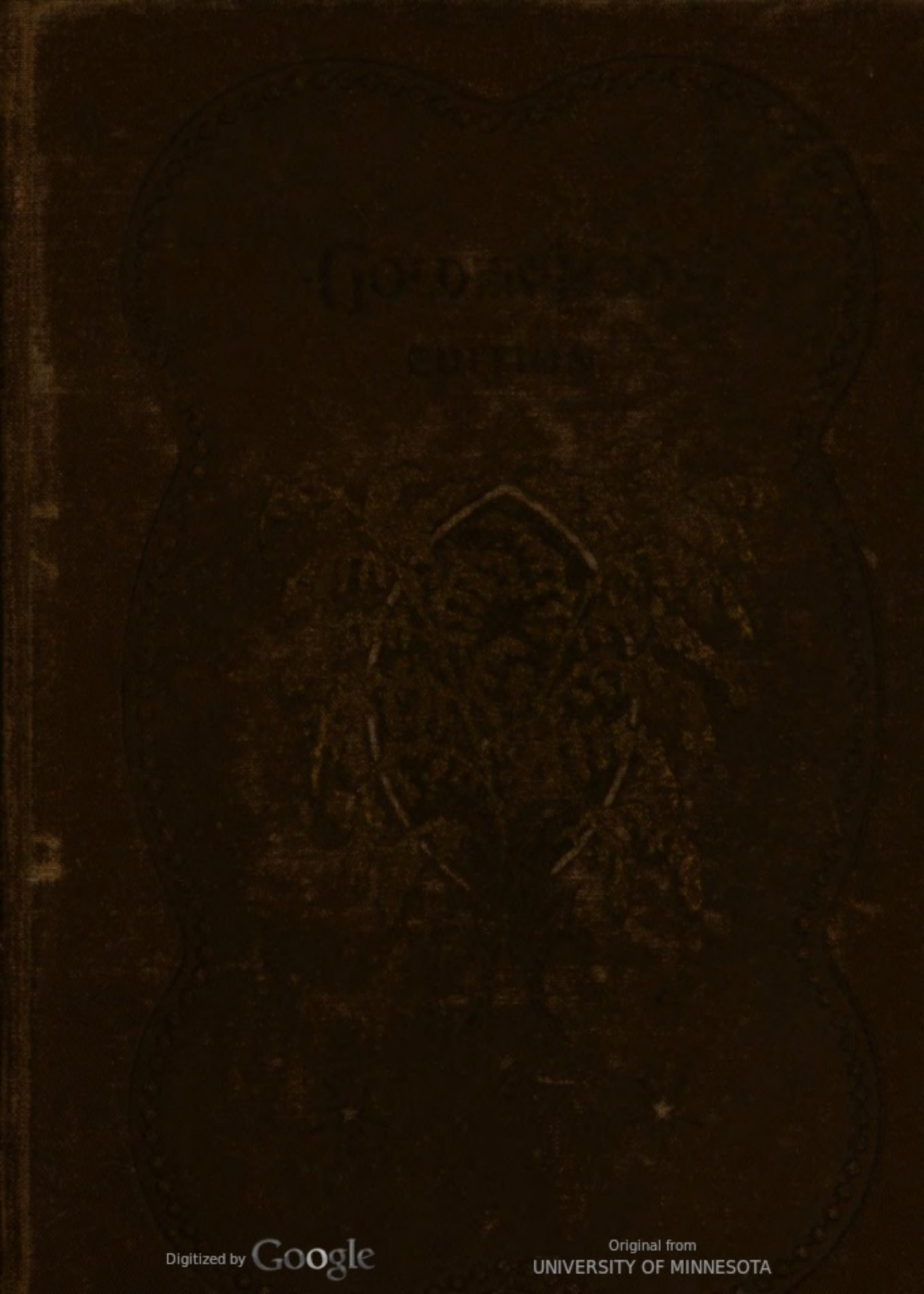

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DANGEROUS GROUND

OR

THE RIVAL DETECTIVES

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"Not just yet; I aint quite ready!"—page 410.

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DANGEROUS GROUND

OR

THE RIVAL DETECTIVES

BY

LAWRENCE L. LYNCH

(E. M. Van Deventer)

Author of "Shadowed by Three," "A Slender Clue," "The Romance of a Bomb-Thrower," "The Lost Witness," "Madeline Payne," "The Diamond Coterie," "Out of a Labyrinth," "A Mountain Mystery," &c.

