said Arthur; while Edith, sobbing convulsively, sank into Sister Sympathy's arms.

"And now, dear children," said the Sister of Mercy, "I will tell you what I will do. I have a relative learned in the law, and once a barrister in high repute and good practice. He ceased to practise his profession because he could not bear to make the worse appear the better cause; but, as the champion of friendless innocence, he still occasionally enters the lists; and I am much mistaken and disappointed in him if he does not take up your cause, Arthur Bertram, as if you were his own son. I would judge no one hastily, rashly, but I own I have formed my own suspicions; God forgive me if I wrong any one! At any rate, I feel pretty sure that my cousin, Charles St. Ormond, will think with me, that much will depend on the evidence of those gipsy-boys; and I can promise you, my dear young friends, that no expense shall be spared to get those boys into court. I will write to my cousin at once. I have little doubt that he will be here to-morrow, although he is three hundred miles away. Into his hands you may safely put yourself and your cause; and I feel convinced that all that man can do for you, he will do, and that God will help him to justify innocence and to detect guilt. And in the meantime, my dear young friend," said Sister Sympathy, "let me exhort you to patience and faith. Pray at morning, at evening, and at noonday, and in the long sleepless hours of the silent night. Pray fervently—pray ever. Read your Bible, and daily learn a hymn from this little book," she said, giving Arthur *The Christian Year*. "And now we must leave you, for it is growing late, and the time allowed the prisoners for converse with their friends will soon expire. We leave you, but we leave you with the fountain of comfort" (here she touched the BIBLE); "and the Father will send the Comforter in answer to your prayers."

Again the gentle Sister looked out of the barred and dingy window, on the wretched court, and again Arthur pressed his Edith to his breast, and imprinted a long kiss on her pale lips.

They are gone, and Arthur is alone; but no longer downcast, desolate, distressed. He turned to his Bible for comfort, and he found it. He committed to memory that exquisite evening hymn in *The Christian Year*, and then he prayed long, fervently—prayed on his bended knees, by the side of his little pallet, and prayed as he lay stretched on that hard and narrow bed; and as he did so, sleep came softly down on the long-wakeful lids. A choir of heavenly harps seemed to lull his weary spirit, and in a column of silver moonlight (that came slanting in through the barred window of his prison) white-winged angels seemed to float, and Faith, with her oaken cross, and Hope, with her silver anchor, to glide down, and take their station at the head of Arthur Bertram's little pallet. And few on couches of down, and under canopies of crimson velvet, have ever passed a night of such bliss, such beatitude, as did poor

Arthur Bertram on his wretched straw mattress, in his prison-cell in M— gaol, after the maiden of his bosom and the sweet Sister of Mercy had visited him there. True Love, sublime Constancy, strong Faith, bright Hope, sweet Consolation, lovely Religion—these were the spirits that visited Arthur in the fair land of dreams.

Sleep on, young Arthur!—sleep on, sweet Edith's first and only love! and, with God's help, may thy innocence be proved (if innocent thou art). And for *her* dear sake we pray that the time may come when thy waking realities may be as full of joy and peace as thy prison dreams.

CHAPTER LIV.

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder." HAYNES BAYLEY.

TIME passed on, and still Mr. Croft came not. Roger Croft had constantly assured his mother that his father was perfectly safe, and fully occupied with the Earl's business; but that the injury to his right thumb, which he had begged him, Roger, to explain, prevented his writing. He added that a certain amount of mystery surrounded the affairs that at present engrossed him, and that, as the result of the private negotiations he was conducting for the Earl of Rockalpine would be very lucrative and beneficial, he hoped Mrs. Croft would keep quiet, and not expect him till she saw him.

While Roger Croft was at home, his arguments succeeded in silencing Mrs. Croft's tongue, and quieting her fears; but when Roger took his leave (which he did to endeavour to get possession of the splendid legacy left him by the Marquis of Dunstanburgh, and of which his mother knew nothing), then she began again to fret and get frightened at the protracted and mysterious absence of her husband.

Mr. Croft had all his life been a very dull and prosy, but a very regular and punctual correspondent. The excuse of the injury to his thumb seemed to her very much like an invention; and she well knew, alas! that Roger Croft never told the truth when a lie would answer his purpose better. Added to this, Mrs. Croft's funds were very low. Mr. Croft had always kept the cheque-book and the purse, but then he had never failed to empower her every Saturday, as regular as the day came round, to pay all the weekly bills. Now, for three weeks they had not been paid. Butcher, baker, grocer, fishmonger, poulterer, laundress, and gardener, all began to grow anxious about their money—to write notes about large amounts to make up, or small sums to meet, and, in short, to dun the distracted Mrs. Croft. But what was worse still was, that several pressing letters had arrived at the Villa, directed to Mr. Croft, and which Mrs. Croft had opened, announcing that

a policy for five thousand pounds would lapse unless the premium were at once paid up. This insurance it had been the great object of Mrs. Croft's life (even as a bride) to induce her husband to effect, for her especial benefit. And now, for the want of a few pounds, it is very likely to lapse! Mrs. Croft was furious at the thought. She wrote to Roger, but she obtained no answer. She wrote again and again, with a similar result. Mrs. Croft could endure her anxiety no longer. She resolved to go to town. She would take Gloriana for company, and take up her abode for a day or two at the house of Mr. Lambert, in Queen's Square, Bloomsbury. Mr. Lambert was an old friend of Mrs. Croft's family. He had often allowed her to make his house her home during her visits to London, and he had given her a general invitation to put up at 111 Queen's Square, not even insisting on any previous notice of her coming. Mrs. Croft resolved, then, that she would set off the next day for town, and repair at once to Mr. Lambert's very comfortable, old-fashioned residence in Queen's Square. Her object was to make every possible inquiry about her husband, especially of an old clerk, who had once been in Mr. Croft's office, and who now was employed by the very Insurance Company—*THE VAMPIRE*—in which Mr. Croft's life was insured for five thousand pounds. She hoped, too, to see her beloved Roger, and the only scruple she had was about leaving Edith Lorraine alone at the Villa during her visit to town. But then, the only danger that could assail her was averted; the only intruder that the Earl and Countess could object to was shut out, as the hard woman hoped and believed, for ever by the walls of *M——* gaol.

Edith, absorbed as she was by her grief, and interested in no company but that of Sister Sympathy, would not miss either herself or Gloriana. Edith was not allowed to write to the Countess or Lady Ida, so exasperated was the former at Lady Edith's behaviour at the coroner's inquest; therefore, it was not very likely her ladyship would hear of the visit to town. At any rate, Mrs. Croft felt she must go; and, as she had only a few shillings in the world, she must borrow of kind, gentle, generous Edith whatever pocket-money the dear girl had by her, and apologise for a step which anxiety about Mr. Croft's life (or rather the insurance on it) compelled her to take.

Gloriana, who really loved her father, and who was excessively anxious about him, gladly agreed to attend her mother to London.

Edith, comforted by the prospect of uninvaded solitude and unquestioned visits to Sister Sympathy, made no objection, and gladly handed to Mrs. Croft the contents of her purse, which, however, owing to her large bounty to the poor, were much smaller than Mrs. Croft had hoped and expected.

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"How very unlucky it is," said Mrs. Croft to Gloriana "that Edith is so very poor just now; she has only lent me just enough to pay our fares and a cab or two. However, when once we get to dear old Lambert's, we shall be free from all expense; and he always places his brougham at my disposal, too: so when once we get there we shall be quite at home."

"But, mamma, if he should be out of town?" suggested Gloriana.

"Oh, he is never out of town, my dear; but even if he were, the old housekeeper knows me, and has known me since I was a little trot so high. She will make us as comfortable as if old Lambert were at home. And now, have you made Betsy pack up all we shall want?"

"Yes, mamma, as you desired, in one large black trunk."

"I hope you have put up my new pink moire and my black velvet, and your own best silk and new ball-dress."

"I have, mamma; but I see no chance of our wanting them."

"Oh, you cannot tell; no one knows what may happen; it is well to be provided. Put up my jewels and your own trinkets, and tie a scarlet bow on to each handle of the trunk. We shall then recognise it at once, and not have to stand among a mob of wretches vainly trying to identify our own luggage."

They are off at last.

Edith watched them from her own window till the pony-chaise was a black speck in the distance. And then, as it was a very fine day in early spring, she resolved to go and call on Mrs. Prosser, the housekeeper at the Castle, and who had been laid up with rheumatism since Edith's departure.

Edith's way lay partly across a corner of the purple moor, over the brook, which she passed by stepping on the large pieces of rock or stone placed there on purpose, and then through the Black Wood, and into the Rockalpine shrubberies. As Croft Villa was on the Rockalpine property, and it all formed one estate, belonging to the Earl, her father, Edith did not hesitate to take this walk unattended. She liked to be alone, to think of her dear Arthur.

The neat, trim, well-kept gardens of Croft Villa, with their smooth, bright, broad, gravel carriage-road and trim evergreens, were rich in snowdrops and golden and lilac crocuses; the dew was on the grass and on the leaves, sparkling in the sun like gems. She went down the broad stone steps—those steps which five-and-twenty years before had been blotted with the blood of Lord Hauteville, her father's elder brother, Rockalpine's heir—and passed out at the green gates of the Villa into the wild country, so beautifully contrasted with the well-kept garden and well-pipeclayed steps of Croft Villa.

Edith's heart was a little lighter than it had been for some weeks, for she had that morning received a note from Sister

Sympathy, saying that her cousin, Mr. St. Ormond, was as fully convinced as herself of Arthur Bertram's innocence, and had great hopes that the momentous question of "GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?" would be decided in his favour. At the same time, Sister Sympathy warned Edith not to be too sanguine; but while hoping—and, above all, praying—for the best, to try to prepare for the worst, since all depended on the success of the efforts she and her cousin were making, and the large reward they had offered for the production of the two gipsy-boys who had witnessed the murder of the Marquis on the Flats.

"Father in heaven!" said Edith (as she quitted the open moor and entered the Black Wood), "in Thy great mercy bring these gipsy-boys to light, for my Arthur's sake!"

This ejaculation, or rather prayer, burst from the depths of Edith's heart, and ere long it was answered; for as Edith passed by that grassy amphitheatre, closed in by evergreens, the scene of Lord Hauteville's murder, an impulse, which she could not understand or resist, compelled her to lift the sweeping boughs of a dark pine and to enter that fatal spot! There was the rough, unshorn man whom she had seen peering through those branches on the day of the Marquis's murder; there was the tall, lean, but still handsome Irishwoman, his wife; there was that Gipsy Madge, who had, some four years since, prophesied that Arthur would live in a castle and wear a coronet! and—oh, joy! oh, ecstasy! oh, comfort, hope, delight!—by her side, all seated on the grass, were the two bright-eyed, black-haired, brown-skinned boys who had witnessed the Marquis's murder, and who had begged her not to go to the Flats, lest she, too, should be killed!

Yes, those very gipsy-boys who had seen the young Marquis lying murdered on the stones, and who had warned Edith not to approach the blood-stained spot, there they were! They, on whose evidence, in all probability, the life, name, fame of her heart's idol depended.

"Oh, boys! dear, good boys!" cried Edith, rushing up to the young vagrants and drawing them to her, "where have you been? whence do you come? Don't you know there's a great reward offered for you?"

"We were talking of it a minute syne," said Gipsy Madge, "and Rough Rob here'll get it, for he's found 'em; and they're my lads, and I mean to take them the night, as quiet and private as may be, to the Sisters o' Mercy; and, oh! my dear young leddy, the tale they'll tell at the trial will turn the scale, I'm thinking, and the poor youth now in gaol will be proved as innocent as your bonny sel'. And do ye remember what I told you four years ago, about a castle in his path and a coronet on his brow, and you in jewels and ermine by his side in the House of Lords, my leddy?"

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"Oh!" said Edith, weeping for joy, "I do indeed; but can these boys prove his innocence?"

"I think they can, my leddy," said Madge.

"I knows as how they can," said the rough, hairy man (whom the reader has recognised as Rough Rob).

"Oh, good Saint Robert, help the innocent!" said his tall wife, "and I'll burn a candle to you!"

"We will spake the truth, leddy," said the elder boy. "We saw the young Markis lying on the Flats in his blood, and we'll point out the man as did it; we both knows him by sight. Oh, it was an ugly sight, my leddy, and I often drames I sees the dead body—all white, and blue, and green, in a pool of blood. I'll spake the truth, my leddy."

And Edith hugged him, in her deep gratitude and delight.

"We must keep all dark, dark as night," said Madge; "they've been kidnapped once, and will again, if we don't hide 'em up, my leddy."

"Oh, take every possible care, dear good people!" said Edith.

"Never fear us, my leddy," said Rough Rob; "it's I have got 'em back, and this is the safest place to hide in, for them as has had consciences flies this place. Trust to us, my leddy, and go now in peace; you may be missed and seeked."

"God bless and guide you all," said Edith, shaking hands with each in turn, as, with streaming eyes, she left the spot.

CHAPTER LV.

"And disappointment in the rear,
That blasts the promised joy." GRAY.

It was nine o'clock at night when Mrs. Croft and Gloriana arrived at the Great Northern railway-station.

With the aid of a railway-porter and the scarlet bows, the black trunk was soon secured, and they themselves were soon safely ensconced in a cab, with their bags, bonnet-boxes, baskets, and all other small portable belongings, and driving through London on their way to Queen's Square.

"It will be much too late for dinner," said Mrs. Croft, "but we can have a dish of cutlets, or a nice rump-steak, with our tea. I think I shall fix on a steak—Mr. Lambert's cook does rump-steak just to my taste—light brown outside, and red in, but only red with the gravy. Then, too, the cook at Mr. Lambert's makes the best buttered toast in the world, and we can have a nice spring salad, or a few fried potatoes. Besides, he keeps poultry, so, if we fancy it, we can make sure of a new-laid egg. I like mine very lightly boiled—three minutes; don't let me forget to mention *that*. You like yours with the white set—four minutes for *you*, remember. But if Mrs. Plumm or Mr. Lambert propose it, we should be none the

worse for a broiled chicken, with mushroom sauce; we can have that, I dare say."

"Oh, that will be very nice!" said Gloriana; "but I long especially for a cup of tea. I am very tired and thirsty."

"Well, I promise you, you shan't have to wait long, Glory," said Mrs. Croft. "My dear old friend's servants well know they cannot please their master more than by making *me* very comfortable. Mrs. Plumm, the housekeeper, has known me from a girl—child, indeed—and she is well aware that, if I had chosen, I might have been mistress of that house and of her fine, portly self. The Square certainly is not as fashionable as I could wish; but the house is a perfect temple of comfort—such beds! and such a delightful warm bath at a few minutes' notice! Then I shall have the brougham and pair at my disposal (I always have), and that saves a fortune in cabs. If I can but find out where your father is, and get money from him to pay up the interest on the policy, if it is not already too late—which God forbid!—I shall be easy in my mind; and then, if we are very comfortable, and old Lambert pressing, perhaps I may make out a week in town."

"But Edith?" suggested Gloriana.

"Oh, Edith will do very well. I am not at all uneasy about her; but I shouldn't like to meet with Lady Rockalpine. She might think I ought not to have left that wrong-headed mope of a girl alone. But unless I were to seek the Countess out (which I promise you, my dear, I shan't do), I am not very likely to meet her. And now let me give you a hint, Glory: old Lambert is very fond of young girls, but he likes them to be full of fun, and always merry. You have taken lately to be almost as dull and moping as Edith herself. A word to the wise:—if you want old Lambert—who is as rich as a Jew—to remember you in his will, you must talk and laugh and joke, and be, as Roger would say, 'up to everything.'"

"But how can I, mamma?" said Gloriana. "I am uneasy about papa, I am distressed about Edith, I am miserable about Arthur."

"Hang Arthur!" said Mrs. Croft; adding, the next moment, "No, I don't mean that, in a literal sense, Glory; but I do wish the trial well over, and his sentence commuted to penal servitude for life."

"Oh, mamma, I am certain he is innocent!"

"And I am certain he is guilty! I remember the trouble I had with his mother—a pert, sly, independent young baggage, who disgraced her family and herself, and died in a madhouse. Ah, by the bye, if that were known, he might get off on the score of insanity, and be confined as a criminal lunatic for life, or rather, during Her Majesty's pleasure, and I hope that would be for life."

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Gloriana was about to express her entire faith in Arthur's sanity as well as in his innocence; but at this moment the cab stopped with a sudden jerk, and the cabman himself, putting down the window from the outside, said—

"What number did you say, ma'am?"