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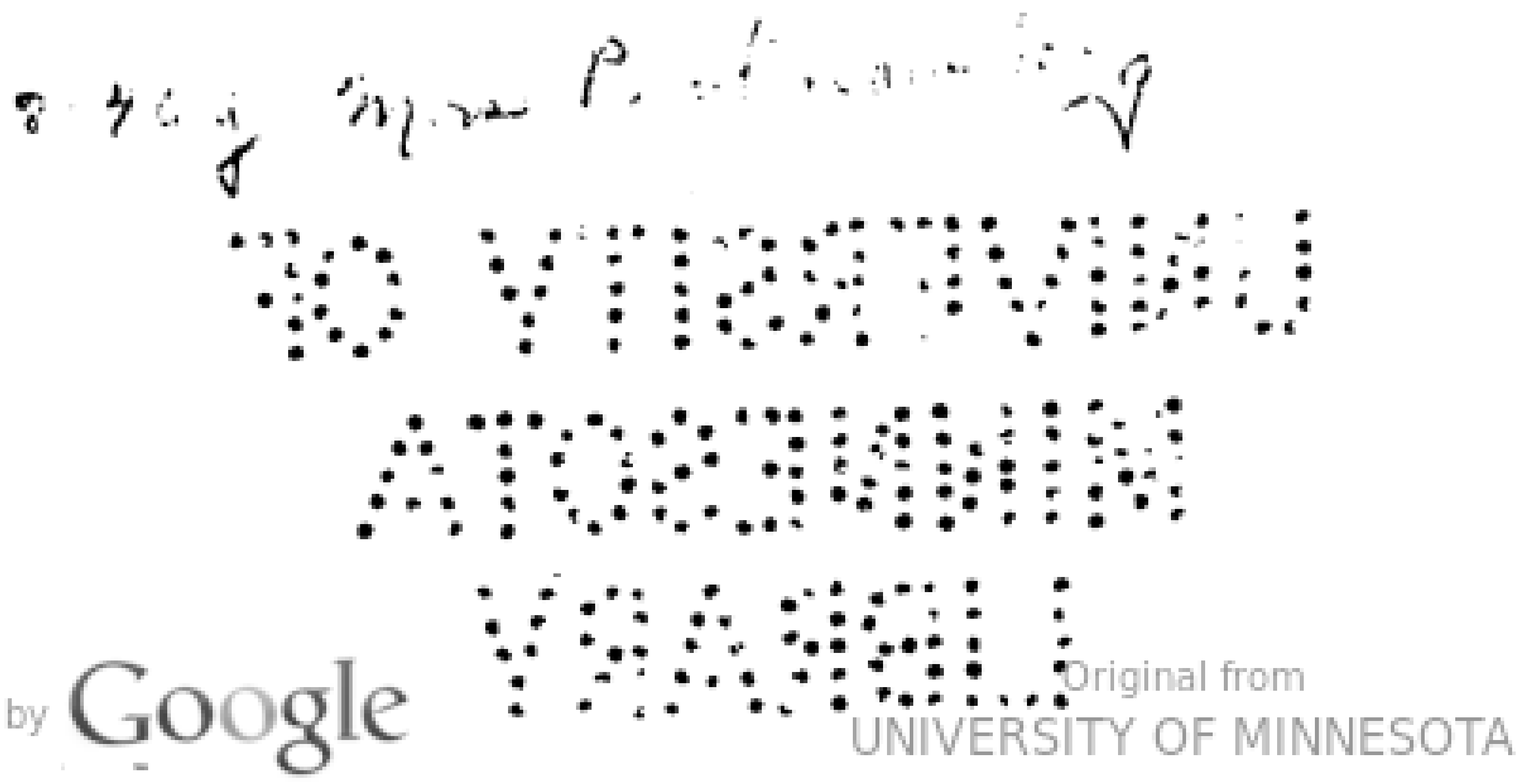
(*Dangerous ground.*)



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3 : 75

"Mamma brings the candle very near to the closed eyes, waving it to and fro, rapidly."—page 309.

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DANGEROUS GROUND.

PROLOGUE.

Time: The month of May. The year, 1859; when the, West was new, and the life of the Pioneer difficult and dangerous.

Scene: A tiny belt of timber, not far from the spot where not long before, the Marais des Cygnes massacre awoke the people of south-eastern Kansas, and kindled among them the flames of civil war.

I.

It is a night of storm and darkness. Huge trees are bending their might, and branches, strong or slender, are swaying and snapping under a fierce blast from the northward.

Night has closed in, but the ghostly light of a reluctant camp fire reveals a small group of men gathered about its blaze; and back of them, more in the shelter of the timber, a few wagons,—prairie schooners of the staunchest type—from which, now and then, the anxious countenance of a woman, or the eager, curious face of a child, peers out.

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There has been rain, and fierce lightning, and loud-rolling thunder; but the clouds are breaking away, the rain has ceased: only the strong gusts of wind remain to make more restless the wakeful travellers, and rob the weary, nervous ones of their much needed sleep.

"Where's Pearson?" queries a tall, strong man, who speaks as one having authority. "I have not seen him since the storm began."

"Pearson?" says another, who is crouching over the flickering fire in the effort to light a stubby pipe. "By ginger! I haven't thought of the fellow; why, he took his blanket and went up yonder," indicating the direction by a jerk of the short pipe over a brawny shoulder—"before the storm, you know; said he was going to take a doze up there; he took a fancy to the place when we crossed here before."

"But he has been down since?"

"Haint seen him. Good Lord, you don't suppose the fellow's been sleepin' through all this?"

Parks, the captain of the party, stirs uneasily, and turns his face towards the wagons.

"There's been some fearful lightnin', sir," breaks in another of the group. "'Taint likely a man would sleep through all this, but—"

He stops to stare after Parks, who, with a swift impulsive movement of the right hand, has turned upon his heel, and is moving toward the wagons.

"Mrs. Krutzer," he calls, halting beside the one most remote from the camp fire.

"What is wanted?" answers a shrill, feminine voice.

"Is the little one with you?"

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"Yes." This time there is a ring of impatience in the voice.

"Have you seen Pearson since the storm?"

"My gracious! No."

"How is Krutzer?"

"No better; the storm has doubled him up like a snake. Do you want him?"

"Not if he can't walk."

"Well he can't; not a step."

"Then good-night, Mrs. Krutzer." And Parks returns to the men at the fire.

"There's something wrong," he says, with quiet gravity.

"Pearson has not been near the child since the storm. Get your lanterns, boys; we will go up the hill."

It is only a slight elevation, with a pyramid of rocks, one or two wide-spreading trees; and a fringe of lesser growth at the summit.

A moment the lanterns flash about, while the men converse in low tones. Then one of them exclaims:

"Here he is! Pearson; Heavens, man, wake up!"

But the still form outstreched upon the water-soaked blanket, and doubly sheltered by the great rocks and bending branches, moves not in response to his call.

They crowd about him, and Walter Parks bends closer and lets the full light of the lantern he carries, fall upon the still face.

"Good God!"

He sinks upon one knee beside the prostrate form; he touches the face, the hands; looks closer yet, and says in a husky voice, as he puts the lantern down:

"He's *dead*, boys!"

They cluster about that silent, central figure. One by

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one they touch it; curiously, reverently, tenderly or timidly, according as their various natures are.

Then a chorus of exclamations, low, fierce, excited.

"How was it?"

"Was he killed?"

"The storm—"

"More likely, Injuns."

"No, Bob, it wasn't Indians," says Parks mournfully, "for here's his scalp."

And he tenderly lays a brown hand upon the abundant locks of his dead comrade, sweeping them back from the forehead with a caressing movement.

Then suddenly, with a sharp exclamation that is almost a shriek, the hand drops to his side; he recoils, he bounds to his feet; then, turning his face to the rocks, he lets the darkness hide the look of unutterable horror that for a moment overspread it, changing at length to an expression of sternness and fixed resolve.

Meantime the others press closer about the dead man, and one of them, taking the place Parks has just vacated, bends down to peer into the still, set face.

"Boys, look!" he cries eagerly; "look here!" and he points to a tiny seared spot just above the left temple. "That's a burn, and here, just above it, the hair is singed away. It's lightning, boys."

Again they peer into the dead face, and utter fresh exclamations of horror. Then Walter Parks, whose emotion they have scarcely noticed, turns toward them and looks closely at the seared spot upon the temple.

"Boys," he asks, in slow, set tones, "did you, any of you, ever *see* a man killed by lightning?"

They all stare up at him, and no one answers.

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"They cluster about that silent, central figure. One by one they touch it; curiously, reverently."—page 12.

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"Because," he proceeds, after a moment's silence, "I never saw the effects of a lightning stroke, and don't feel qualified to judge."

"It's lightnin'," says the man called Bob, in a positive voice; "I've never seen a case, but I've read of 'em. It's lightnin', sure."

"Of course it is," breaks in another. "What else can it be? There ain't an Injun about and besides—"

A sharp flash of lightning, instantly followed by a loud peal of thunder, interrupts this speech, and, when they can hear his voice, Parks says, quietly:

"I suppose you are right, Menard. Now, let's take him down to the wagons; quick, the rain is coming again."

Slowly they move down the hill with their burden, Walter Parks supporting the head and shoulders of the dead. And as they go, one of them says:

"Shall I run ahead and tell the Krutzers?"

"No," replies Parks, sternly; "we will take him to my wagon. I will inform Mrs. Krutzer."

So they lay him in the wagon belonging to their leader, and before they leave him there Parks does a strange thing. He takes off the oil-skin cap from his own head and pulls it tight upon the head of the dead man. Then he strides over to the wagon occupied by the Krutzers.

II.

A flickering, sputtering candle, lights up the interior of a large canvas-covered wagon. On a narrow pallet across one side of the vehicle, a man tosses and groans,

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now and then turning his haggard face, and staring, blood-shot eyes, upon a woman who crouches near him, holding upon her knees a child of two summers, who slumbers peacefully through the storm, with its fair baby face upturned to the flickering candle. In the corner, opposite the woman, lies a boy of perhaps ten years, ragged, unkempt, and fast asleep.

A blaze of lightning and a rush of wind cause the man to cry out nervously, and then to exclaim, peevishly:

"Oh, I wish the morning would come; this is horrible!"

"Hush, Krutzer," says the woman, in a low, hissing whisper; "you act like a fool."

She bends forward and lays the sleeping child beside the dirty boy in the corner. Then she lifts her head and listens.

"Hush!" she whispers again; "they are astir outside; I hear them talking. Ah! some one is coming."

"Mrs. Krutzer."

It is the voice of Walter Parks, and this time the woman parts the tent flap and looks out.

"Is that you, Mr. Parks? I thought I heard voices out there. Is the storm doing any damage?"

"Not at present. Is Krutzer awake?"

She glances toward the form upon the pallet; it is shivering as with an ague. Then she says, unhesitatingly:

"Krutzer has been in such misery since this storm came up, that I've just given him morphine. He ain't exactly asleep, but he's stupid and flighty; get into the wagon, Mr. Parks, and see how he is for yourself. Poor man; this is the fifth day of his rheumatism, and he has not stood on his feet once in that time."

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The visitor hesitates for a moment, then drawing nearer and lowering his tone somewhat, he says:

"If Krutzer is in a bad state now, he had better not know what I have come to tell. Can he hear me as I speak?"

"No; not if you don't raise your voice."

"Pearson is dead, Mrs. Krutzer."

She starts, gasps, and then, with her head protruding from the canvas, asks, huskily:

"How? when? who?—"

"We found him up by the rocks, lying on his blanket—"

"Killed?"

"Killed; yes."

"How—how?" she almost gasps.

"There is a burn upon his head. Menard says it was a stroke of lightning."

"Oh," she sighs, and sinks back in the wagon, turning her head to look at the form upon the pallet.

"Mrs. Krutzer."

She leans toward him again and listens mutely.

"We—Menard, Joe Blakesly, and myself—will watch to-night with the body. We know very little about Pearson, and the little one; what can you tell us?"

"Not much;" clasping and unclasping her hands nervously. "It was like this: Pearson joined our train just before we crossed Bear Creek—beyond the reserve, you know. That was three weeks before we left the others, to join your train. The child was ailing at the time, and so Pearson put it in my charge, most of the other women having more children than I to take care of. I liked the little thing, and it did not seem a trouble to me; so after a while Pearson offered to pay me, if I

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would look after it until we struck God's country. But I would not let him pay me, for the baby seems like my own."

"And *now*, Mrs. Krutzer?"

"I am coming to that. Pearson told us, at the first, that the little girl was not his; that its father was a miner back among the mountains. Its mother was dead, and the father, who was an old friend of Pearson's, had put it in his care, to be taken to New York, where its relatives live. Pearson was obliged to quit mining, you know, on account of his health."

"Yes; do you know the address of the child's friends."

"Yes; it's an aunt, her father's sister. About two weeks ago—I think Pearson must have had a presentiment or something of the kind—he came to me, and gave me a letter and a package, saying that if anything happened to him during the trip, he wanted me to see the little girl safely in the hands of her relatives. The letter was from the baby's father, and the packet contained the address of the New York people, and enough money to pay my expenses after I leave the wagon train. I promised Pearson that I would take care of the child and put her safe in her aunt's hands, and so I will—but, Oh, dear! I never expected to be obliged to do it."