"One hundred and eleven, as plain as I could speak," said Mrs. Croft, pettishly; "a corner house—a large corner house!"

"Well, this 'ere is a large corner 'ouse, and three ones, as plain as plain, and that makes a 'underd and heleven, I calculate."

"Very well, then knock at the door, will you?"

"You please to put hout your 'ead, and see for yourself, ma'am, what's up."

Mrs. Croft looked out.

"Good Heavens!" she exclaimed, "was there ever anything so unfortunate, so exasperating, so maddening? Why, the house is under repair! The old fool must be gone out of town, just to torment and provoke me!"

She sank back in the cab and began to cry.

Gloriana, in her turn, looked out of the cab-window and saw that Mr. Lambert's house was surrounded by a scaffolding; that the windows were all splashed with whitewash; that planks, and posts, and ladders were lashed together with ropes; that bricks were piled up as if some enlargement were about to be commenced; and, in fact, that it was quite absurd to suppose that any master was living in that house, or that any guests could be received there.

There was no light to be seen; but Mrs. Croft felt sure that such very careful people as Mr. Lambert and his housekeeper would not have left the house quite unoccupied; and ordered the cabman to knock, and, in fact, to persevere until he made some one hear.

After several thundering knocks, a light appeared at one of the garret-windows, and an old head, in a high-cauled night-cap, with a flannel petticoat pinned over it, was protruded, and a shrill voice asked—

"Vat do you ever vant a-knocking the blessed 'ouse down? Don't you see we're under repairs?"

"Ask her," said Mrs. Croft, "where Mr. Lambert is, and where Mrs. Plumm is?"

The cabman put the question as desired.

"Vy, gone abroad for the 'oneymoon, to be sure; and they won't be back till this 'ere house is new painted and papered, and two more rooms built on to it; and there ain't no one in the 'ouse but myself, and I bad with the rheumatis in my poor dear 'ead."

"Good Heavens!" screamed Mrs. Croft; "do you mean to say that Mr. Lambert has married Mrs. Plumm?"

"Yes, marm," cried the charwoman; "they were married a fortnight ago, at St. Pancras Church; and they 'ont be back for six weeks, if then. Lawk-a-daisy, how the night wind do punish my poor, dear 'ead! Your servant, ma'am; will you please to leave your names?"

"Oh, no; it's of no consequence," said Mrs. Croft, biting her handkerchief in her rage and despair.

The old charwoman had closed the window, and put out the light; and the question was, "What's to be done now?"

"My sisters!" suggested Gloriana.

"Oh! the vile, undutiful, ungrateful creatures!" said Mrs. Croft, "*they* are quite out of the question."

"They would only be too delighted to receive us, dear mamma."

"You're a fool," retorted Mrs. Croft, "and know nothing at all about it; besides I could not sleep in a house with a glass-case of grinning white teeth, in pink gums, and 'MR. TIPPIT, DENTIST,' on a brass-plate on the door. Still less could I rest with the thought of a horrid foot, and a hand armed with a sharp instrument, just about to make an incision, to announce a chiropodist!"

The truth was, Mr. Tippit had written a very kind, manly letter—ay, and a letter any Christian gentleman might have been proud of—to tell Mrs. Croft that his Barbara was about to become a mother, and that her nervous, excitable, and delicate state of health was greatly increased by the grief and regret she felt at having offended her parents; that she was always saying she was sure she should never be a happy mother unless she were forgiven as a daughter; and he implored Mr. Croft to forgive the past, and to come and cheer up his darling wife by her presence, in the fast-approaching hour of pain and peril.

To this letter Mrs. Croft had returned a very heartless and unworthy reply; and the next thing was an announcement in the *Times*, and this she kept from Gloriana:—

"On the 3rd inst., in Bedford-row, the lady of Timothy Tippit, Esq., of a son, still-born."

Mrs. Croft had not much heart, but even she felt a pang when she read that announcement, and wished she had not written so harshly, nor acted so implacably. But it would certainly not do to drive up to Mr. Tippit's house, and ask for their hospitality, after what had passed so recently.

Then, as for Mrs. Cutts, she had written to invite her mother to come and visit her, expatiating on her spacious, well-furnished house, her four servants, her brougham, her adoring husband, her happiness, alloyed only by there being no prospect, in her case, of such good fortune as Barbara's (that was when a little stranger was expected); and actually presuming

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to say that there had been faults on both sides, but that she was willing to forgive and forget, and so was her beloved Castor Cutts, if her mother would accept the olive branch they jointly extended, and come and stay with them as long as she liked, bringing Gloriana.

Mrs. Croft's rage at the receipt of this letter was very great, and she returned it in a blank envelope to her daughter, Mrs. Cutts. Of all this Gloriana heard nothing.

Bitterly Mrs. Croft repented of her implacability. It would have been so pleasant, so convenient, to have repaired at once either to Bedford-row or Maddox-street, and there have been received like a queen, and welcomed like a mother. But regrets were useless; they could not stay in the cab all night. Already they had run up a considerable sum; they must go to a hotel—there was no help for it! Not knowing of any family hotel, Mrs. Croft consulted the cabman, who recommended the London-bridge Hotel, principally because it was a good way off, and so would suit his book in that respect; and partly because the stand he "used" was one close to London-bridge, and it was in that neighbourhood he put up.

Bitter were the bewailings of Mrs. Croft, at this distressing and expensive *contretemps*, and violent and angry was her conflict with cabby, when he deposited her at the entrance of the London-bridge Hotel. However, for once cabby had not charged more than his fare, and she was obliged to submit. Instead of all the little luxuries she had contemplated, she was obliged to confine herself to tea and bread-and-butter, for her funds were very low; and she retired to bed in a very ill-humour, and so cross and reproachful to poor Gloriana, who was in no way to blame, that the latter was very glad to retire into a small inner room, and forget all her troubles in a very small bed. The rooms assigned to Mrs. and Miss Croft, owing to the lateness of their arrival, were at the top of the house, and Mrs. Croft's bed was not large enough to accommodate Gloriana too.

Gloriana was soon in the happy land of dreams; but her mother lay long fretting and tormenting herself—now in agonies about the probable lapsing of the policy—now in tears at the loss of the legacy, almost certain to ensue upon old Lambert's marriage—now full of terror at the thought of being penniless in London! Before she closed her eyes, she resolved to be up betimes in the morning, in order to send to the old clerk, and to have an interview with him about the policy, before Gloriana was stirring.

Having decided on this, she at last composed herself to sleep, as a loud and regular snore might have convinced any one who was at all anxious on that point.

CHAPTER LVI.

"Heaven first sent letters for some wretch's aid."

POPE.

At a very early hour Mrs. Croft arose, and, taking a writing-case from her carpet-bag, sat down to address a note to Mr. Krimp, the old clerk at the Vampire Life Insurance Office.

As soon as she heard the waiters and the chambermaids stirring, Mrs. Croft rang her bell, and succeeded in getting her note sent at once to the Vampire Office, not very far from London-bridge. She then dressed herself, and awaited the return of her messenger—sitting in an easy-chair the while, though with a very uneasy mind, and knitting, for Mrs. Croft was an incessant knitter.

Gloriana still slept soundly.

In about an hour Mr. Krimp arrived. He was a very lean, bald old fellow, all in black. His clothes were very glazed and threadbare, but carefully brushed. Mrs. Croft, not having a sitting-room, was going to receive the old clerk in her bedroom, which, as we have said, was in one of the attic of the hotel, and consequently was very meanly furnished—for a hard, small bed, with scanty and rather soiled dimity curtains, three or four rush-seated chairs, a small round washing-stand, with a set of cheap ware of the well-known "willow pattern," and a small dressing-table, formed the principal objects in Mrs. Croft's bed-room. Mrs. Croft, however, perceiving, when she went out on the landing, on hearing a man's step, a sitting-room neatly-furnished, of which the door was ajar, invited her visitor into the apartment in question, hoping that her doing so would not be noticed or mentioned by the chambermaid who "showed up" Mr. Krimp.

Mr. Krimp was, like so many of his class, a Job's comforter.

"Your servant, ma'am," he said. "I'm sorry to see you looking so bad. Fear you enjoy bad health, ma'am, to judge by your looks."

"Oh, I'm very well, thank you, Mr. Krimp," said Mrs. Croft. "A little tired, and rather anxious, that's all; and I've not had a very good night."

"Ah! sorry to hear it, ma'am; a bad night tells sadly upon us when we're beginning to be uppish in years; it does on Mrs. Krimp, and I think, ma'am, you've the advantage of her, and she's no chicken, as I often remind her," he added with a chuckle; "for she's on the shady side of sixty, and if I remember right, when we were obliged to have your register"—

"I wish to talk of something much more important, if you please, Mr. Krimp," said Mrs. Croft; "I mean the policy. How long is it since you saw Mr. Croft?"

"Senior, ma'am, of course. Oh, I haven't seen him or heard of him for two months, ma'am; but I have seen the young

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Squire, for I'm sorry to say he and Lord Hauteville were had up and fined heavily for kicking up a row in the street and fighting the police, and they were bound over to keep the peace; and he wanted sureties, and sent to me, but I declined; for I think, if once a young man gets into bad company, no penalty or bail will keep him out of mischief."

"Oh, I was in hopes," said Mrs. Croft; "that Mr. Croft had called upon you or written to you, sending the money due, in order to settle that affair of the policy. I hope there is no danger of its lapsing?"

"None at all, ma'am, for it has lapsed by this time, unless anything has happened to Mr. Croft—which I begin to think might be the case from my not hearing from him, and he generally punctual to a day, and a bonus coming in."

"Good Heavens, Mr. Krimp!" shrieked Mrs. Croft, "you don't mean to say that the policy we have paid up so regularly for thirty years, is in any danger of lapsing?"

"I mean to say, ma'am, it has lapsed—that it lapsed on the third instant, unless you can prove that Mr. Croft, senior, had departed this life prior to that date; in which case, ma'am, on your satisfactorily proving date and place of death, and age corresponding—for the Vampire is very exact—we shall have to hand you over five thousand pounds."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Croft, bursting into tears, "I have no reason to believe that Mr. Croft is dead. My son, I am certain, knows where he is."

"Then Mr. Croft, junior, should have reminded Mr. Croft, senior, about this policy, ma'am. Five thousand pounds is no mere flea-bite—it's a good bit of money, ma'am, particularly where there's a family. I heard, ma'am, that two of the young ladies are well married—comfortably settled in life. I know their lords and masters, Mr. Tippit and Mr. Cutts—the former attends our teeth, and the latter cuts our corns. I'm sure I congratulate you, ma'am, for they're two very respectable young men; and my cousin, who visits them, says they make first-rate husbands. Of course you've heard, ma'am, of the dis-appointment in the son and heir of Mr. Tippit being still-born, and she, poor dear lady, for some days not expected to live?"

Mrs. Croft turned a little pale. "All danger is over now, I believe," she said.

"Well, I should say not, ma'am," said Mr. Krimp. "My Anna says Mrs. Tippit fretted herself to a shadow before her time came, and now she's so weak, she has to be fed like a babe, and, I believe, might go off at any moment quite sudden. Mrs. Cutts is with her day and night."

"Pray, Mr. Krimp," said Mrs. Croft, "how do you advise me to act about proving——"

"The dear old gentleman's decease?"

"Oh, no! I don't mean that."

"Why, ma'am, there ain't any other proof that can do you any good about the policy. If Mr. Croft is in the land of the living, *the policy's lapsed*; if he's departed this life, you've only to prove it, and the Vampire won't cheat you of a farthing, or keep you waiting an hour."

"Perhaps I had better advertise," said Mrs. Croft.

"I've done that already, ma'am," said Mr. Krimp, taking out a newspaper, and handing it to Mrs. Croft; "but no good came of it."

"Well," said Mrs. Croft, eagerly scanning the paper, "I must try to see my son, and consult with him."

"Ah, ma'am! I fear you'll not get much help or comfort out of him. Shall I put in another advertisement, ma'am? They come expensive! but the Vampire would like to come to some certainty—the Vampire don't like suspense, ma'am."

"No, nor do I," sobbed Mrs. Croft. "I can't decide on nothing till I have seen my son."

"Well, ma'am, perhaps when you have, you'll drop me a line. If the old gentleman's alive and kicking (excuse a joke), the policy's lapsed; if he's departed this life, the five thousand pound's yours, on proof of date and place of death, likewise age."

"Oh! I have no hope," said Mrs. Croft; but checking herself, she said, "I mean, I have no fear. In fact, I'm so agitated, I scarcely know what I mean."

"Well, ma'am," said Mr. Krimp, "either ways, I beg to offer my condolences; for if you've not lost a good partner, you've certainly lost five thousand pounds, and *vice versa*. So I wish you good-day, ma'am."

He bowed himself out of the room, and Mrs. Croft threw herself on the sofa in an agony of grief. While she was sobbing there, a waiter looked in, napkin in hand.

"Beg pardon, ma'am; I didn't know you'd engaged a private sitting-room."

"Nor have I," cried Mrs. Croft.

"Well, ma'am, the rule is, you must pay for every room you occupies."

"But I've only occupied it for half an hour," said Mrs. Croft.

"We don't make half hours here, ma'am," said the waiter, skipping downstairs to have a good laugh about the angry old lady with the pretty chambermaid who was coming upstairs with Gloriana's hot water.

Mrs. Croft hurried back to her own room, to indulge in what she called "a regular good cry," behind the whitey-brown dimity curtains of her tent-bed.

While she sat rocking herself to and fro, as she thought with agony of the possible lapse of the policy, on that of the legacy the charge for the sitting-room, and all the unpleasant remarks

of the old clerk, she was roused by a scream from Gloriana, and starting up, she saw at the foot of her bed, where the black trunk had been placed, Gloriana, who had entered her mother's room unperceived, kneeling before the box, which she had opened, and gazing into it with looks of horror. Her pale cheeks and clasped hands, her parted lips and wild scream, made Mrs. Croft rush to her daughter's side. It was then Mrs. Croft's turn to scream and turn pale—the box into which she gazed was not her own! The device of the scarlet bows had suggested itself to, and had been adopted by, an old gentleman, whose wardrobe (a good deal the worse for wear) met her horrified gaze, in the shape of very old trousers, very old coats, waistcoats, boots, etc., etc., etc., with a very musty, fusty smell, instead of her own fragrant, neatly-folded, elegant dresses, her delicate, lavendered linen, her fancy cuffs, habit-shirts, chemisettes, and pocket-handkerchiefs.

"My new Solferino silk, with high low and bodice!" gasped Gloriana.

"My pink *moire*, and my black Genoa velvet!" shrieked Mrs. Croft.

"My Paris blue velvet mantle!" sobbed Gloriana.

"My Indian cashmere!" sobbed Mrs. Croft.

"My new tulle ball-dress!" moaned Gloriana.

"My jewel-case, and my gold watch and chain!" cried Mrs. Croft.

"What *is* to be done?" sobbed Gloriana.

"We must get a cup of tea, for I am ready to faint," said Mrs. Croft; "and then drive off to the Great Northern station."

CHAPTER LVII.

"One woo doth tread upon another's heels." SHAKESPEARE.

"WILL you breakfast in a private room, ma'am, or in the ladies' coffee-room," asked the pretty housemaid, when, in answer to Mrs. Croft's bell, she knocked at the door. "The ladies' coffee-room is very cheerful and pleasant," said the chambermaid, "and most of our ladies prefer it."

"Let us breakfast there, mamma," said Gloriana, "this room is so close."

"None but ladies, and gentlemen as comes *with* ladies, family gents as we call 'em, ma'am, is admitted to the ladies' coffee-room—which it isn't many hotels as has one. I've lived in many, and never see one till I come here."

"Well, we will breakfast in the ladies' coffee-room," said Mrs. Croft, after she had confided to the young chambermaid the disaster of the exchanged trunk.

Effie, the pretty chambermaid took an intense interest in this

misfortune when she heard of all the finery lost, and had been permitted to glance at what she called the "male rubbish." Comforted by her sympathy and by her prophecies that the box would be returned to the station, because the old gentleman would be as much put out by the loss of his "male rubbish" as the ladies by that of their beautiful silks and velvets, Mrs. Croft repaired to the ladies' coffee-room with Gloriana.

The chambermaid was right in saying that few London hotels possessed the advantage of a ladies' coffee-room; and this was a delightful room.