A hollow groan breaks upon her speech; the man upon the pallet is writhing as if in intensest agony. The woman makes a signal of dismissal, and drops the canvas curtain.

Walter Parks hesitates a moment, and then, as a second groan greets his ear, turns and strides away.

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III.

The clouds hang overhead like a murky canopy. The wind is sighing itself to sleep. The rain has ceased, but large drops drip dismally from the great branches that lately sheltered Arthur Pearson's death-bed.

Beside the rocks, three men are standing. It is three o'clock in the morning. Two of the three men bend down to examine something which the third, lighted by a lantern, has just taken from the wet ground at his feet.

It is a small thing to excite so much earnest scrutiny; only the half burned fragment of a lucifer match.

"Boys," says Walter Parks, solemnly, swinging the lantern upon his arm and carefully wrapping the bit of match in a paper as he speaks, "poor Pearson was never killed by lightning. That sear upon his forehead was made by the simple application of a burning match. *I've* seen men killed by lightning."

"But you said—"

"No matter what I said *then*, Joe; what I *now* say to you and Menard is *the truth*. You have promised to keep what I am about to tell you a secret, and to act according to my advice. Menard, Blakesly, *Arthur Pearson has been foully murdered!*"

"No!"

"Parks, you are mad!"

"You will believe the evidence of your own senses, boys. I am going to prove what I assert."

"But who? how?—

"Who?—ah, that's the question! There are ten men of us; if the guilty party belongs to our train, we will

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ferret him out if possible. If we were to gather all our party here, and show them how poor Pearson met his death, the assassin, if he is among us, would be warned, and perhaps escape."

"True."

"Boys, I believe that the assassin *is* among us; but I have not the faintest suspicion as to his identity. We are ten men brought together by circumstances. We three have known each other back there in the mining camps. The others are acquaintances of the road; good fellows so far as we know them: but nine of us ten are innocent men; *one is a murderer!* Come, now, and let me prove what I am saying."

As men who feel themselves dreaming; silently, slowly, with anxious faces, they follow their leader to the wagon where the dead man lies alone.

"Get into the wagon, boys; here, at this end, and move softly."

It is done and the three men crouch close together about the body of the dead.

"Hold the lantern, Joe. There, Menard lift his head."

Silently, wonderingly, they obey him.

Then Walter Parks removes the cap from the lifeless head, and shudderingly parts away the thick hair from about the crown.

"Hold the lantern closer, Joe. Look, both of you; do you see *that?*"

They bend closer; the lantern's ray strikes upon something tiny and bright.

"My God!" cries Joe Blakesly, letting the lantern fall and turning away his face.

"Parks, what—*what* is it?"

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"A *nail!* Touch it, boys; see the hellish cleverness of the crime; think what the criminal must be, to drive that nail home with one blow while poor Pearson lay sleeping, and then to rearrange the thick hair so skillfully. That was before the storm, I feel sure. If we had found him sooner, there might have been no mark upon his forehead. Then we, in our ignorance, would have called it heart disease, and poor Pearson would have had no avenger. After the storm, the cunning villain crept back, struck a match, and applied it to his victim's temple. And but for an accident, we would all have agreed that he was killed by a lightning-stroke."

Menard lays the head gently back upon the damp hay and asks, shudderingly:

"How did you discover it, Parks?"

"In examining the sear, you may remember, I brushed the hair away from the temple. As I ran my fingers through it, I touched—that."

They look from one to the other silently for a moment, aad then Joe Blakesly says:

"Has he been robbed?"

"Let us see;" Menard says, "he wore a money-belt, I know. Look for it, Parks."

Parks examines the body, and shakes his head.

"It's gone; has been cut away. The belt was worn next the flesh; the print of it is here plainly visible. The belt has been taken, and the clothing replaced!"

"What coolness! what cunning! Shall we ever run the fellow down, Parks?"

"*Yes!* Boys, you know why I am leaving the mountains. I am going home to England, to be near my

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"Hold the lantern closer, Joe. Look both of you; do you see *that?*"—page 19.

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father who must die soon. I am not a poor man; I shall some day be richer still. If *we* fail to find this murderer, I shall put the matter in the hands of the detectives, *and I will never give it up.* Arthur Pearson met his death while traveling for safety with a party which calls me its leader, and *I will be his avenger!* It may be in one year, or two, or twenty; it may take a fortune, and a lifetime; *but Arthur Pearson shall be avenged!*"

CHAPTER I.

"STARS OF THE FORCE."

"Yes, sir," said Policeman No. 46, with an air of condescending courtesy, "this *is* the office."

It is characteristic of the metropolitan policeman; he is not a man to occupy middle ground. If he is not gruffly discourteous, he is pretty certain to be found patronizingly polite.

Number 46 had just breakfasted heartily, and had swallowed a large schooner of beer at the expense of the bar keeper, so he beamed benignly upon the tall, brown-faced, grey-bearded stranger who had just asked, "Is this the office of the City Detective Agency?"

"This *is* the office, sir; up two flights and turn to your left."

The stranger shifted his position slightly, glanced up

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"Is this the office of the City Detective Agency?"—page 22.

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and down the street, drew a step nearer the policeman, and asked:

"Is it a large force?"

"Well, I should say!"

"I suppose you know some of them pretty well?"

"Yes, *sir*; I know some of the best men of the lot."

The stranger jingled some loose coin in his pocket, and seemed to have forgotten his interest in the detective force.

"Officer, where does a man go to get a good brandy cocktail?"

Policemen are not over bashful, and No. 46 smiled anew as he replied:

"Just wait a few minutes, and I'll show you. I must stop that con—"

The last syllable was lost to the stranger as 46 dashed off to wave his club before the eyes of an express-man, who was occupying too much space on the wrong side of the street. In a moment he was back again, and, as he approached, the stranger said:

"I'm a new-comer in the city, and want to see things. I take a sort of interest in the doings of the police, and in detectives especially. I'd like to have you point me out some of these chaps, officer. Oh, about that brandy cock-tail; you'll join me, I hope?"

No. 46 consulted his watch.