In spite of their many troubles, Mrs. Croft and her daughter did ample justice to the excellent breakfast spread before them in that large, airy, well-lighted saloon. While at breakfast, Gloriana remarked, in one of the further corners of the large room, a party at breakfast, consisting of three ladies and three gentlemen. One of the latter had his back turned to Mrs. and Miss Croft, but a glance which Gloriana had of his long face, and lantern jaws, coupled with his quaint look and strange appearance, convinced her that she gazed on Old Hackney-Coach.

A very venerable-looking, handsome old clergyman, with silver locks, and evidently in extreme old age, yet hale, rosy, and cheerful, was of the party; and Gloriana suspected that this old divine, attired in the fashion of fifty years ago, was the Rev. Peter Pryme, father-in-law of Hackney-Coach. There were two very odd-looking women of the party, in coal-skuttle bonnets, gigôt sleeves, small tippets, short waists, short skirts, and sandaled shoes; these ladies and one more gentleman formed the party, which seemed very happy and merry. There was something bridal in their appearance; and Gloriana guessed that the old curate had been temp'ed to share in the wedding festivities of Grace Pryme and her clerical bridegroom. Gloriana wished to claim acquaintance with Old Hackney-Coach; but Mrs. Croft, perceiving her inclination, and not having any generosity of impulse or independence of feeling, sharply rebuked her for thinking of attaching such a set of "Guys" to her party, and added—

"If they are here to-night, and nothing better has turned up, we will ask Old Hackney-Coach to lend us a few pounds. Of course they must have plenty of money, or they would not be here at a first-rate hotel. But," she added, "if I can but see Roger, I am certain of money from him; and, in that case, I shall not renew my acquaintance with those figures of fun, and as they have all read themselves almost blind, and cannot see an inch beyond their noses, they won't make us out if we don't introduce ourselves to them. And now, my love," added Mrs. Croft, "if you have quite done, we will slip away unperceived, and get into a cab, and drive at once to the Great Northern Station."

Mrs. Croft's *ruse* did not succeed. A waiter detected that she was going, and as she was a stranger there, he swiftly brought up the bill, and, to her horror, she saw a private sitting-room charged for. Mrs. Croft remonstrated, but in vain—except that a shilling was taken off the charge. Mrs. Croft's purse was so slender, she was afraid to leave herself penniless, and she proposed to the waiter to pay on her return to dinner. He remarked that being quite a stranger, it would be more satisfactory if she would settle so far, and indeed that it was a peremptory rule with his master never to trust strangers.

"Do you know who those people in that corner are?" asked Mrs. Croft.

"Oh, yes, ma'am; they are old customers. Mr. Harkup Hackney and his bride, and her father the Rev. Mr. Pryme, and Mrs. Hackney's sister and her bridegroom. They are come here for their honeymoon, ma'am."

"Well," said Mrs. Croft, "take my card to the gentleman with the iron-grey hair and long back, and say I wish to speak to him here."

The waiter obeyed.

Kind Hackney-Coach was very glad to meet with his old friends; and Mrs. Croft found that, by giving him as a reference, she was able to avoid immediate payment.

The ladies of the party were introduced, and it was agreed they should all dine together. Hackney-Coach was very full of the cruel murder of the young Marquis of Dunstanburgh, his patron and friend; but he would not admit a possibility of Arthur Bertram's having had any hand in that dreadful crime.

"I see by this morning's paper," he said, "that, for the convenience of the parties concerned, this memorable trial will take place in the Central Criminal Court, and that it is fixed for this day week."

"I shall stay in town," said kind old Hackney, "to see if I can be of any use, help, or comfort to the dear boy, of whose innocence I am as certain as of my own."

"Ah, still waters run deep," said Mrs. Croft. "I fear the only chance for his life is to set up a plea of insanity. His mother died in a madhouse."

"Oh," said Hackney, "I hope he'll scorn such a plea. He's no more mad than I am, and no more guilty than you are."

"So say I," said Gloriana; "but mamma believes him guilty."

"Well, his fate will be decided now in a few days," said Mrs. Croft. "I should like to be present, and I must try if I can manage it; but come, my dear Gloriana, we are losing precious time with regard to our trunk—I will tell you all about that when we meet at dinner," said Mrs. Croft, bowing all round. "Come Glory."

Alas! poor Glory, at the thought of Arthur's being tried for

his life on a charge of wilful murder, her tears fell fast. Mrs. Croft's scolding made no impression on her; for she kept on saying to herself—"In one week! Arthur Bertram to be tried for his life this day week! Oh, dear, dear Arthur! may God strengthen thee, and enable thy judge and jury to see the truth, and to acquit thee, poor dear Arthur! Only a week! Alas! alas!"

CHAPTER LVIII.

"How sharper than the serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child." SHAKESPEARE.

It was a bitter disappointment to Mrs. Croft and Gloriana to find, on their arrival at the Great Northern Station, that nothing had been heard of their travelling-trunk. By the advice of the clerk of the Lost Luggage Office, Mrs. Croft left the trunk she had carried away, in mistake; and, after bewildering the official with multitudinous and very involved descriptions and directions, she took her leave in a very ill-humour, re-entered the cab, and said—

"If you had had your wits about you, Gloriana, this horrible misfortune would not have happened. My mind is distracted by anxieties of all kinds, but *you* have not a real care or trouble in life. You ought at once to have seen that that old wretch's box was not our beautiful trunk. Why, the scarlet bows were of a different size and shade, and—oh!" she added, suddenly, with a sort of scream, that made Gloriana start, "oh, what a fool I have been, to leave that box at the office! I feel convinced we shall never get our own back, and I should have done much better to have kept *that* than none."

"But what could you have done with it, mamma?" asked Gloriana.

"Well, I only looked into it. There were only old clothes and boots at top, but there might have been some things of value underneath; and if not, at any rate I could have had in a Jew, and have got something for all those old coats, trousers, and boots. And now what's to be done? I must try to see Roger; I know he's in town, for old Krimp, whom I saw this morning before you were up, told me he's living a great deal too fast, and getting into every kind of scrape, always going about with that disreputable Hauteville, who, though he's a nobleman, is certainly no gentleman. However, Roger's as proud as a peacock, and he'd be in a fine rage if we were to drive up to Mivart's or Long's Hotel in this wretched old cab. I never saw so miserable a concern! The horse is broken-kneed, and almost a skeleton, and has a raw on his back; the cabman has but one eye—and that is the case with the horse, too; then the cab is mended, splashed, and very small and low. A cab is always a very disgraceful conveyance, but this is the

meanest and dirtiest old vehicle I ever beheld. Of course Roger would cut us dead if he saw us, in our dusty, old travelling-dresses, driving up in this odious cab to one of his hotels."

"What can we do, then, mamma?" said Gloriana.

"Ah! that is all you can say; there is no help or advice to be got out of you, Gloriana. But, thank Heaven! I have a head on my shoulders, and, I flatter myself, a pretty good one. Old Lambert used to say, I should have been Prime Minister, or Lord Chamberlain—no, Lord Chancellor; I can't remember which—if I had but been a boy."

"And what have you decided on doing, mamma?"

"Why, on stopping in this cab just round the corner in Clifford Street, close to Long's Hotel, and getting the cabman to give in a note I have written to Roger. I have begged him to come and dine with us at the Bridge Hotel; and I have asked him to bring a few pounds with him, saying that we are penniless in London, have lost our luggage, and are quite in despair and terror at our dreadful position. He cannot be so cruel and undutiful as not to attend to such a harrowing note as I have written to him."

"Does the cabman know where he is to go, mamma?" asked Gloriana.

"Yes; while you were staring about you like a stuck pig, I explained all to him. But here we are in Clifford Street, I declare! Cabby, cabby!" said Mrs. Croft, putting her head out of the cab-window; "come here a minute, please, cabby."

Mrs. Croft had an object in being so civil to cabby.

"Will your horse stand still here, while you step round to the door of Long's Hotel in Bond Street, and give in this note, and wait for an answer?"

"Well, he ain't a good un at waiting," said the cabman. He've zeed better days, he has. He wor an 'unter onst, and carried a peer o' the realm. I 'ont warrant un to wait long. He's a spirited hanimal; but if you likes to chance it and stand all repairs, I don't mind."

He took the note from Mrs. Croft's hand, and disappeared.

"What did he mean by 'chancing it, and standing all repairs?'" said Mrs. Croft. "That poor old skeleton horse, with rags round his broken knees, is not very likely to run away with us, I think."

Just at this moment a very dashing equipage, with four spirited greys, and a very showy harness, whisked past Mrs. Croft in her little dingy cab.

"It is Roger!" she cried; and, in her ecstasy, forgetting his dislike to all that was dusty and shabby, she put her head, in her old travelling-bonnet, out of the cab window, and cried, "Roger! Roger!"

Roger heard, and Roger saw; but none are so deaf as those

who will not hear, none so blind as those who will not see. The undutiful wretch let his mother call on him in vain!

It was a very high carriage—the same to which he had given his name. It was painted a bright green; the liveries of the outriders and the servant behind were green. Roger Croft, in a very low-crowned hat of green beaver, and in the celebrated green “Croft” coat, was driving a beautiful woman, all velvet, lace, feathers, and gold. This was Marion, Lady Hauteville. Between Lord and Lady Hauteville and Roger Croft a great intimacy had sprung up. They were staying at the same hotel (Mivart’s); and while Hauteville drank and smoked with his own base and profligate associates, Roger Croft drove about with Lady Hauteville.

“How stylish—how beautiful he looks!” said the silly mother. “But I know, by a certain twinkle in his eye and a curl of his lip, that he saw us. Well, I can’t blame him, cutting such a dash as that, for not noticing us in this wretched old cab.”

Just at that moment a street-band struck up; a horn-player gave a loud blast, preparatory to playing the “Huntsman’s Chorus.” At that sound all the past rushed on the broken-kneed, broken-spirited, broken-hearted old cab-horse. He forgot the old cab at his heels, he forgot the brute his driver, he forgot his heavy whip, he forgot the raw on his shoulder, the rags on his broken knees, the burden of life, and the knacker’s yard staring him in the face! He is off, off! as if again he was bearing the daring sportsman, the noble Lord Ascot, to be in at the death. How often he had done so.

Loudly screamed, roared, and bellowed the horrified Mrs. Croft, crimson with rage and terror; while silent, pale, and in trembling fear, Gloriana drew herself back into the corner of the cab. Another blast! and yet another! and the old hunter has overtaken Roger Croft in his dashing equipage, and driven up against the bright green panel and its showy arms.

It was now Lady Hauteville’s turn to scream and turn pale. Roger Croft, mad with rage, rose up, and dealt the old hunter’s head a heavy blow; maddened with the pain, the old horse reared, kicked, plunged, and dashed the old cab again and again on the side of the new “Croft.” With his last dash the old cab-horse came down upon his knees, and the old cab went to pieces. Mrs. Croft was thrown into the middle of the street, and Gloriana sank fainting among the ruins of the cab. A large crowd had assembled. Mrs. Croft was picked up senseless, and carried into the nearest shop. Roger Croft, without stopping to inquire whether his mother was hurt, drove away, amid the yells, hisses, and groans of the crowd. How much louder would those yells, groans, hisses and have been, had they known, that the woman he had not the decency to inquire after

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was his own mother, and the young girl fainting in the broken-down cab, his sister!

The brutal cabman by this time had reached the scene of the accident, and savagely and brutally was he lashing and kicking the poor old hunter, who was again on his legs.

Among the crowd assembled round the broken cab, was a gentleman, who no sooner perceived the face and form of the young lady who had fainted inside, than, opening the door, he lifted her out, and carried her into the same shop in which Mrs. Croft, not really hurt, was in a violent paroxysm of kicking and screaming hysterics.

The shop, luckily, was a chemist's; and the usual restoratives having been administered, Gloriana opened her pretty black eyes, to meet those of her quondam adorer, Mr. Blower. Gloriana had often rather regretted Mr. Blower, and Mr. Blower had never, as he said in confidence to Mrs. Cutts, been able to root out the image of Gloriana from among the ruins of a broken heart. Their eyes met, and so did their hands; and Mrs. Croft came out of her hysterics "to watch the game," as she called it. But her attention was soon called off by a gruff voice at the door. It was that of Cabby, come to demand the full cost of the repairs to be done to his cab.

"You said you'd chance it, ven you axed me to leave my 'oss. I told you he wor a sperited hanimal, and 'ad been a 'unter; and you said you'd chance it, and stand all repairs."

"Neither your wretched old horse nor your more wretched old cab was safe nor fit for use, and I'll not pay a farthing," said Mrs. Croft.

"Oh! you 'ont, 'ont you, you reg'lar wicious old cure? We'll soon see that. Whatever does you go to presume for to ride in cabs? Homnibushes is the vehicles for you, only them's too good, and so's a veelbarrer; but I'll get my rights, you may depend. Oh! if it warn't for the lor, wouldn't I lurrup you a good un—wouldn't I wallop you as I never walloped a 'oss in my life! You a lady!"

"Hold your insolent tongue, cabman," said Mr. Blower, going boldly up to the enraged brute, "or I'll give you in charge for insulting and abusive language."

The cabman, cowed by the voice and manner of Mr. Blower, backed into the street, and began brutally lashing and kicking his wretched horse.

The crowd cried "shame!" but did not interfere. Gloriana, who had learnt from Arthur and Edith to feel intensely for that ill-used being the London cab-horse, and who had read Captain Curling's admirable work on the subject, seeing a policeman coming towards the scene, ran up to him, and at once gave the cabman in charge.

As a magistrate was sitting at that very time in — Court

close by, the policeman took the brute off at once, telling Gloriana she must accompany them to prefer her charge. Mr. Blower, offering to attend her, called a cab, and handed in Mrs. Croft and his heart's idol, who was loudly cheered by the crowd for her spirited conduct in defence of the poor cab-horse. On their way to the police-office, Mr. Blower informed Mrs. Croft that he had inherited the fortune of his aunt, the wealthy Mrs. Tight, who had left him all she possessed, on condition of his giving up business in the artificial leg, arm, eye, and ear line, and adding to his own name that of Tight: so that he was now Mr. Tight-Blower, or Mr. Blower-Tight, whichever the ladies preferred. The magistrate, a very humane man, fined the cabman forty shillings under Mr. Martin's Act; and as he was unable to pay it, he was sent to prison, with hard labour, for a fortnight; the poor old horse being taken, by the magistrate's order, back to his stable, and the cab, in its dilapidated state, to its proprietor.

Mrs. Croft, enraptured with Mr. Tight-Blower in his altered circumstances, and enchanted to see that he was more than ever enamoured of Gloriana (in spite of her old black straw turban-hat, grey cloak, and linsey-wolsey dress), was in high good humour.

Mr. Tight-Blower proposed that they should keep together that day, and that he should get his brougham, which he had left at a livery-stable, and drive them to his house. Mrs. Croft agreed, on condition that he took her first to the London-bridge Hotel, to put off till the morrow their dinner with the bridal party. She then gladly accepted Tight-Blower's invitation to go down with him to Wimbledon, where he was living in his late aunt's villa, to dinner.

"We'll buy a nice bit o' fish," he said, "and a goose, to add to my bachelor's fare, and be as happy as the day is long. As for Mr. Croft, I no more believe he's dead than I am; and I think the Vampire can be made to pay. I'll tender the money to-morrow—five thousand pounds is no flea bite; we'll see about it. So now cheer up, and let's be merry while we may—for we every day grow older."

An excellent dinner, with plenty of champagne, restored Mrs. Croft's spirits, and brought on "an exposition of sleep."

Yes; there she lay, in the pretty villa drawing-room, after dinner, on the late Miss Tight's comfortable crimson Utrecht velvet sofa; and while she enjoyed her nap, Mr. Tight-Blower or Mr. Blower-Tight (which the reader likes) stood in the window recess with Gloriana, looking at the moon, and while relating all he had suffered, stole his arm round her trim waist, and whispered in her ear, "Doesn't she see how her poor Tight-Blower loves the ground she treads on? and will she doom him to despair—or will she be his dear, darling little wife?"

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Gloriana's head sank on Tight-Blower's shoulder, as she whispered, "I will;" and when the footman came in with the tea, Mr. Tight-Blower handed to the table, to preside there, his affianced bride—the future Mrs. Tight-Blower.

CHAPTER LIX.

"Yes, I forgive my child's clandestine marriage;
For, after all, she's married to her carriage." LASCELLES.

MR. TIGHT-BLOWER lent his mother-in-law a sum sufficient to pay her bill at the London-bridge Hotel, and to meet all her expenses in town. The dinner with Hackney-Coach and his party came off, and was a very merry one, Hackney-Coach insisting on playing host on the occasion.

Mr. Tight-Blower "tackled" the Vampire, as he called it, and there seemed some hope of the policy being saved; and so "all went gaily as a marriage bell."

Mrs. Croft found, indeed, great help and comfort in her son-in-law elect, but even he failed to obtain any tidings of old Croft. Neither could Mrs. Croft obtain the slightest notice from her undutiful and insolent son Roger. The intimacy of his mother and sister with Mr. Tight-Blower made him more resolute than ever in shunning, and, in fact, cutting them. But if Tight-Blower was an element of estrangement and discord between Mrs. Croft and her vile, ungrateful son, he was one of reconciliation in the case of the offending daughters, Mrs. Tippit and Mrs. Cutts.

Tight-Blower had a very good heart, and he could not bear to see Mrs. Tippit so unhappy and deserted. He therefore made it a personal request that Mrs. Croft would call on her suffering daughter. Tight-Blower had a brougham, and in this brougham he drove Mrs. Croft and Gloriana to Bedford-row, to visit Mrs. Tippit.

Great was Mrs. Croft's delight when she found that, instead of the glass-case full of grinning rows of white teeth with pink gums, nothing announced the dentist but a small brass-plate with the name of "MR. TIPPIT." This change had been wrought by the influence of Mrs. Tippit. Tippit certainly lost many inferior patients by the removal of the glass case and the rows of white teeth and pink gums, but he rose in the profession in consequence of the withdrawal of this showy, practical advertisement. His patients were of a higher, wealthier class, and on the whole he was no loser.

Mrs. Tippit, scarcely recovered from her confinement, was looking very delicate and pretty. Her tender and devoted husband had surrounded her with every possible comfort and elegance of life; and when Mrs. Croft saw her daughter lying on a rich modern sofa—in a wadded rose silk wrapper—in a

boudoir furnished with the most elegant luxury, her own French maid to wait on her, and a page—a perfect constellation of buttons—to answer her bell, Mrs. Croft forgave her from the bottom of her heart, and deigned to accept her daughter's pressing invitation to make her house her home during her stay in London; Gloriana, of course, was included in this invitation.

As for Mrs. Cutts, she was gone with Mr. Cutts, her husband, to Paris for a holiday, and therefore Mrs. Croft was spared the misery of making-up with a daughter whose husband still proclaimed his calling by the picture over his door of the hand, the foot, and the sharp instrument. Mrs. Croft was so very comfortable at the Tippits', and was made so much of by her son-in-law, the dentist, and by Tight-Blower, Gloriana's intended, that she troubled herself very little about Lady Edith Lorraine. Still less did Lady Edith Lorraine trouble herself about her faithless chaperon. All her thoughts, hopes, and feelings were centred in Arthur's acquittal. Long and frequent were her consultations with Sister Sympathy, that lady's cousin, Mr. St. Ormond, and Detective Meadows, who had long been lurking in secret places at Rockalpine, to unravel the dark web of crime which had puzzled even that renowned Detective.

The discovery of the gipsy boys was a secret as yet known only to Arthur, Edith, Sister Sympathy, Mr. St. Ormond, Rough Rob, his Mary, Gipsy Madge, and Meadows the Detective, who had greatly helped Rough Rob to discover the distant spot to which they had been most artfully kidnapped. In company with Sister Sympathy, Edith had frequently cheered Arthur's captivity; and, as far as she was concerned, all she dreaded was Mrs. Croft's return—all she hoped (about her) that she might prolong her stay until the day of Arthur's trial. Oh, what blessed comfort, in this his hour of grief and misery, did Arthur find in the true love of one faithful woman's heart! What comfort does man always find in such affection, as long as he has virtue to deserve and sense to appreciate it! And Edith seems to him to be appointed the blessed instrument Providence has selected for saving his life, and what are dearer to him far, his name and fame.

It was through Edith he first knew Sister Sympathy, and through Sister Sympathy, Mr. St. Ormond had been induced to interest himself in the case of one so forlorn, and to bring all the experience of a practised barrister, and all the zeal of a generous nature, to the justification of innocence and the detection of guilt.

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CHAPTER LX.

"A son abridge the old age of his father!" LOUIS XI.

Mr. and Mrs. Cutts were, as we have said, in Paris, and, among other objects of interest, they visited the madhouses with which the City of Delights abounds. The lively Frenchman reproaches the English as a nation driven by fog and gloom to despair and suicide; but social statistics have proved that suicide is of more frequent occurrence in France than in England. And in the suburbs of the gayest city in the world, "moping Madness, laughing wild amid severest woe," is most frequently found.

Among the wards and cells visited by Mr. and Mrs. Cutts, was one in which one of the keepers told them that an old Englishman had been for some time located. His madness, the keeper said, was of a perfectly harmless kind, and had he not been placed there by his son, who had exhibited the necessary certificates, and who paid for his board and lodging, they should scarcely have considered him sufficiently insane for confinement in that asylum. The keeper added that the old man was always reading an English Bible which a former patient, also English, had left behind him when he went to his last long home; and what seemed most to distress him was there being no one whom he could understand, or who could understand him.

The account the keeper gave of the old man interested Mr. and Mrs. Cutts, and they requested to be allowed to see their countryman.

Little did Mrs. Cutts, when she tripped lightly along the stone passages in her French kid boots, gathering up her flounced silk, and thinking of her rich velvet paletot and its ermine trimming—little did she think who would meet her view when the door was opened! There, on a wooden tressel, his Bible on his knees, and the light streaming in through the grated window on his bald head—there was old Croft, her father, who had been decoyed, trepanned, and tricked into that living tomb by the heartless villain whose plot required the old lawyer's absence—his son Roger!

It was sad to see the change wrought by misery, confinement, and the sense of his son's base treachery and ingratitude, in the face and form of old Croft. But yet, changed as he was, his daughter knew him at a glance.

"Let me go to him alone, Castor," she said to her husband, after she had revealed to him who the old Englishman was. "He is not mad, and it would pain him too much to be seen in this degraded state by you or any other stranger."

Mr. Cutts complied with his wife's considerate wishes, and Almeria entered the cell alone.

As she drew near, the change in the once spruce and proud old man seemed more touching, and her sense of her own filial ingratitude and desertion more harrowing.

Old Croft was reading the Book of Job. So intent was he on troubles greater than his own, that he did not hear Almeria enter, nor was he aware of her presence until she sank on her knees before him, and the well-known, well-remembered word, "Father!" burst from her very heart.

Yes; the daughter knelt, her rich silks trailing on the dusty floor—she knelt in her velvet and ermine, her laces and jewels, before the wasted, broken-hearted, old man! And, at the sound of that familiar voice, he looked up, and extended his arms. Almeria crawled on her knees to his feet, and laying her face on his old, tottering knees, wept long and bitterly.

Her father, whose intellect was quite unimpaired, soon explained the mystery of his confinement in a French madhouse. Roger, the arch-villain, had decoyed him from his home by a diabolical artifice, had tricked him into a visit to this madhouse, and left him there as a lunatic.

"Ah, I fancy I know his object," said old Croft. "He wanted to prevent my presence at the reading of the late Earl of Rock-alpine's will, and he dreaded my revealing certain important family secrets connected with Arthur. He shall be defeated yet. The will which he hoped to get out of my iron safe is here, stitched in the breast of my coat, and so are the papers on which Arthur's welfare depends. Take me away from this prison—take me to England, my child, that I may do justice to all."

Mrs. Cutts, who spoke French well, and was no stranger in Paris, soon obtained of the authorities the release of old Mr. Croft; but when they got him to the Hôtel du Louvre, he was taken dangerously ill, and for some time his life was despaired of. And while he was lying between life and death, Arthur Bertram, his grandson, was undergoing his trial for the wilful murder of the Marquis of Dunstanburgh, in the Central Criminal Court, London. In his case, as in that of Palmer the Poisoner, and many others, it was found more convenient to the judges, witnesses, etc., etc., to remove the scene of trial to London. The excitement that attended it was intense and unparalleled. The rank of the victim, the romance woven with the crime, the Love and Murder so closely united—the mystery in which the whole case had been so long involved—all contributed to invest this murder and trial with an interest no crime of the kind had excited for many a long year. The papers were full of the "Dunstanburgh murder;" a broadsheet, by a street author, sold by hundreds of thousands daily; portraits, said to be of Arthur Bertram, but which had done duty for Thurtell, Greenacre, Rush, Tawell, and many others, were

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hawked about the streets; and so were lives, histories, etc., etc. Every detail connected with the prisoner's most trifling remark or action was made public; and where facts fell short, fibs supplied their place. The mysterious Dunstanburgh murder occupied every mind, and was the theme of every tongue.

CHAPTER LXI.

"Thrice is he armed who has his quarrel just;
And he but naked, though in triple steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted." SHAKESPEARE.

THE sun rose with unclouded splendour on the morning fixed for Arthur Bertram's trial. The sky was of the deep, clear, bright sapphire so common in Italy, so rare in England; the granite of the pavement sparkled in the rays of the sun. The flower-girls hawked about the cheapest and most common-place offerings. These London Floras were sunburnt, and their growth stopped and stunted by the heavy burdens they had borne from their cradles—that of life itself not the lightest carried on their broad shoulders; but Nature never yet made a flower which in its first freshness has not some beauty, nor a flower-girl who in her early youth has not a charm for some one.

At a very early hour the Central Criminal Court was crowded—thronged to excess; so were all the avenues approaching to it. Great, indeed, was the interest excited by this trial for **WILFUL MURDER**—the Wilful Murder of a Peer of the Realm—the young, wealthy, happy, hopeful Marquis of Dunstanburgh. The romance interwoven with this story of blood and crime, the extraordinary details connected with this deep tragedy, which had stolen into the public papers, and thence into every home and heart, filled all with horror, doubt, and intense curiosity as to the solution of the mystery. The constantly-disputed point of **GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?** which had become almost a party-question throughout the empire, all united to invest Arthur Bertram's trial with a harrowing, a thrilling, a bewildering interest, felt alike by all classes, from the noble lords and M.P.'s, who were accommodated with seats on the bench, to the poor hawkers of ginger-beer and lemonade, the vendors of nuts, apples, oranges, etc., etc., and the strolling Floras of whom we have spoken. Outside the Court the mob formed one dense, closely-packed mass; inside, there was not an available spot unoccupied. People, outside and in, seemed in high good-humour. So bright a day! so interesting a trial! so much sensation! Oh, it was high holiday for all the spectators; and so it was in ancient Rome, when the lions, the tigers, and the panthers were let loose upon the Christian martyrs, who preferred death to apostasy.

Among the spectators, and vainly flattering themselves that they were *incog.*, were ladies well known in the fashionable world, armed with opera-glasses. Quietly dressed and closely veiled, Lady Rockalpine and her daughter, Lady Ida, might have been detected among these lovers of a sensation drama. But it was not merely curiosity that led Lady Rockalpine to that Court. She was very vindictive; she owed Arthur Bertram a bitter grudge, not only for winning Edith's young heart, but for the part she believed he had taken in depriving her and her family of the alliance she had so ardently coveted—that of the young of Marquis Dunstanburgh. Lady Rockalpine had written to Mrs. Croft when first she left her daughter in that lady's care, desiring her on no account to allow any information connected with Arthur Bertram and the proceedings against him to be conveyed to Lady Edith.

"As far as I can judge," said her ladyship to Mrs. Croft (by letter), "Lady Edith has ceased to interest herself in the fate of that most guilty and unhappy wretch. I do not think she knows or has tried to ascertain the result of the coroner's inquest. She is a strange girl, and I have sometimes thought that the fall which, in her childhood, threatened to make her a cripple, may in some way have affected her brain. Let the name of the wretched prisoner never be mentioned in her presence; keep all newspapers carefully away from her; and if ever she should make any inquiry as to the fate of the young ruffian, tell her his friends have got him out of the way, and that he is enjoying himself in Paris or Brussels, or where you will; and do not on any account give her any idea that he is in prison, or to be tried for his life. To such romantic girls as Lady Edith, a culprit like Bertram becomes a hero and a martyr; and looking upon him in that light, there is no excess—no madness—of which she would not be guilty! If she thinks him safe and happy, she will soon forget all about him, and, I hope, accept a certain young duke, who saw her in Paris, and who not only admired *her*, but ardently desires to be allied (by marrying my daughter) to *me*."

Mrs. Croft had answered this letter in the meanest and most abject style, promising everything her ladyship required; and Lady Rockalpine then troubled herself no more about the matter.

She was very anxious that Arthur Bertram should be found guilty; and if a something, inseparable from woman's nature, made her prefer that he should not be hanged, the best she wished him was that a plea of insanity should be set up, and that he should be confined as a criminal lunatic during her Majesty's pleasure—namely, for the term of his natural life.

Lord Rockalpine had taken, in secret, an intense interest in every detail connected with Arthur Bertram's trial, and at one

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time he had resolved to be present; but his courage failed him when the time came, and when Lady Rockalpine sent to propose that they should drive to the Central Criminal Court together, My Lord was nowhere to be found! His absence was the result of a long and ghastly conflict with his own tormented spirit.

He wanted—nay, he burned to know exactly what passed, what transpired, at this trial. How could he tell but that the train of circumstances might drag him in some way before the public, as connected indirectly with this murder?

In all webs, whether woven by the Fatal Sisters, and called the web of life, or those delicate silken meshes that seem to grow beneath the fingers of fair ladies, a touch will unravel what it has taken a long time to weave. Conscience whispered in the terrified, anxious ear of Lord Rockalpine, that at any moment the web he had woven so carefully might be unravelled, and he stand bare, exposed, disgraced, and defenceless before the world which had so long been at his feet, worshipping in him the great moral reformer; he who had so greatly improved the discipline of our prisons, established reformatories, formed ragged schools, and realized what many had long deemed impossible—a liberal conservatism. Alas! alas! the pillory of public opinion is at all times a terrible one! What must it be, then, to him who, for five and twenty years has occupied a shrine placed on the highest pinnacle of popular esteem, and been worshipped as an idol?

No wonder Lord Rockalpine, when the awful time drew near, shrank from the dangers which, to his excited fancy and deeply-wounded conscience, seemed almost like his own trial for **WILFUL MURDER**—a trial which he had evaded and averted for five and twenty years, but which he had gone through more than a thousand times by day and by night in his midnight vision, on his feverish couch; that couch, with its velvet hangings, surmounted by a coronet, and its gilded griffins rampant forming the supporters. Yes, he had gone through that trial while the busy world slept. He had seen the Court—the Judge—the Counsel for the Crown—the Jury of his peers. He had heard the verdict, **GUILTY!** He had heard the Sentence, and sank back insensible at the long-deferred doom! And even in his grand office at **Whitehall**, with the noon-day sun shining brightly on his despatch-boxes, his official grandeur, and his mysterious-looking private secretary, he had gone through every harrowing detail of the trial, which, ever since the fatal day when “the deed that damns eternally was done,” he, ingenious in self-torture, had acted over and over again to himself, at the crowded levée and the Court ball, as by the lonely sea-beat haunts of Rockalpine, or in the green solitudes of **Armstrong Park**, or wandering alone by moonlight amid the ruins

of Rome, or gliding like a ghost amid the forests of Baden-Baden, while Lady Rockalpine, armed with a card and a pin, was seated at the tables of the misnamed "conversation saloon," since a deadly silence, the silence of impending doom, prevailed there.

Guilty and miserable wretch that he was! He had no sooner started by express for a place at a considerable distance from the scene of trial, than he repented having left London, and conjured up a thousand terrors and "chimeras dire." Among others, he was haunted by the thought that his absence from the trial of the supposed murderer of his noble friend and nearest neighbour, the Marquis of Dunstanburgh, would excite suspicion, appear strange and unnatural, and lead to those remarks and surmises which he so dreaded.

However, it was too late. He could not return in time for the trial, had he wished it. While the preliminary formulæ were being gone through, the fratricide was hurriedly slipping out of the express at M—, his hat drawn down, and his coat collar pulled up; bent only on escaping unnoticed, and on hiding himself among the wild flinty rocks, and wishing that the petrifying waters by which he roamed could extend their power to him, and turn to stone the wildly-beating heart, where Terror and Remorse had held their empire for five and twenty years.