"I'll join you, sir. Yes sir; in ten minutes, if you'll wait. There's a capital place right here handy. And if you want to see *detectives*, just you stand here with me a while. Vernet and Stanhope went down to breakfast half an hour ago."

"Vernet and Stanhope?"

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"The Stars of the force, sir; a perfect matched team. Splendid fellows, too. They always spend their mornings at the office, when not 'on the lay.' They've been back in the city four or five days; hard workers, those boys."

"Young men, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, they're young, but you can't fool them much. A little under thirty, I should call Vernet; Stanhope is the younger of the two."

"Americans?"

"Stanhope is, an out-and-outer. Vernet's got some French in him."

"Um, yes; well, I'd like to take a look at them, after we refresh ourselves."

"They won't be back for a good half hour; there's no fear of missing them."

Half an hour, and a brandy cock-tail, makes some men firm friends. When that period of time had elapsed, No. 46, more affable than ever, and the tall stranger, looking quite at his ease, stood again near the entrance to the office of the City Detective Agency.

Two men were coming down the street, walking and talking with the air of men on good terms with themselves and each other.

Both were young, well dressed, well-looking; but a more marked contrast never was seen.

One, the taller of the two, was dark and decidedly handsome, with black waving hair, dusky eyes, that were by turns solemn, tender, severe, and pathetic; "faultily faultless" features, that wore an habitual look of gravity and meditation; an erect, graceful carriage, and a demeanor

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dignified and somewhat reserved. Slow of speech and punctillious in the use of words,he was a man of tact and discretion; a man fitted to lead, and capable of ruling in stormy times. At first sight, people pronounced him "a handsome fellow;" after long acquaintance, they named him "a perfect gentleman."

His companion was not quite so tall, of medium height, in fact, but muscular and well built. He walked with a springy, careless stride, carrying his head erect, and keeping his observant, twinkling, laughing brown eyes constantly employed noting everything around and about him, but noting all with an expression of careless unconcern that seemed to say, "all this is nothing to me, why should it be?" His hair, brown, soft, and silky, was cropped close to his head, displaying thus a well developed crown, and brow broad, high and full. The nose was too prominent for beauty, but the mouth and chin were magnificent features, of which a physiognomist would say: Here are courage and tenderness, firmness and loyalty. He was easy of manner—"off-hand," would better express it; careless, and sometimes brusque in speech. At first sight one would call him decidedly plain; after a time spent in his society you voted him "a good looking fellow," and "a queer fish." And those who had thoroughly tested the quality of his friendship, vowed him a man to trust and to "tie to."

"Here they come," whispered No. 46; "those two fellows in grey."

"Which is which?"

"To be sure. The taller is Van Vernet; the other Dick Stanhope."

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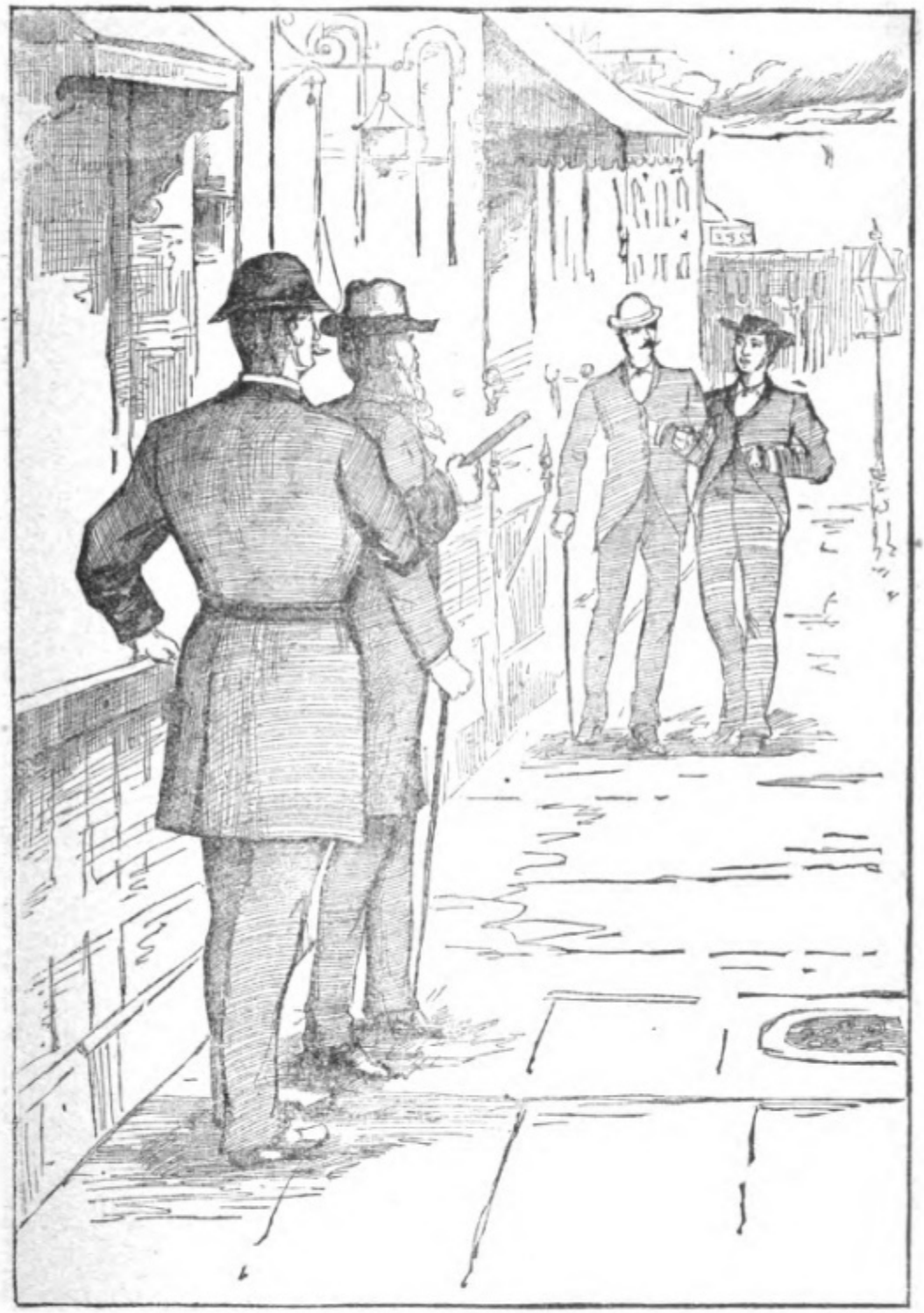

"Here they come," whispered No. 46; "those two fellows in grey."—page 26.

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As they approached, Van Vernet touched his hat with a glance of courteous recognition. But Richard Stanhope merely nodded, with a careless, "how are you, Charlie?" And neither noted the eager, scrutinizing glance bent upon them, as they passed the grey-bearded stranger and ran lightly up the stairs. "You're wanted in the Chief's office, Mr. Vernet," said the office boy as they entered; "And you too, I think, Mr. Stanhope."

"Not both at once, stupid?"

"Um, ah; of course not. Now look here, Mr. Dick—"

And Stanhope and the office boy promptly fell into pugilistic attitudes, the former saying, with a gay laugh:

"You first, Van, if the old man won't let us 'hunt in couples.'"

With the shadow of a smile upon his face, Van Vernet turned his back upon the two belligerents and entered the inner office.

"Ah, Vernet, good morning," said his affable chieftain. "Are you ready for a bit of business?"

"Certainly, sir."

"I don't think it will be anything very deep, but the young fellow insisted upon having one of my best men; one who could be courteous, discreet, and a gentleman."

Van Vernet, who had remained standing, hat in hand, before his chief, bowed deferentially, and continued silent.

"There are no instructions," continued the Chief. "You are to go to this address—it's a very aristocratic locality—and act under the gentleman's orders. He wants to deal with you direct; the case is more delicate than difficult, I fancy. I am only interested in the success or failure of your work."

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Taking the card from his outstretched hand, Vernet read the address.

"A. WARBURTON.
No. 31 B—— Place."

"When shall I wait upon Mr. Warburton?"

"At once. Your entire time is at his disposal until the case is finished; then report to me."

Vernet bowed again, turned to go, hesitated, turned back, and said:

"And the Raid?"

"Oh, that—I shall give Stanhope charge of that affair. Of course he would like your assistance, but he knows the ground, and I think will make the haul. However, if you are not occupied to-morrow night, you might join them here."

"Thank you. I will do so if possible," turning again to go.

"Send Stanhope in, Vernet. I must settle this business about the Raid."

Opening the door softly, and closing it gently after him, Vernet approached his comrade, and laid a light hand upon his arm.

"Richard, you are wanted."

"All right; are you off, Van?"

"Yes;" putting his hat upon his head.

"On a lay?"

"Yes."

"Wish you good luck, old man; tra la."

And Dick Stanhope bounced into the presence of his Chief with considerable noise and scant ceremony.

Number 46, who, with the stranger beside him, was

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slowly pacing his beat, lifted his eyes as Vernet emerged from the stairway.

"There comes Vernet, and alone. I'll bet something he's off on a case," he said.

"Looks like it."

"He looks more serious than usual; wonder if he's got to work it without Stanhope."

"Do they always pull together?"

"Not always; but they've done their biggest work together. When there's a very knotty case, it's given to Vernet *and* Stanhope; and they seldom fail."

"Which acts as leader and is the best man of the two?"

"Well, sir, that's a conundrum that no man can guess, not even the Chief. And I don't believe any body ever will know, unless they fall out, and set up an opposition to each other. As for who leads, they both pull together; there's no leader. I tell you what I don't want to see two such splendid fellows fall out; they've worked in double harness a good while. But if the Chief up there wants to see what detectives *can* do, let him put those two fellows on opposite sides of a case; then he'd see a war of wits that would beat horse-racing."

"Um!" said the stranger, consulting an English repeater, "it's time for me to move on. Is this your regular beat, my friend? Ah! then we may meet again. Good morning, sir."

"That's a queer jockey," muttered No. 46. "When he first came up, I made sure he was looking for the Agency—looking just for curiosity, I reckon."

And the stranger, as he strolled down the street, communed thus with himself:

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"So these two star detectives have never been rivals yet. The Chief has never been anxious to see what detectives *can* do, I suppose. This looks like *my* opportunity. Messrs. Vernet and Stanhope, *you shall have a chance to try your skill against each other*, and upon a desperate case; and the wit that wins need never work another."

CHAPTER II.

ODDLY EMPLOYED.

While the stranger was thus communing with himself, and while Van Vernet was striding toward that fashionable quarter of the city which contained the splendid Warburton mansion, Richard Stanhope, perched upon one corner of a baize covered table, his hands clasped about one knee, his hat pushed far back upon his head, his whole air that of a man in the presence of a familiar spirit, and perfectly at his ease, was saying to his Chief:

"So you want me to put this business through *alone?* I don't half like it."

"You are equal to it, Dick."

"I know that," with a proud curve of the firm lips, "but I'm sure Van expected to be in this thing, and—"

"Vernet has another case in hand.. I have given him all his time until it is finished, with the privilege of joining you here and assisting in the Raid to-morrow night, if he can

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do so without interfering with his other duties. You seem to fear to offend Vernet, Dick?"

"I *fear* no one, sir. But Van and I have pulled well together, and divided the honors equally. This Raid, if it succeeds, will be a big thing for the man, or men, engineering it. I know that Van has counted upon at least a share of the glory. I hate to see him lose the chance for it."

"You are a generous friend, Dick, and Van may rejoice that you *are* his friend instead of his rival. Now, leaving friendship to take care of itself, do you feel that the *success* of the Raid depends upon Vernet's assistance?"

"Perdition! *No.*"

"You know the ground?"

"Every inch of it!"

"And Van does not."

"One pilot is enough."