CHAPTER LXII.

For who, to dull forgetfulness a prey,

This pleasing, anxious being e'er resigned—

Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,

Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind? GRAY.

It is a dreadful thing to see any human being tried for Wilful Murder. The basest ruffian, whose oft-repeated deeds of blood and crime are proved beyond a doubt, and for whom, in vulgar parlance, "hanging is too good," yet excites a thrilling interest in all who think seriously what life and death really are, when awaiting the verdict that may doom him to a sudden and violent death.

But if the vilest culprit ever tried for Wilful Murder does, in spite of his low brow, his brutal mouth, his small, porcine eyes, and his bull neck, yet inspire a sort of interest, what must have been felt for Arthur Bertram, when he was led into Court by two policemen, and placed at the dock? And what must those who had ever known Arthur Bertram have felt when the sun shone full on his pale brow, his hollow eyes, his thin cheek, and his figure wasted by confinement, distress, and anxiety about Edith and the result of this trial?

Directly Arthur Bertram appeared, all evil impressions vanished about him. They had been excited by the savage portraits which had been sold by tens of thousands, heading the most

absurd and impossible life and adventures of one whom the street authors designated as "Bertram, the Bold Bastard," thus calling in "apt alliteration's artful aid" to the embellishment of their broad-sheets.

There was a sublime expression of hope, faith, resignation upon Arthur Bertram's pale, noble, and earnest face. The thick clusters of closely-curling dark-brown hair waved above a marble brow of power and intelligence. In his large, deep-set eyes there was a bright calm and a gentle daring. A pale rose tint on his thin cheeks deepened into a crimson flush as the buzz of surprise and approbation at his appearance went through the Court. And some were touched to the heart, and some women even wept, to see how wasted was the tall form, how thin and semi-transparent the hand he passed across his brow, how graceful in its dignified humility his bow to the Judge and Jury, and how sweetly sad the smile with which he recognised Mr. St. Ormond and several others of his friends and witnesses.

Among the witnesses for the Crown, and certainly the most conspicuous, was Roger Croft, in his glossy jet-black "Prince of Wales," and his green velvet sacque (or very loose paletot), with gilt buttons; the hideous coat, in short, which a servile tailor had named the "Croft," after him.

Lord Hauteville, with his bleared eye, his pale and yet bloated face, was by Roger Croft's side; and the two were actually betting—and that very heavily—on the trial.

Marion, Lady Hauteville, gorgeously dressed, and looking very handsome, had been driven to the spot by Roger Croft, whose showy equipage had attracted as much notice as that of the Lord Mayor of London might have done.

In spite of an assumed air of independence and swagger, and in spite of a borrowed bloom, there was a ghastly hue spread over Roger Croft's vulgar face; and all the bluster of his manner could not conceal the aspen-like tremor that shook his frame.

Roger Croft was no voluntary witness at that dread trial. He had suffered enough at the inquest on the young Marquis to make him dread and shun all public examinations and investigations; but he had been subpoenaed, and, much as he dreaded to be present, he yet dared not to absent himself.

Lord Hauteville, looking very pale and bloated, dressed in a slovenly style, unshorn, his hair dull and matted, and in his eye the dulness, and in his whole person the neglect, that characterize the drunkard, had yet roused himself—or rather, caused himself to be aroused—from the heavy sleep of intemperance, in order that he, too, might be present at a trial on which he had some heavy bets, and in which his low associates took a lively interest, as such men always do in cases of murder, or any other capital offence.

After Arthur Bertram had made his appearance and been placed in the dock, where, on account of recent illness, he was accommodated with a seat, a change came over the expression of every face, from the pale, clear, earnest countenance of the Judge on the bench, to the twelve thoughtful, anxious visages in the jury-box; and even the Counsel for the Crown and his junior, with their rather bullying expression, the barristers present out of curiosity, and the spectators who had assembled as if to witness a play—all found a “change come o’er the spirit of their dream,” when, for the first time, all their conceptions of the notorious ruffian, the savage murderer, **BERTRAM, THE BOLD BASTARD**, were put to flight by the appearance in the dock of the *beau ideal* of an English gentleman, whose countenance expressed at once nobility of soul, cultivation of mind, and goodness of heart, refined, softened, spiritualised, as it were, by the confinement, the anxiety, the mental and bodily sufferings which had sharpened the firm and flowing outline, hollowed the young cheek, traced a deep violet shadow round those dark eyes so full of light, and changed the sunny-brown and glowing rose tints of youth and health for the pale primrose that is the very livery of pain. As a stream of sunshine came in, and settling like a halo round that noble head, lighted up that massive marble brow and those deep-set eyes, the Judge’s countenance relaxed into a smile, the Jury breathed more freely—for it is a fearful thing to be compelled by conscience to find a fellow-creature Guilty—and each Juryman had decided in his own heart that the prisoner in the dock had never committed **WILFUL MURDER**.

Even the Counsel for the Crown was a little taken aback as he glanced smilingly at the dock. The face and form that met his view were in no respect such as he had expected to see; for in his close and life-long study of the wicked, he had never once met with the face of Virtue coupled with the heart of Ruffianism. When the Clerk of Arraigns, in a loud, official voice, said, after he had read over the charge against the accused—“Arthur Bertram, prisoner at the bar, what say you—**GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?**” The silence that ensued was so unbroken, and the excitement so intense, that the buzz and hum of a fly on one of the court windows was distinctly heard; and when Arthur Bertram started to his feet, his fine face first crimson and then deadly pale, his eyes first flaming like those of an angel in wrath, and then slowly suffused with tears, and placing his thin hand on his breast, in a loud, clear voice, said—“Not Guilty, so help me Heaven! Not Guilty I swear it, in the name of Him, the Sinless One, who died for sin!” a murmur of approbation, which was at once suppressed, went through that vast assembly; a faint tinge of colour dawned in the pale face of the Judge; the Jury exchanged glances that seemed to

say, "We believe you, prisoner at the bar;" and the Counsel for the prosecution (alias the Crown) said, in a loud whisper, to his junior, "So said Palmer, the Poisoner—a fine man, a clever man, a pleasant man, too—and we hanged him! We know that 'a man can smile, and smile, and smile, and be a villain.'"

"Even so," said the junior. "The devil can assume the form of an angel of light."

After the attempt at applause had been suppressed, the business of the trial proceeded in the usual manner, and the Counsel for the Crown, who seemed to take as vivid and as personal an interest in proving Arthur Bertram guilty as if the victim had been his own son, commenced an eloquent and closely-argued statement, so well linked together by the strongest chain of circumstantial evidence—so clearly keeping ever before the minds of the Judge and Jury the MOTIVE of the prisoner's crime, that again the brow of the Judge was corrugated, and his cheek pale.

The Jury now began to look anxious and stern, like men who felt they would be called upon to sacrifice duty to feeling, or feeling to duty; and the tiers above tiers of human faces, which had worn the rosy hue of hope, were now livid with intense anxiety and deadly fear that the noble and intellectual being before them, in whose guilt they could not believe, would yet, by the force of resistless Destiny, and the astute arguments and overpowering eloquence of the Counsel for the Crown, be sent, in the flower of his life, out of this fair world, and leave a blighted name behind him!

CHAPTER LXIII.

"The passionate heart of man entered the breast of the wild, dreaming boy; and he became—what to the last he must be—her adorer." *Lady of Lyons.*

THE Counsel for the Crown was a man of great physical and mental energy. He was what Roger called an "old hand," and "a cunning old file." Habit had hardened his heart. He felt no pity, no compunction; to get a verdict was his great object.

It was not so much that he wanted Bertram hanged, as that he could not endure to be defeated or outdone. Still, even he felt the necessity of simulating something like pity for the young life he was working so hard to cut short.

"My Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury," he said, "in the whole of my long professional experience, I have never felt the pain I feel at this moment. I perceive the impression made upon you by the appearance of the prisoner; nay, more—I myself, with all the warm impulses and strong emotions which agitate your breasts at work within my own, I cannot but wish that the task which it is my duty to perform had devolved

upon another; for never since I first practised at this bar, my Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury, never have my convictions and my feelings been more terribly antagonistic. It is a frightful thing—and in the pale and anxious faces of all present I see my own impressions confirmed—it is a frightful thing to connect the idea of a bloody, treacherous, and most remorseless murder, and the awful punishment that awaits on such a crime, with a young man of the bearing, the education, the position, the intellectual and classical advantages, and I will add (at the risk of being accused of a weakness), the singularly interesting appearance of the prisoner at the bar. It is a frightful thing to feel and to know that one holds in one's own hand the clue of that dark labyrinth of crime, and to feel, too, that after tracking him through all the twistings, turnings, and twinings in the maze of Folly and Guilt into which he has suffered Passion to lead him, one is obliged, in common justice to that noble victim's friends and relations, and in common justice, my Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury, to the great family of MAN, to hunt down this blood-stained criminal of the white hands and the black heart, of the cultivated mind, but of the ruthless and savage breast, till, the black labyrinth completely threaded, we find him at the foot of the gibbet itself!

Here a murmur of horror and deprecation ran through the crowd, and Mr. Charles St. Ormond, in wig and gown, acting as one of the Counsel for the Defence, sarcastically reminded his learned brother, the Counsel for the Crown, that he was begging the question, and acting in direct opposition to the great, just, and merciful law of the land, which considers every man innocent until he has been proved guilty.

"My learned and eloquent brother," said Mr. St. Ormond, "has actually brought the accused to the scaffold for execution before he has been convicted, and has convicted him before he has been tried. I must, therefore, beg your lordship to call my learned brother to order; for it is as much an act of justice to the 'great family of Man' to justify innocence falsely accused, as to convict and punish remorseless crime."

"My Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury," said the Counsel for the Crown, "it is my turn to call the Counsel for the Defence to order. My learned brother will have an opportunity for arguing the great question of GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY when I sit down. I will now simply state the circumstances of this sad, and, I may say, horrible case. The prisoner at the bar, my Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury, is a young man who, like Eugene Aram and some other scholars in England and across the Atlantic, has not found in Learning and Science a refuge from Passion. I do not wish in the slightest degree to prejudice your calm, enlightened, and just minds, gentlemen of the Jury, against the accused, when I say that his birth is of that

kind which has been supposed to transmit, with its other disadvantages and inabilities, a certain lawlessness, sadly in keeping with the position of one who comes into this cold world with a brand upon his brow, to mark him as an outcast of society."

Here Arthur Bertram started to his feet, his fine face crimsoned with shame and anger, his thin hands extended in deprecation. He seemed about to speak, but meeting the calm eye of Mr. St. Ormond, which seemed to say, "Be patient, and bide your time," he pressed those hands tightly, first on his breast, and then on his burning forehead, and sank back, white and trembling, in his chair.

"The prisoner at the bar, my Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury," resumed the Counsel for the Crown, "is the unhappy offspring of man's sin and woman's shame."

Here Arthur Bertram's head sank on his breast, while his hands closed and unclosed convulsively; and Mr. St. Ormond again called his learned brother to order.

"My Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury," almost screamed the Counsel for the Crown, "I submit it to you whether I am out of order in making a statement which, however much I may regret to be obliged to make it, is yet essential to the full understanding of this case. The prisoner at the bar is the son of a lovely and ill-starred lady, Miss Clarissa Croft, daughter of Mr. Croft, attorney-at-law, and agent of the late and of the present Right Honourable Earl of Rockalpine. An impenetrable mystery surrounds this unhappy *liaison*; and the name of the prisoner's father has, though frequently whispered over tea-tables, never been clearly pronounced or positively ascertained. Suffice it to say that Mr. Croft, the prisoner's grandfather—a very worthy man, and who would have been subpoenaed here to-day as a witness, but that he has most mysteriously disappeared, and can nowhere be found—adopted, educated, and supported the prisoner at the bar as if he had been his own legitimate child. Having contracted a second marriage, and his daughter, the ill-fated Clarissa Croft, mother of the prisoner, having died in a madhouse—mark *that*, gentlemen of the Jury—having died in a madhouse" (here there was a great stir in the Court)—"the prisoner was brought up with Mr. Croft's young family by his second wife. A story of a private marriage of Clarissa Croft with a Mr. Bertram, was, I fear I must say it, *invented* by old Croft, to shield his daughter's memory, and to give some respectability to his grandson's position; and as the grandfather—as grandfathers often do—doted far more blindly on his grandchild than on his children, nothing was thought too good for young Bertram, as it was agreed to call him. At an early age he was sent to Eton, and thence, at the usual time, to Oxford. At both Eton and Oxford he was inti-

mate with the young, noble, amiable, and generous Lord Pontecraft (since the Marquis of Dunstanburgh), the beau-ideal of an English nobleman; a being in the first warm flush and sunny prime of youth, uniting in his own most noble person the chivalry of a Norman knight, and the virtues of a Christian gentleman. This young nobleman, both at Eton and Oxford, took the young Pariah by the hand, fought his battles, and secured for him a footing which nothing but such generous patronage could have secured, in such an exclusive society, to the illegitimate grandson of an attorney. It was a noble, a sublime friendship, on the part of the young Marquis; and I must, I will hope that until Love, with his prime minister, Jealousy, broke up this friendship—as Love always does, when two friends carry their sympathy so far as to adore and covet the same ‘inexpressive she’—I will hope and believe that, before that master-spirit came, the prisoner *was* grateful, *was* attached to the most noble deceased.

“I do not wish to harrow up your feelings, gentlemen of the Jury, nor yet to wound the pride and delicacy of a patrician family, the head of which boasts a name Religion loves, and Morality reveres—I mean the honoured name of the great moral reformer, the Earl of Rockalpine”—(great applause in the Court)—I do not wish to wound the feelings of that nobleman and his family—God forbid;—but in the careful unraveling of this web of crime I am obliged to reveal the fact that a daughter of that noble house had been placed, in her sickly infancy, as a boarder at Mrs. Croft’s, and had grown up from that sickly, and, indeed, crippled infancy, among the Croft children, and the rocks and moors of Rockalpine, and had expanded into health, bloom, and beauty worthy of Hebe herself.

“Domesticated with the Croft children, she was also domesticated with Arthur Bertram, and a strong attachment between these young people was the result of this unfortunate intimacy. On the young lady’s side it was a sister’s tender and true affection; in the passionate heart of man—the heart of the prisoner at the bar—it was Love!—first, wild, jealous, adoring, exacting Love! Remember, my Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury, that the prisoner at the bar is what in some countries is called a ‘love-child!’ Passion was his only heritage—the passion, lawless, wild, absorbing of Abelard for Eloisa—of Claude Melnotte for Pauline. The prisoner was obliged to content himself with the young girl’s gentle and sisterly affection, although you may as well try to feed a hungry tiger with rose-leaves, as Passion with Friendship. Still he tried to be content, until a rival came upon the scene; that rival was his old college-friend—his boy-patron and protector at Eton—the young, brilliant, generous Marquis of Dunstanburgh. The noble parents of the young lady approved of and encouraged the Marquis’s suit. The

young lady herself could not be blind to so much that was good and great in a form made to captivate, combined with manners that could not fail to win woman's favour. Here, too, were high rank, ancient birth, boundless wealth, approval of parents, the world's applause. No wonder the young Marquis found favour in the lady's eyes; no wonder the spirit of Cain, the craft of Iago, and the jealousy of Othello entered the breast of the adoring but despised bastard. 'Who loves raves—'tis youth's fever,' says the great poet Byron. Love and jealousy combined will turn any brain—they must have turned that of the prisoner at the bar; for I am prepared to prove that, the night before the murder on Dunstanburgh Flats, a fruitless attempt was made by supposed highwaymen on the Marquis, as he drove home at night from Bessborough Castle through the Black Wood, on his way to Dunstanburgh Abbey. I will presently call witnesses to prove that a hat with a black crape band attached to it, a blood-stained shirt and overcoat, and other articles, were found concealed in the loft in the summer-house near the scene of the murder, and that all these blood-stained articles belonged to the prisoner at the bar, and have been identified as his by many witnesses. I will prove to you, also, my Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury, that a violent and personal conflict had occurred between the prisoner at the bar and the most noble deceased Marquis, a little while before the murder; that the latter challenged the former to fight a duel with him on Dunstanburgh Flats; that the prisoner at the bar went to the appointed spot without *pistols or second*—mark that, my Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury—without pistol or second; and I can prove, by the evidence of a most reluctant but most credible and highly respectable witness, Mr. Roger Croft, junior, who was to have been the young Marquis's second on the occasion, that he left his lordship on his way to the Flats, in order to desire a surgeon to be in attendance in case of need; that he left the young Marquis of Dunstanburgh in high health, buoyant spirits, and full confidence that the lady of his love returned his affection; and that when, at the end of about twenty minutes, he, Mr. Roger Croft, returned to the spot, he found Lord Dunstanburgh lying on his face in a sort of fissure between the flat rocks—the back of his head battered in, smashed, pounded as it were—a pool of blood surrounding the face and head of the deceased, a loaded bludgeon, covered with blood and hair, lying on a flat at a little distance, and no one near save the prisoner at the bar.

"My Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury, I know you must feel with me, that if ever a murderer was fairly and justly convicted on circumstantial evidence, the prisoner at the bar must be that man. How seldom is it that the blackest crimes are not done in the dark, or in those lone and secret places where no eye can

see the deadly blow given, no ear detect the curse of the murderer, the cry for help of the attacked, the dying groan of the murdered! For one murderer convicted on the oath of an eye-witness, thousands have been proved guilty on circumstantial evidence alone. Crime, defiant and fearless, still stalks abroad at noon-day, infesting our streets, blanching the cheeks of our women and children with terror, and firing the hearts of manhood with the thirst for vengeance; but, if we are a crime-ridden people now, what should we be if Murder—Murder, that loves night, darkness, secrecy, and lonely places, and seldom shows his horrent head and blood-stained hand in the light of day, or the open haunts of man—what should we be, I say, if all who have not been *seen* to do the bloody deed are to be let loose upon society, and circumstantial evidence, however convincing and irresistible, is driven from our Courts? I know that the unhappy young lady, whose name has been mixed up with this tale of blood and crime, and whose reason, it is much to be feared, has been impaired by the horrors she has witnessed, is said to have deposed that, on her way to prevent the duel, of which she had overheard some inklings, she met with two gipsy-lads, crab-hunting among the rocks, who told her they had just witnessed a bloody murder, and warned her not to go to the Flats. This was solemnly deposed to by the Lady Edith Lorraine at the inquest on the late Marquis's body; but as the unfortunate young lady's manner was very wild and excited, and all search for the gipsy-lads had proved vain, it was supposed that they existed only in the excited fancy of the hapless lady, and the coroner's inquest very wisely resulted in a verdict of Wilful Murder against the prisoner at the bar.

"My Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury," added the Counsel for the Crown, "if no one can think without emotion of a young man so gifted in mind, so polished in manners, so winning in appearance as Arthur Bertram, the prisoner at the bar, suddenly sent out of this fair world, and launched upon that dark ocean, without, as his deeds lead us to fear, the pole-star of Faith to guide his soul to the throne of grace, can any present think with indifference of the sudden and bloody close of the virtuous, blameless, and Christian life of the young and most noble Marquis of Dunstanburgh? How fair for him was the world from which the treacherous blow of the assassin severed him!—that assassin bound to him by all the ties of gratitude—if gratitude could dwell in the breast of treachery, jealousy, and ruffianism. Love—first love, happy love—warmed the noble heart now cold in death. Open as the day to melting charity, was that hand, now stiff for ever! If you have tears, let them flow for a legitimate object—a most noble victim; make not a hero of an assassin, when a great and good man has been cut off by that assassin's treacherous and dastardly

blow—the blow all Englishmen loathe and despise—the blow of one who feared to meet his victim face to face, but stole behind him, and killed his unguarded, unsuspecting benefactor, as ‘butcher felleth ox.’

“My Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury, I will presently call the witnesses for the prosecution, and my learned brother, Sergeant Darkside, will examine them. When you have heard the evidence, no doubt will remain on your enlightened, manly, and upright minds, gentlemen of the Jury; and to you I now leave a cause which is the cause of every Englishman, whether he dwell in castle or cottage, hall or hovel! May God enlighten your minds to see the truth, and strengthen your hearts and hands to do what is just; so that your verdict may be received with the applause of all just and honest men, not merely throughout the length and breadth of the land, but wherever among all the nations of the world this ghastly and most bloody murder has been discussed; with white lips and burning hearts!”

The Counsel for the Crown sank exhausted on his seat, and Sergeant Darkside, Q.C., proceeded to the examination of the witnesses for the prosecution.

While the witnesses were called, and during the bustle that always attends their appearance in the witness-box, a murmur ran through the Court that the Lady Edith Lorraine had arrived, resolved to give her evidence. This was, in fact, the case; but how it got wind no one knew.

Yes; the devoted girl, thickly veiled and closely shrouded, was there, having travelled all night to be present; and having the very evening before, while wandering in the woods of Rock-alpine, been suddenly accosted by her detested adorer, Roger Croft, who, fearing she might appear at the trial, as she had done at the inquest, was there with a carriage ready to carry her to a place of confinement; thus, having compromised her fair fame, hoping to compel her to accept his base hand. Luckily, Edith had concocted her plans, and confided them to Rough Rob and his party.

They, fearing some foul play—for Roger was better known than he was aware of—were on the watch, masked like highwaymen; and when they heard the Lady Edith’s shrieks, they rushed forth, carried her off in safety to the very carriage her odious lover had procured for his own objects, and drove her at once to the station, securing him until she was off by the express, when they released him, and let him do what he chose with his vile self.

Although the announcement of the Lady Edith’s arrival had passed like electricity through the crowd, no one had as yet seen her, nor did she appear in Court till the witnesses for the defence were called.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE first witness for the prosecution who was called by the Counsel for the Crown was Roger Croft. Now, Roger Croft, after his rash, desperate, and futile attempt to carry off Edith Lorraine, had remained for about two hours, bound and guarded by Rough Rob and his friends in the depths of the Black Wood. They offered him no insult, they did him no injury; but they kept him a close prisoner until they felt sure that the Lady Edith was off by the express to London; and they knew that there was no other train by which Roger Croft *could* follow, save and except a very slow one, that left Rockalpine at nine o'clock at night, and did not reach London till the following morning. By this train, then, Roger Croft, who was subpoenaed, and compelled to appear at the Central Criminal Court, set off for London.

He looked, as he stood in the witness-box, not only very malicious and very mean, but very haggard, anxious, and brutally stupid. He had not had time to shave, or do more than hurry on his clothes, including the green "Croft," and the superfine Prince of Wales hat. His eyes were red and heavy from want of sleep, and the impression he made on all present was as unfavourable as that made by Arthur Bertram had been the reverse. A shudder passed through the frames of the most impressionable among the audience, when, from under his red, swollen eyelids, and white eyelashes, Roger Croft stole a glance of unmistakeable and most malicious hatred at the prisoner in the dock, who met that furtive, snake-like glance with a calm, proud gaze, folding his arms across his breast the while, and compelling Roger's weak, prominent, pale-blue eyes to droop beneath the clear, searching, indignant, and fixed gaze of Arthur Bertram's dark, soul-beaming eyes.

"Are you related to the prisoner at the bar?" asked Mr. Dark-side, Q.C., with a very insinuating smile, addressing Roger Croft.

"No."

"Indeed! I thought he was described as your father's grandson?"

"He is so described, and has been so considered; but as he was the *illegitimate* son of a half-sister of mine, who was old enough to be my mother, I never acknowledged him as a relative; for I have always understood that bastards, by the law of the land, have no relations."

"Certainly; no one can dispute that proposition. Are you aware of any evil feeling of long standing between the deceased Marquis and the prisoner at the bar?"

"Yes."

"What was the cause of that evil feeling, and when did it first begin?"

"My late most noble and most beloved friend the Marquis of Dunstanburgh" (here Roger Croft hid his face in his handkerchief) "had for some time been attached to a young lady brought up by my mother. He had not proposed to the young lady herself, but he had expressed his intention of doing so to her mother, a lady of high rank, who encouraged his suit. Under these circumstances, my most noble friend was startled one day, on going accidentally into Messrs. Hunt and Roskell's, to see in the hand of the prisoner at the bar a locket, containing a miniature and a lock of hair, which at a glance he recognised as the portrait and hair of the object of his own suit."

"Did any conflict take place in consequence?" asked Serjeant Darkside.

"None: The Marquis, who had not been seen by the prisoner at all, passed on to the other end of the shop; and shortly after the prisoner at the bar left the shop."

"How do you happen to know the particulars to which you allude?" said Serjeant Darkside,

"I had them," said Roger Croft, "from my deceased friend."

"When did the conflict of which my learned brother spoke take place?"

"A few days later. My most noble and lamented friend, passing through the Black Wood—a part of the Rockalpine property—came suddenly on the prisoner at the bar, who was sitting on a high bank, with the locket I have alluded to in his hand. My noble friend, who had been accepted in the meantime by the young lady's mother as a suitor for her daughter, tried to possess himself of a treasure which he thought and felt—as we all should, I think, my Lord Judge, and gentlemen of the Jury, in similar circumstances—that no man had a right to possess save himself, seeing that he looked upon the lady in question as his future wife. The prisoner at the bar, who from his boyhood had been a very pugnacious bully, refused to give up the prize. A struggle ensued. My most noble and beloved friend, whose blood was up, called the prisoner at the bar an insolent bastard for presuming to raise his eyes to the lady in question, and threatened, if he refused him the satisfaction of a gentleman, to horsewhip him wherever he met him. A meeting was subsequently consented to by the prisoner at the bar; the place fixed upon was Dunstanburgh Flats, the weapons were to be pistols, and I was to be my friend's second."

Cross-examined by Mr. St. Ormond:

"Had the Marquis been accepted or encouraged by the young lady herself?"

"Of that I have no certain knowledge; but I cannot believe that any young lady could be indifferent to the attachment of such a man as the Marquis of Dunstanburgh."

"A prior attachment would render such indifference very

probable. Have you any reason to believe that the young lady gave the locket in question to the prisoner at the bar?"

"If she did, it must have been as a token of sisterly regard, not as a pledge of any warmer feeling," said Roger Croft, growing livid with the consciousness of the lies he was telling, nay, the perjury he was committing.

"This young lady, then, who had known the prisoner at the bar from her infancy, had a warm, sisterly regard for him—that is something in his favour?"

"Oh! he could bamboozle her or any one else; but he's a wolf in sheep's clothing."

"Ah! the wolf did not wear the sheep's clothing at home, you may be sure. A man who is loved in his home is sure to be a sterling character. No one wears a mask at home." (Applause in the Court.)

Here the Counsel for the Crown remarked that all this was irrelevant; that his learned brother was wasting the time of his Lordship, of the enlightened Jury, and of the whole Court.

Roger Croft then went through all the details, with which the reader is familiar, connected with the intended duel; the reluctance of the prisoner at the bar to fight his most noble friend; the subsequent arrangement for a duel with pistols on Dunstanburgh Flats; his leaving the young Marquis to secure the attendance of a surgeon; and his finding his beloved, lamented, and most noble friend, half an hour later, lying in a pool of blood on his face in a fissure of the rocks—a loaded stick or bludgeon close by, clotted with blood and hair, and no one to be seen on that lone and dreary spot but the prisoner at the bar, who pretended to be coming towards the spot. On examining the bludgeon, it proved to be one belonging to Arthur Bertram—the witness remembered his bringing it for protection during a walking tour.

Roger Croft here sat down, covered his face with his handkerchief, and appeared lost in grief for his most noble friend.

The surgeon, Mr. Poke, who had made the *post-mortem* examination, was then called. He deposed that the most noble deceased died from the effects of several most violent, savage, and brutal blows with a bludgeon at the back of his head.

By a juror: "Did these blows correspond with the bludgeon?" (Here the bludgeon was produced and handed to the judge and jury. The initials "A. B." were carved on the wood.) They corresponded exactly.

By another juror: "Is it possible the deceased could have inflicted those blows on himself?"

Mr. Poke: "It is impossible he could have done so; they must have been dealt from behind."

The Counsel for the Crown here observed that he did not intend to call any more witnesses. The case lay in a nut-shell;

and he should now await, as soon as the Defence had been heard, with confidence the charge of his Lordship, and the verdict of the most enlightened, patient, and intelligent Jury he had ever had the honour to address.

Arthur Bertram then rose, and, as he did so, every heart beat high, every cheek was blanched, every eye was strained, every neck was stretched, every ear was attent.

At first his voice was low, and betrayed some internal agitation; his cheek was very pale, and a tremor ran through his frame; but after the few first words his voice became clear, loud, sonorous, steady; his manner firm and composed, and a glow was suffused over the pallor of his fine face.

"My Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury," he said, "I have resolved to address you myself, because I alone, in this Court, know that I am innocent. I might have availed myself of the eloquence of some of the greatest orators, and of the special pleading of some of the greatest ornaments of the profession, to persuade you not to find me GUILTY; but strong in the consciousness of an innocence as spotless (with regard to this foul murder) as your own, my Lord Judge, and yours, gentlemen of the Jury, I disdain all the powers of oratory, all the science and chicanery of law; I believe in the irresistible power of TRUTH, and I pray God to enable me to state that truth, so that it may carry conviction to the minds of those on whose verdict my life depends, and that which I value far more than life—my fair fame, and the esteem of all good people in general, and of one angelic being in particular.

"The Counsel for the Crown and one of the witnesses for the prosecution, Roger Croft, have attempted to prejudice your minds, my Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury, by asserting that I am a bastard; I deny that such is the case. I have the word—nay, the solemn assurance, of my grandfather, that I was born in wedlock; and he has often told me that, although a mystery surrounds my birth, yet that it was in his power, and that it would be his duty, at a certain time not far distant, to raise the veil that has been dropped over my father's name; and that when that veil is raised, and justice done, I shall find myself not only the lawful son of a man of honour, but entitled to a name I shall be proud to bear. The unaccountable absence of my grandfather, who has been for some time 'missing,' alone prevents my proving this point; and I only allude to it because the Counsel for the Crown, and one of the witnesses for the prosecution, have tried so hard to make what they call my *illegitimacy* a weapon against me. It was with unutterable reluctance, and with deep regret, that I heard the name I most revere and love upon earth dragged by the witness Roger Croft into this investigation; but as this has been done, I have no alternative but to disprove many of the false state-

ments connected with that honoured lady, and with her revered and beloved name. Of the midnight attack on the late Marquis of Dunstanburgh in the Black Wood at Rockalpine, I, so help me Heaven! know nothing but by report. How my hat, my coat, or any other articles of apparel belonging to me came to be stained with blood, and secreted in the loft over the summer-house at the end of Rockalpine Park, as the Counsel for the prosecution has told us they were, I know no more than you do, gentlemen of the Jury! I can only believe that the real culprit is some miscreant who had access to my room at Croft Villa, and that his object was less to murder the Marquis of Dunstanburgh, in that midnight attack in the Black Wood, than to ruin me; not but what his Satanic plan may have included both the objects which he has at length triumphantly carried out. That after a frank and friendly understanding and intimacy of many years, and after repeated proofs from the late lamented Marquis of Dunstanburgh that he held me in high esteem, some modern Iago, whose name I may most unwillingly whisper to myself, but will not, in this early stage of the proceedings against me, proclaim in this Court, may have filled his noble heart with jealousy, hatred, and rage against me, I cannot attempt to deny or to disprove. I would wish to say as little as possible about the *cause* of that sudden jealousy, rage, and hatred; not on my own account, but because the delicate sensibilities of one whose peace and happiness are far dearer to me than my own are concerned. I have, besides, little to object to the account the witness Roger Croft has given of my quarrel and personal conflict with the Marquis of Dunstanburgh; but allow me with all deference, to ask, what man is there here present who would suffer what he valued most on earth to be wrested from him, even by a Prince of the blood royal—nay, by a Monarch himself—however humble a member he may be of what the eloquent Counsel for the Prosecution has called ‘the great family of MAN?’ The locket the deceased so coveted was mine—mine by every law, human and Divine. The Marquis demanded it of me in language the most insulting, and tried to possess himself of it by force. I defended my prize; I defended myself. I hurled him from the bank on which we stood, and he fell from that height into the road. He challenged me; he called me by every name which he thought would most debase and outrage me; he threatened to horsewhip me whenever he met me, unless I accepted his challenge. I agreed to meet him, my Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury; but as my principles are strongly opposed to deliberate murder under the name of duelling, *I resolved not to fight the Marquis of Dunstanburgh*, but to go alone to the place of meeting, to try to convince him that he wronged me. He had a noble and a gentle spirit, and, left to himself and to the promptings of his own heart,

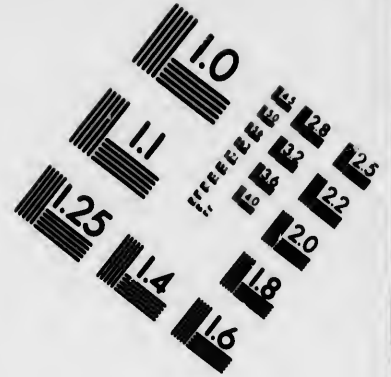
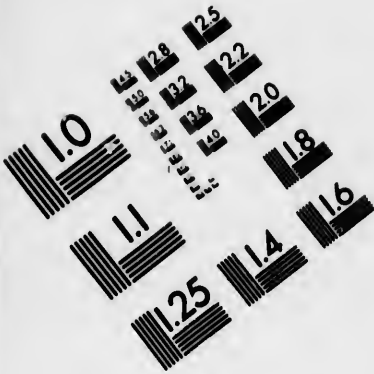
I hoped he would have believed me; but had I found it impossible to soften or convince him, I meant to say to him, 'My Lord, I will stand up before you, for I am no coward; but I warn you that I shall not take aim at you—I shall fire in the air; and you, if you aim at me, and I fall, will be a deliberate murderer.' This I meant to say to the Marquis of Dunstanburgh; and I went to that meeting on Dunstanburgh Flats without any weapon at all, and without a second. When I got there, I fancied I was first on the ground, for I could see no one; when suddenly, at a little distance, I beheld a loaded stick, or bludgeon, lying on a flat piece of rock; and on approaching to examine it, I recognised it with horror as my own, and beheld blood, hair, and brains on its rough and loaded head. Horrified, I examined the ground, and beheld a slender crimson stream trickling down the slope between the fissures of the Flats; and tracing it to its source, I saw the Marquis of Dunstanburgh lying on his face in a sort of hollow between two dwarf rocks; his head was frightfully battered and smashed, he was apparently quite dead, and not a creature was near. As I stood transfixed with horror at a little distance from the body, considering what step I had best take, and resolved, at all risks to myself, to try to lift the Marquis up, and see if life was quite extinct, Roger Croft came up; and his loud cries and shouts for help reached the ears of two coast-guardsmen at some distance, and of a policeman who was with them at the time.