"You know the people?"

"Well, rather!"

"Do you doubt the success of the undertaking?"

"No, sir. I see only one chance for failure."

"And that?"

"I have made this Raid a study. If anything occurs to prevent my leading the expedition, and you put another man at the head, it will fail."

"Even if it be Vernet?"

"Even Vernet. Satan himself would fail in those alleys, unless he knew the ground."

"And yet you would share your honors with Vernet for friendship's sake? Dick, you are a queer fish! But why do you suggest a possibility of your absence?"

"Because," sliding off the table and pulling his hat low

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over his eyes, "The Raid is thirty-six hours distant, and one never knows what may happen in thirty-six hours. Is there any thing else, sir?"

"Yes; I've a dainty bit of mystery for you. No blind alleys and thieves dens in *this*; it's for to-morrow evening, too."

Stanhope resumed his former position upon the corner of the table, pushed back his hat, and turned an attentive face to his Chief.

"Your Raid will not move until a little after midnight; this other business is for ten o'clock. You can be at liberty by eleven. You know Follingsbee, the lawyer?"

"By reputation; yes. Is *he* in the mystery?"

"He's negotiating for a client; a lady."

"A lady!" with a stare of dismay. "Why didn't you turn her over to Van; you know he is just the man to deal with women, and I—"

"You are afraid of a petticoat! I know; and I might have chosen Vernet, if the choice had been given me. But the lawyer asked for *you*."

Stanhope groaned dismally.

"Besides, it's best for you; you are better than Vernet at a feminine make up."

"A feminine make up!"

"Yes. Here is the business: Mr. Follingsbee desires your services for a lady client; he took care to impress upon me that she *was* a lady in every sense of the word. This lady had desired the services of a detective, and he had recommended you."

"Why I?"

"Never mind why; you are sufficiently vain at present.

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You have nothing on hand after the Raid, so I promised you to Follingsbee; he is an old friend of mine. To-morrow evening, at ten o'clock, you are to drive to Mr. Follingsbee's residence in masquerade costume."

"Good Lord!"

"In a feminine disguise of some sort. Mr. Follingsbee, also in costume, will join you, and together you will attend an up-town masquerade, you personating Mrs. Follingsbee, who will remain at home."

"Phew! I'm getting interested."

"At the masquerade you will meet your client, who will be introduced by Follingsbee. Now about your disguise: he wants to know your costume beforehand, in order to avoid any mistakes."

"Let me think," said Stanhope, musingly. "What's Mrs. Follingsbee's style?"

"A little above the medium. Follingsbee thinks, that, with considerable drapery, you can make up to look sufficiently like her."

"Considerable drapery; then I have it. Last season, when Van and I were abroad, we attended a masquerade in Vienna, and I wore the costume of the Goddess of Liberty, in order to furnish a partner for Van. In hiring the costume, I, of course, deposited the price of it, and the next day we left the city so hurriedly that I had no opportunity to return it, so I brought it home with me. It's a bang-up dress, and no one has seen it on this side of the water, except Van. How will it do?"

"Capitally; then I will tell Follingsbee to look for the Goddess of Liberty."

"All right, sir. You are sure I won't be detained later than eleven?"

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"Yes; I've a dainty bit of mystery for you. No blind alleys and thieves' dens in *this*"—page 33.

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"You have only to meet the lady, receive her instructions, and come away."

"I hope I shall live through the ordeal," rising once more and shaking himself like a water-spaniel, "but I'd rather face all the hosts of Rag Alley."

And Richard Stanhope left the Agency to "overhaul" the innocent masquerade costume that held, in its white and crimson folds, the fate of its owner.

Leaving him thus employed, let us follow the footsteps of Van Vernet, and enter with him the stately portals of the home of the Warburtons.

Crossing a hall that is a marvel of antique richness, with its walls of russet, old gold, and Venetian red tints; its big claw-footed tables; its massive, open-faced clock, with huge weights a-swing below; its statuettes and its bass-reliefs, we pass under a rich *portierie*, and hear the liveried footman say, evidently having been instructed:

"This is Mr. Warburton's study, sir; I will take up your name."

Van Vernet gazes about him, marking the gorgeous richness of the room. A study! There are massive book-cases filled with choicest lore; cabinets containing all that is curious, antique, rare, beautiful, and costly; there are plaques and bronzes; there is a mantle laden with costly bric-a-brac; a grand old-fashioned fire-place and fender; there are divans and easy chairs; rich draperies on wall and at windows, and all in the rarest tints of olive, crimson, and bronze.

Van Vernet looks about him and says to himself:

"This is a room after my own heart. Mr. Warburton,

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of Warburton Place, must be a sybarite, and should be a happy man. Ah, he is coming."

But it is not Mr. Warburton who enters. It is a colored valet, sleek, smiling, obsequious, who bears in his hand a gilded salver, with a letter upon it, and upon his arm a parcel wrapped in black silk.

"You are Mr. Vernet?" queries this personage, as if in doubt.

"Yes."

"Then this letter is for you."

And the valet bows low, and extends the salver, adding softly:

"I am Mr. Warburton's body servant."

Looking somewhat surprised, as well as annoyed, Van Vernet takes up the letter, breaks the seal and reads:

SIR:

My business with you is of so delicate a nature that it is best, for all concerned, to keep our identity a secret, for a time at least. Your investigation involves the fair fame of a lady and the honor of a stainless name.

Come to this house to-morrow night, in the costume which I shall send for your use. The enclosed card will admit you. My valet will show you the domino by which you will recoguize me. This will enable me to instruct you fully, and to point out to you the persons in whom you are to take an interest. This letter you will please destroy in the presence of my valet. A. W.

After reading this strange note, Van Vernet stands so long, silently pondering, that the servant makes a restless movement. Then the detective says, with a touch of imperiousness.

"Give me a match."

It is proffered him in silence, and in silence he turns to

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the grate, applies the match to the letter, and lets it fall from his fingers to the fire-place, where it lies a charred fragment that crumbles to ashes at a touch.