"Roger Croft at once summoned these men to the fatal spot, and accused me as the murderer of the Marquis of Dunstanburgh; refusing to hear anything I had to say in my own defence, and, in short, giving me in charge as the perpetrator of this base and bloody murder.

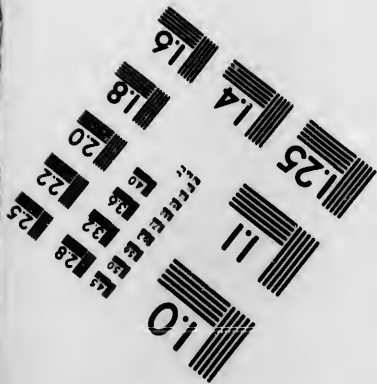
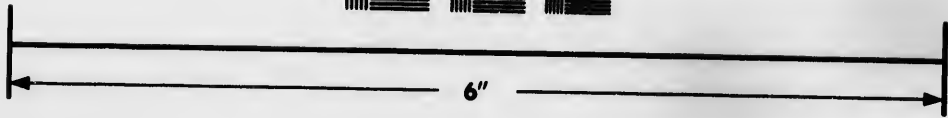
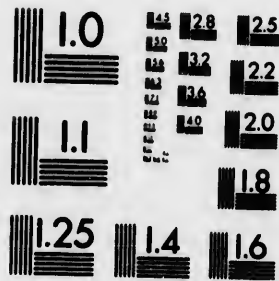
"At the coroner's inquest held on the body of the late lamented Marquis, the young lady who has been already alluded to, and who arrived at the scene of the murder soon after my arrest, deposed that she, on her way to the Flats to prevent the duel—of which she had overheard something, in a conversation between the Marquis and Roger Croft—had met with two gipsy lads, who were crab-hunting among the rocks; that they were in a state of great agitation and alarm, and that they warned and entreated her not to go to the Flats, as a bloody murder had just been done there—a murder of which they, hid up among the rocks, had been the unwilling and horror-stricken witnesses!

"The inquest was adjourned, my Lord and gentlemen of the Jury, in order to give time for the production of these gipsy lads. A large reward was offered, but in vain—they were nowhere to be found; and after a long, an active, and a fruitless search, they were supposed by many, who did not know, as I do, the integrity and the bright intelligence of the young and noble lady in question, to exist only in her imagination.





**IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (MT-3)**



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"The inquest was, therefore, resumed without their having been discovered, and a verdict of *Wilful Murder* was returned against me! A warrant was then obtained, and I was imprisoned nearly ten weeks in M—— gaol; but, even in that wretched prison, Faith and Hope never deserted me! Kind friends—friends warm of heart, wise of head, powerful, wealthy—believed me what, so help me Heaven, I am—INNOCENT! Yes, by my immortal soul, and all my hopes for its salvation, even if my body perish on a scaffold, sacrificed to delusive evidence and a false oath—I am innocent! I have no doubt that the same cruel and remorseless wretch who planned the midnight attack on the late Marquis, in the Black Wood of Rockalpine, and craftily contrived to throw suspicion on me, planned this foul murder on Dunstanburgh Flats, knowing that I should be there, and must be suspected.

"My great, good, and wise friends saw how much depended on the evidence of these gipsy-lads, and with the aid, the invaluable aid of Detective Meadows, they set to work; they left no effort unmade—they spared neither time, nor money, nor trouble, nor energy; by night and by day they have toiled for me; and the result is, *that those boys have been found—that they are ready to give evidence that they were eye-witnesses of this ghastly murder; and, that as I have never seen them, nor they me, it will be satisfactory to all parties that they should be examined as witnesses, sworn, and asked to point out, in this crowded Court, the man in whose hand they saw the bludgeon—the man whom they beheld, from their hiding-place, doing this bloody and most brutal murder!*"

Here Roger Croft started, turned deadly pale, and cried out, "No, no! I object; they are suborned!"

As he spoke, his glaring eyes fell on the brown, intelligent faces of the two gipsy-lads, who were brought in at this moment. He gasped, he stuttered, he tried to speak, but voice failed him, and he fell back insensible.

CHAPTER LXV.

"The injurer's face grew pale,
Pale writhe the lips, the murmurs fall,
And thrice he strove to speak—in vain!"

SIR E. BULWER LYTTON.

ROGER CROFT'S sudden indisposition excited considerable emotion in the Court; all eyes were turned from Arthur Bertram, and fixed with suspicion and disgust on Roger Croft—who, however, soon rallied, and though his complexion was of a leaden hue, his lips white, and his prominent light eyes blood-shot, cocked his glossy Prince of Wales hat on one side, and proceeded to settle his collar, square his elbows, take several

pinches of snuff, and tap his patent-leather boot with a very smart cane, the gold head of which represented a skull.

"My Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury," said Arthur Bertram, in conclusion, "I have now said all I have to say; and I feel a strong faith, a lively hope, and a firm conviction that the witnesses for the defence, about to be examined by my learned and excellent friend, benefactor, and counsel, Mr. St. Ormond, will establish to the satisfaction of your minds the truth of my statement. 'I am no orator, as Brutus is.' I do not, like the learned and experienced Counsel for the Crown, compliment you, my Lord Judge, on your penetration and justice; nor you, gentlemen of the Jury, on your upright and enlightened minds; but I thank you for the patience and courtesy with which you have heard me out. I believe that the Lord Chief Justice of England has not reached that high eminence without the qualities that make a great judge, a sound lawyer, and a Christian gentleman; and I believe that a Jury of Englishmen, sufficiently intelligent, responsible, and upright to be impanelled here will not suffer themselves to be influenced by anything but the facts of this case—that they will sift it thoroughly, and return a verdict in accordance with the evidence which is produced on both sides. On that evidence I confidently rely. What has been stated by the witness, Roger Croft, amounts to nothing but a confirmation of the fact that the Marquis of Dunstanburgh was found murdered on Dunstanburgh Flats, and that I was close at hand when his cries of 'Murder!' and shouts for help brought two coast-guardsmen and a policeman, who had just landed from a small boat, to the spot. It is certain, my Lord and gentlemen of the Jury, that when I came to that place, the corpse of the young Marquis Dunstanburgh was alone; but it is certain, too, that the Marquis was not alone when, as a living man, he left Dunsinburgh Abbey. Who, then, was his companion when he set out for the Flats? The witness, Roger Croft. That witness states that it suddenly struck him that it would be very desirable that a surgeon should be on the ground in case of need, and that, leaving the Marquis on the way to the place appointed, he turned back and went to Mr. Poke's house; but that, not finding Mr. Poke at home, he left word with the maid-servant who opened the door that his presence was required on the Flats. Now, that Roger Croft did call at Mr. Poke's, I believe—nay, I know to be true; but I think I am prepared to prove, my Lord Judge and gentlemen of the Jury, that he called there *after the murder, not before!*" (Great excitement in the Court.) "I believe—so help me Heaven!—I believe this ghastly deed to have been done by Roger Croft himself!" (Tremendous agitation; all eyes turning from Arthur Bertram to Roger Croft; the latter again becoming of a ghastly hue, and vainly trying to articulate.) "Yes; I

believe that Roger Croft is the murderer of the Marquis of Dunstanburgh!

"When we come to the great question of MOTIVE, we find motive enough to urge to such a deed a remorseless man of no principle. All his life he has hated me, with a hatred that has grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength. He, too, was an aspirant for the hand of the young lady whose name has been already mentioned here. He was my rival, he was the Marquis's rival; but more especially was he my rival, because he knew that the Marquis had not found any favour in her eyes. He knew that, although it suited the deep and desperate game he was playing, to make out to the late Marquis that he was loved—he knew perfectly well that, however much the lady's noble parents might advocate the Marquis's suit, the young lady would never give her hand where she could not give her heart, and that that heart was already bestowed by her on another." (Great excitement.) "I believe, so help me Heaven! that Roger Croft did all in his power to exasperate the Marquis against me, and to urge him to insult and to challenge me. His object I believe to have been twofold—the death of the Marquis, and mine. I believe, and I think I can prove, that Roger Croft was at the head of the attack on the Marquis, as he drove through the Black Wood, on his way from Bessborough Castle to Dunstanburgh Abbey, and that he had dressed himself in the clothes of mine—to which, as we are both at Croft Villa, he had easy access—in order to throw suspicion on me. Had the Marquis been shot, and had I been arrested and hanged for that murder, he—for he has no faith in woman's constancy or woman's truth—fancied he would have ultimately obtained the hand we all three so coveted. As that attack failed, he planned a duel between the Marquis and myself. He was to be second, but before it took place he had obtained a promise from the Marquis of a very handsome provision for himself in either case."

By a Juror: "What do you mean by 'either case?'"

"I mean (as the Marquis had intended it to be a duel unto the death) in case either he or I fell. The Marquis of Dunstanburgh had told Roger Croft that he was resolved either to kill me or be killed himself in the duel he meditated; and that as, in either case his second would get into great trouble, and have to fly the country, so, in either case, he Roger Croft, would find an ample provision secured to him by will." (Great sensation.) "I do not believe," said Arthur Bertram, "that the late Marquis's affairs have been wound up, the will proved, or the legacies paid, as yet; but I do know that he has raised large sums on these bequests, and has been living in great luxury and dissipation ever since the murder of the Marquis. My grandfather's family have been in deep distress, and have been driven to great straits, by the

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mysterious disappearance of the head of the family, whose ab-
 sence still continues, and is still unaccounted for; but Roger
 Croft has spent in scenes of what he calls pleasure the time I
 have spent in M—— goal. It must be clear to all thinking
 people, that if his grief for the loss of his late patron were
 genuine, he would not assume the appearance of woe merely
 when in the presence of a Judge and Jury. Those who really
 mourn are not found in Cider-cellars, Casinos, and at Cre-
 morne——"

(Here the Counsel for the Crown begged the Judge to call
 the defendant to order, as these diatribes had nothing to do
 with the case in point.)

"In my opinion, they have," said Arthur, turning to the
 Counsel for the Crown; "for *falsus in uno is falsus in omni*.
 It is only by small indications that I myself have been led to a
 conviction which dawned upon my mind in M—— goal, and
 from which at first I recoiled with horror, but which many
 circumstances that have come to my knowledge since, have
 completely confirmed, and which I feel certain I shall be able to
 prove—namely, *that the murderer of the Marquis of Dunstan-*
burgh is Roger Croft himself! Under these circumstances, I
 make no appeal except to the patience of the gentlemen of the
 Jury, while the eminent and learned Counsel who has advised
 me throughout, and to whose generous aid, true zeal, and great
 genius I owe the power of proving that, instead of being a blood-
 thirsty ruffian, whose name ought to be execrated throughout all
 time, I stand here, as I verily believe, on the verge of being
 proclaimed a martyr. Yes, I am confident that before this
 memorable trial ends, the momentous question of GUILTY OR
 NOT GUILTY? will be decided in my favour, and the odium
 which has been lavished upon me, transferred to one who really
 did the foul deed of which I have been so unjustly accused.

"My Lord, and gentlemen of the Jury, I have done. May
 the God of Justice and Mercy enable you to discern the truth!
 and I feel sure that, the truth once made clear to you, justice
 will be done to me, and that is all I hope for—all I ask."

A murmur of applause ran through the Court, as Arthur
 Bertram sank back in his chair, and buried his face in his hands.
 That murmur was instantly suppressed by order of the Judge,
 and the attention of all present was riveted on Mr. St. Ormond,
 as he proceeded to examine the witnesses for the defence. In-
 tense excitement prevailed, when the first name called out aloud
 in that crowded Court proved to be that of the LADY EDITH
 LORRAINE.

CHAPTER LXVI.

"No ceremony that to great ones 'longs,
Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
The Marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,
Become them with one-half so good a grace
As mercy does."

SHAKESPEARE.

"I HOPE your father will disinherit that wilful fool of an Edith," said Lady Rockalpine to the Lady Ida, when Edith was led in as a witness for the defence. "Oh, I shall faint, I know I shall, to think of a daughter of mine coming into a court of justice to be a witness for a murderer!"

"Oh, he's no murderer, mamma; I'm convinced he's innocent, and that the verdict will be NOT GUILTY. That wretch, Roger Croft, who leads dearest Hauteville into so much mischief—he it is who has done this vile deed. I see it all."

"Nonsense! Roger Croft is a very sensible, agreeable person, and a man of good manners and good taste. I'll never rest till I get that insane creature, Edith, shut up in a private lunatic asylum, for her wilful folly in coming here to-day to disgrace herself in an open Court by parading her degrading affection for that young base-born ruffian. I'll give her one chance; the Duke of Durham is so much in love with her, he is willing to marry her at once; if she accepts him—and I cannot think she will dare to refuse—all will be well; if not, as sure as we're sitting here, I'll have her shut up!"

"Oh, but the Duke of Durham, mamma, is such an odious creature! I remember hearing Augusta say that when she was presented he made up to her, and she hated him. He was the Marquis of Malplaquet then, with, as she said, a hollow roof, and hollow heart, red hair, and red eyes. Oh! Edith will never look at him."

"If she refuses Durham Castle, she will go at once to that admirable private lunatic asylum, 'The Happy Home,'" said Lady Rockalpine. "Gracious heavens! why, she is wasted to a shadow, white as marble; and what horrid object is that by her side? She looks as if she were Mrs. Noah, come out of the ark a widow."

The fact was, Sister Sympathy was by the side of the Lady Edith Lorraine, who clung to her arm, and looked up into the kind face of the Sister of Mercy for encouragement and support. The Lady Edith Lorraine ascended the witness-box, and every eye was fixed on the sweet pale face which was revealed when she was ordered to raise a thick veil which had shrouded her features. She was also desired to take off her gloves (of which Sister Sympathy took charge), and this done, the beauty of her small, taper, snow-white hand excited universal admiration.

Fervently and reverently she kissed the Testament handed to her for that purpose; and with downcast eyes and an orient

blush suffusing her sweet face, she proceeded to answer Mr. St. Ormond's questions in a clear, sweet voice, which, soft and low as it was, was yet distinctly heard throughout that crowded Court.

"Had the late Marquis of Dunstanburgh any reason to believe that you returned his affection?" asked Mr. St. Ormond, Counsel for the defence.

"None," said Lady Edith. "I think he was aware that my heart was given to another."

"Was Mr. Roger Croft aware of that circumstance?"

"I cannot answer that question positively, but I think he could not have been ignorant of it."

"Was the locket containing your portrait and a lock of your hair given by you to the prisoner at the bar?"

"It was."

"Will you relate the conversation you overheard between the Marquis and Roger Croft, when you were concealed in the loft of the summer-house?"

Lady Edith related succinctly, and very nearly *verbatim*, that memorable conversation, with which the reader is acquainted. She added that Roger Croft led the Detective to the summer-house, and suggested a thorough search there.

The Counsel for the Crown and Sergeant Darkside vainly tried, by crafty cross-examination, plausible argument, and impertinent bullying, to make Edith contradict herself. In vain,—she was unshaken.

Her evidence produced an extraordinary effect. The Judge read over his notes carefully. Strips of paper were handed about.

Mr. St. Ormond continued—

"Are you aware of any evil or unkind feeling between the deceased and the prisoner at the bar?"

"No; I know, on the contrary, that the late Marquis of Dunstanburgh entertained the highest possible opinion of Arthur Bertram; and that on one occasion, at Interlachen, where the latter saved my life at the imminent peril of his own, the late Marquis offered him his patronage, and said Arthur Bertram was his *beau ideal* of an English gentleman."

"You may stand down," said Mr. St. Ormond.

But Lady Edith lingered for a moment, clasped her hands, burst into tears, and said—

"My Lord, and you, gentlemen of the Jury,—I was brought up with the prisoner at the bar—I have known him from his infancy. I cannot recall the time when I did not love and trust him. I never knew him tell a falsehood or harm a fly. He was the best of boys, and the boy is father to the man. He is, and always has been, the bravest of the brave, and no brave man can be an assassin. It is not possible that one who has

always acted like an angel should suddenly become a ruffian. He is innocent as I am of this black crime. May God send into your hearts the conviction that dwells here!"

At these words Edith's voice failed her, and she sank back fainting. She was carried out of Court, attended by Sister Sympathy.

Mr. St. Ormond then called the gipsy-boys. They were examined apart, and separately and severely cross-examined at great length by Mr. Darkside, Q.C. But they were not in the least puzzled or bamboozled; they persisted in their first plain statement. Each gave his evidence clearly, and with great intelligence. On being severally asked to point out the murderer, they, after looking around them for some time, fixed on Roger Croft, although he tried all he could, by a hideous grimace, to puzzle and bewilder them.

"Pray, my lads," said the Counsel for the Crown, "how do you know that the gentleman in the green coat and hat is the same you saw on the Flats? Now, let us hear, had he on that same coat and hat?"

"Na, na; he had na the same coat and hat, but he had the same gap in his mouth, for he grinned when he gived the blows that killed the young Markis, as he's grinning now; and I whispered to Ben, as we crouched down all of a tremble ahint the rocks, 'Eh, but he's a ugly brute to look at, with them broken teeth and that gap in his front gate;' and Ben whispered, 'He'll do for us, if we can't stale awa' unbeknown.'"

Nothing could shake the gipsy-lads, on their separate examination, as to the truth of this testimony; and Roger Croft's case begun to look very bad, and Arthur Bertram's very bright.

The next witness called by Mr. St. Ormond was Kit Moss, who deposed to the fact that he and others had been employed by Roger Croft, disguised as highwaymen, to play the young Marquis a trick, and give him a good fright, by pretending to attack him in the Black Wood at Rockalpine; that it turned out a very bad joke, as one of the party of the sham highwaymen was killed; that as he did not belong to those parts he was not missed; and as a great stir was made about it, Roger Croft paid them handsomely to hush it all up, and keep their own counsel; that their dead comrade was by them buried in the Black Wood, and that there the matter ended.

This witness was repeatedly examined and cross-examined, but his evidence was unshaken.

Keziah Cripps, housemaid at Mr. Poke's, was next put into the witness-box. She swore that when Mr. Roger Croft called at her master's, he was very white, and all of a tremble, and that she remarked a splash of blood on his trousers. (Great sensation.)

Betsy Blake, parlour-maid at Croft Villa, deposed that on

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two occasions she found Mr. Roger Croft in Mr. Arthur Bertram's bedroom; and that she mentioned it to her fellow-servants as very singular, for they never had been very friendly together. On one occasion, after Mr. Roger was gone out, she went to the closet to tidy it a bit, and to put in the linen just come from the wash, and she missed the straw hat and the queer stick and told the cook of their disappearance.

This witness was subjected to severe cross-examination by Mr. Darkside, Q.C., but was in no instance shaken in her testimony.

Sarah Lomax, cook at Croft Villa, confirmed Betsy Blake's statement, as to her having mentioned Mr. Roger Croft's visits to Mr. Arthur Bertram's empty room, and to the fact of the hat and stick being missing.

Detective Meadows was then sworn. He stated that from the first he had suspected that the gipsy-lads had been spirited away; and that he had first ascertained that such lads had been located among the gipsies on the common, and then he had hunted them down. He had discovered them at Ostend, to which place they had been trepanned by a man answering to the description of Kit Moss. Now, he had discovered in Kit Moss the hero of the attack on the Marquis in the Wood; and, as he was employed by Mr. Roger Croft in one matter, of course it was natural to suppose he was in another. He (Detective Meadows) had with great difficulty found the boys, with the help of a man of the name of Redpath, or "Rough Rob," who had since disappeared, but who had not rested night or day until the boys were found.

Roger Croft here stuttered out that "Rough Rob" was an escaped murderer; that, in fact, he was the assassin of the late Lord Hauteville, and that what he did or said was nothing to the point.

Mr. St. Ormond said that was irrelevant. Rough Rob was not called as a witness; he had helped Detective Meadows to find the boys. If he was, indeed, an escaped murderer, a warrant must be issued for his apprehension, but that had nothing to do with the case in point.

Kit Moss was here recalled, and cross-examined by Mr. Darkside. He, however, confirmed Detective Meadows' report, and added that Roger Croft had told him to take the boys over to Ostend for the benefit of their health and education, as he meant to provide for them. (A laugh.)

The Counsel for the Crown then spoke a few words, which evinced great anxiety for a verdict against the prisoner at the bar, but put forth no argument in favour of such a verdict.

The Judge then proceeded to charge the Jury; and throughout a very careful summary, a strong bias in favour of the prisoner was perceptible.

The Jury retired for not more than two minutes; and returning at once, the Foreman, in answer to the usual question, announced that they found the prisoner **NOT GUILTY**; and that in their opinion the evidence tended so strongly to criminate Roger Croft, that they submitted it to his Lordship, whether he should not at once be committed upon a charge of Wilful Murder.

After the necessary forms this was done.

Loud, long-continued, and irrepressible cheers followed the announcement of the verdict of **NOT GUILTY**.

The Judge, before the Court was cleared, congratulated the prisoner on the result of his trial, complimented him on the high testimony elicited in his favour, and added, he left that Court, not only without a stain on his name, but raised in the opinion of all present by his conduct during the trial, and by all that had transpired concerning him.

Arthur Bertram was soon surrounded by friends congratulating and shaking hands with him. But he was thinking only of one; and Sister Sympathy and Mr. St. Ormond, feeling for the young lovers, led them to a small room, where, for a few moments, quite alone, the Lady Edith wept on her rescued Arthur's bosom, and he thanked and blessed her, and clasped her to his yearning, beating heart. There, in that little room, they renewed their troth, and had just sworn to be true to the last, when Sister Sympathy and Mr. St. Ormond returned, saying that Lady Rockalpine was eagerly inquiring for her daughter, to take her home with her; and the weeping girl, lowering her veil, was, after another passionate embrace, and after both Arthur and herself had warmly thanked Mr. St. Ormond and Sister Sympathy, handed into her mother's carriage, and driven rapidly away.

CHAPTER LXVII.

"Though now to both might Fortune's wrath deny
The pledged vows, the altar, and the home,
Yet still and far there glittered on the eye
Life's only fairy-land—the days to come!"

THE Lady Edith's life at home was a very wretched one. Her mother treated her with supreme contempt; her father continued absent. The Duke of Durham proposed, and Edith, affianced to Arthur Bertram, of course rejected him. After this, her mother's persecution became intolerable.

Poor Edith! her only comfort was an occasional note thrust through the grating of the Park-lane gardens when she walked there, or a word interchanged with Arthur at the same spot at early morn or "dewy eve." Lady Rockalpine discovered this

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correspondence and these meetings. She removed Edith from London—she took her to Armstrong Park; but Arthur contrived to see his beloved there. She carried her to Rockalpine; there, too, Love, who "laughs at locksmiths," outwitted her ladyship.

The day, the dark day, however, came at last, when Arthur completely lost sight of Edith, and Edith neither saw nor heard of Arthur.

Roger Croft had been brought to trial, found guilty, and hanged at N—, the assize town of the county in which he did the foul murder for which he suffered. Almost to the last he protested his innocence; and when the final hour came, he was insensible, and was carried to the gallows.

* * * * *

Three months had glided by, and Edith, who was twenty, was, according to a legal fiction, of age. Detective Meadows, who had always taken a lively interest in Arthur, undertook to discover the retreat of his beloved. Detective Meadows, like Richelieu, admitted into his lexicon no such word as FAIL. He ascertained that the Lady Edith Lorraine was concealed and confined in a private lunatic asylum in Northumberland; "The Happy Home" was its name. It was the same in which Clarissa Croft had died twenty-six years before.

Arthur Bertram had, ever since his trial, maintained himself by his pen. Mr. St. Ormond had put him in the way of doing this, and had, besides, insisted on lending him a sum of money to commence his new career with.

Old Croft had not yet been heard of. Mrs. Croft was a wretched being, and so wild with grief at the ignominious fate of her darling son, that her friends feared that her own safety, as well as that of all around her, would render it necessary to confine her as a lunatic. Her daughters were very kind to her, and so were her three sons-in-law; for Gloriana was married to Mr. Tight-Blower shortly after their meeting in London.

Detective Meadows, having obtained a search-warrant, introduced himself in the disguise of a nurse into "The Happy Home." Arthur Bertram awaited the nurse and the patient on horseback at an appointed spot on a moonlight night. As the village clock struck twelve, the Detective, who had enlightened Edith as to his mission, appeared, with the rescued treasure clinging to his arm.

Poor Edith! what with all she had suffered in that dread prison-house—that haunt of irresponsible cruelty—that tomb of the living, and the excitement, the hope, the joy, the reaction, she was in a fainting state when she was clasped in Arthur's arms, and lifted to his horse.

Arthur's object was to bear his darling to the home of the Sisters of Mercy—the bosom of Sister Sympathy. Their way

lay through the Black Wood, and across the wild moor; but just as they emerged from the latter, they came suddenly on four men masked and armed. These men were lying in wait for Mr. Byles, the Earl of Rockalpine's new agent, who had lowered their wages, raised their rents, and roused them to madness. Rough Rob was one of these men; Kit Moss was another. They did not mean to murder, but to compel Byles to grant them better terms. At the approach of a horse, they rushed forth, for Byles was expected on horseback. Arthur had already felled the foremost with his heavy whip, when Rough Rob, recognising him as the moon shone full on his face, loudly called on his mates to fall back, and explained his error. After this, Arthur Bertram proceeded on his way unopposed; and, after some hours of hard riding, he reached the home of the Sisters of Mercy, and placed his darling on the kind breast of Sister Sympathy.

A month later, with the sanction of Sister Sympathy and Mr. St. Ormond, Edith, who could not venture to let her cruel parents know of her intentions, for they had imprisoned her, sane as she was, in a lunatic asylum, was married to Arthur Bertram. She was of age. She required the protection of a husband after treatment so illegal, so inhuman; and, all things considered, her friends, her only true friends, thought this was the best way of protecting her from further outrage, and of ensuring her lasting happiness.

Lord and Lady Rockalpine, when they heard of Lady Edith's marriage, cast her off for ever. It was not a very long "for ever," at least *on earth*, for one of them!

CHAPTER LXVIII.

"They met again, and oft! what time the star
Of Hesperus hung his rosy lamp on high,
Love's earliest beacon, from our storms afar,
Lit in the loneliest watch-tower of the sky,
Perchance by souls that, ere this world was made,
Were the first lovers the first stars surveyed."

SIR E. BULWER LYTON.

Lord and Lady Rockalpine held high festival at Rockalpine Castle, to celebrate the nuptials of the Lady Ida with the Duke of Durham.

All the nobility and gentry of the country were present. The Earl and Countess of Richlands, with the Contessa, were among the guests. The wicked Count Romeo di Roccabella had been killed in a fray. Jocunda—now a happy mother—had written to the Contessa, to announce the Count's death, which had taken place some months before it was known to her. Lady Rockalpine, upon this, forgave the Contessa.

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feasted in the barn. It was a sultry day in August, but the weather-glass foretold a terrible storm. Lord Rockalpine was in high spirits; he was flushed, excited.

The bride and bridegroom were gone, but still the feasting went on; when suddenly a new guest appeared at the board. It was old Croft—his daughter, Mrs. Cutts, on one side, and Rough Rob on the other—so thin, so pale, so shadowy, many thought it was his ghost!

"My lord," he said, "I come at last; I come from my bed in a foreign land; I come to do an act of justice before I die. Your noble brother fell in yon wood! He fell, not as was supposed by the hand of Robin Redpath here, *alias* Rough Rob, he fell by your hand, my lord!"

Here the storm, which had been long gathering, burst out, the lightning flashed, the thunder growled, the rain poured down in torrents.

"Remove that maniac!" said Lady Rockalpine.

"My lord," continued old Croft, "on his death-bed your brother bound me by a solemn oath never to reveal the truth till his father was no more. Before that nobleman was buried, I was carried off by one who, full of plots and lies, has paid the penalty of his crime. He incarcerated me in a French mad-house, to prevent my proving the late Earl's last will—which I have here—in favour of Lady Edith, now Countess of Rockalpine. But now that the hand of Death is upon me—now that I have been spared only to do justice to all—I proclaim not only that you, my lord, did that foul murder, but that, as your brother had been privately married for four years to Clarissa Croft, my daughter (of which marriage here are the proofs), Arthur Lorraine, commonly called Arthur Bertram, his son, born in wedlock, is by rights the Earl of Rockalpine!"

"You lie!—it is a foul, a base lie!" shouted the Earl of Rockalpine. "I call God to witness it is a foul lie!"

Here all started to their feet, while a sudden darkness wrapped the festive scene; and the next moment an electric flash lighted up the pale faces of all present, and revealed the fact that the Earl had fallen, with his face on the table, struck by lightning—killed by the hand of God! They raised him—he was a blackened corpse! After a life of anguish he had died by this sudden stroke—died impenitent—died the death of a murderer!

Old Croft lived long enough to see his grandson Earl of Rockalpine, and Edith his Countess.

How fortunate that they were married before they were aware that the father of the one had been the murderer of the father of the other! That knowledge must else have severed them

for ever; as it was, Edith often said that it behoved her to be doubly tender as a wife, since it was owing to her father that her Arthur was an orphan.

They live in seclusion a live of virtue, and are blessed with many heirs and heiresses of their beauty and their truth.

Rough Rob and his Mary are no longer compelled to hide. They are well provided for now by ARTHUR LORRAINE, the new EARL OF ROCKALPINE, who has made Rough Rob his head gamekeeper. The new Earl has granted a handsome annuity to the supposed Lord and Lady Hauteville, now Mr. and Mrs. Lorraine, to be paid to them only as long as they live peaceably together.

The unhappy woman, who for five-and-twenty years had figured as Countess of Rockalpine, retired to the Continent, and with her own large fortune bought herself, as a husband, an Italian Prince.

Mrs. Croft died in "The Happy Home."

After some years of retirement, Arthur, Earl of Rockalpine, is beginning to take a part in politics and active life. Edith still shrinks from that world which, when the veil was lifted, beheld in the great Moral Reformer (her father) a hypocrite and a fratricide! But home is her sphere of happiness, and the great world has no charms for her.

"Eh, my lord!" said Rough Rob, as smooth, well shaven, his hair oiled, and in a bran-new gamekeeper's suit, he kissed his Mary's now plump rosy cheek, and, followed by his dogs, joined his lord on the moors—"Eh, my lord! I'm a new mon the day. But we'd both gone through a deal, before the world comed to a right understanding of us, and of the momentous question of GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY."

THE END.

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