The dark servant watches the proceeding in grave silence until Vernet turns to him, saying:

"Now, the domino."

Then he rapidly takes from the sable wrapper a domino of black and scarlet, and exhibits it to the detective, who examines it critically for a moment and then says brusquely:

"That will do; tell your master that I will follow his instructions—*to the letter*."

As the stately door swings shut after his exit, Van Vernet turns and glances up at the name upon the door-plate, and, as he sets his foot upon the pavement, he mutters:

"A. Warburton is my employer; A. Warburton is the name upon the door: I see! My services are wanted by the master of this mansion: he asks to deal with a *gentleman*, and—leaves him to negotiate with a colored servant! There's a lady in the case, and 'an honorable name at stake;' Ah! Mr. A. Warburton, the day may come when you will wear no domino in my presence; when you will send no servant to negotiate with Van Vernet!"

CHAPTER III.

THE EFFECT OF AN ADVERTISEMENT.

A rickety two-story frame building, in one of the worst quarters of the city.

It is black with age, and guiltless of paint, but a care-

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"He applies the match to the letter, and lets it fall from his fingers to the fire-place.—page 38.

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ful observer would note that the door is newer than the dwelling, and that it is remarkably solid, considering the tumble-down aspect of the structure it guards. The windows of the lower story are also new and substantial, such of them as serve for windows; but one would note that the two immediately facing the street are boarded up, and so tightly that not one ray of light can penetrate from without, nor shine from within.

The upper portion of the dwelling, however, has nothing of newness about it. The windows are almost without glass, but they bristle with rags and straw, while the dilapidated appearance of the roof indicates that this floor is given over to the rats and the rain.

Entering at the stout front door, we find a large room, bare and comfortless. There is a small stove, the most battered and rusty of its kind; two rickety chairs, and a high wooden stool; a shelf that supports a tin cup, a black bottle, and a tallow candle; a sturdy legged deal table, and a scrap of rag carpet, carefully outspread in the middle of the floor.

An open door, in one corner, discloses the way to the rat-haunted second floor. There are some dirty bundles and a pile of rags just behind the door; some pieces of rusty old iron are lying near a rear entrance, and a dismal-looking old man is seated on a pallet in one corner.

This is what would be noted by the casual observer, and this is all. But the old man and his dwelling are worthy of closer inspection.

He is small and lean, with narrow, stooping shoulders; a sallow, pinched face, upon which rests, by turns, a fawning leer, which is intended, doubtless, for the blandest of smiles, a look of craftiness and greed, a scowl, or a sneer. His hair,

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which has been in past years of a decided carrot color, is now plentifully streaked with gray, and evidently there is little affinity between the stubby locks and a comb. He is dirty, ragged, unshaven; and his age may be any where between fifty and seventy.

At the sound of a knock upon the outer door, he sits erect upon his pallet, a look of wild terror in his face: then, recovering himself, he rises slowly and creeps softly toward the door. Wearing now his look of cunning, he removes from a side panel a small pin, that is nicely fitted and comes out noiselessly, and peeps through the aperture thus made.

Then, with an exclamation of annoyance, he replaces the pin and hurriedly opens the door.

The woman who enters is a fitting mate for him, save that in height and breadth, she is his superior; old and ugly, unkempt and dirty, with a face expressive of qui' · as much of cunning and greed, and more of boldness and resolution, than his possesses.

"It's you, is it?" says the man, testily. "What has brought you back? and empty-handed I'll be bound."

The old woman crossed the floor, seated herself in the most reliable chair, and turning her face toward her companion said, sharply:

"You're an old fool!"

Not at all discomposed by this familiar announcement, the man closed and barred the door, and then approached the woman, who was taking from her pocket a crumpled newspaper.

"What have you got there?"

"You wait," significantly, "and don't tell *me* that I come empty-handed."

"Ah! you don't mean—"

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Again the look of terror crossed his face, and he left the sentence unfinished.

"Old man, you *are* a fool! Now, listen: Nance and I had got our bags nearly filled, when I found this," striking the paper with her fore-finger. "It blew right under my feet, around a corner. It's the morning paper."

"Well, well!"

"Oh, you'll hear it soon enough. It's the morning paper, and you know *I* always read the papers, when I can find 'em, although, since you lost the few brains you was born with, you never look at one."

"Umph!"

"Well, I looked at this paper, and see what I found!"

She held the paper toward him, and pointed to a paragraph among the advertisements.

> WANTED. INFORMATION OF ANY SORT CONCERNing one Arthur Pearson, who left the mining country with a child in his charge, twenty years ago. Information concerning said child, Lea Ainsworth, or any of her relatives. Compensation for any trouble or time. Address,
>
> O. E. MEARS, Atty,
> Melbourne, Australia.

The paper fluttered from the man's nerveless fingers, but the woman caught it as it fell.

"Oh, Lord!" he gasped, the drops of perspiration standing out upon his brow, "oh, Lord! it has come at last."

"What has come, you old fool!"

"Everything; ruin! ruin!"

"We're a pretty looking pair to talk of *ruin*," giving a contemptuous glance at her surroundings. "Stop looking so like a scared idiot, and listen to me."

"Oh, I'm listening!" sinking down upon the pallet in a dismal huddle; "go on."

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'Oh, Lord!" he gasped; "oh, Lord, it has come at last!"—page 42.

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The woman crossed over and sat down beside him.

"Now, look here; suppose the worst comes, how far away is it? How long will it take to get a letter to Australia, and an answer or a journey back?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Well, it'll take all the time *we* want. But who is there to answer that advertisement?"

"Oh, dear!"

"You miserable coward! *She* wouldn't know what it meant if she saw it."

"No."

"Arthur Pearson—"

"Oh, *don't!*"

"Arthur Pearson has not been heard of in twenty years."

The old man shuddered, and drew a long sighing breath.

"Walter Parks, after all his big talk, never came back from England," she hurried on. "Menard is dead; and Joe Blakesley is in California. The rest are dead, or scattered south and west. There are none of the train to be found here, except—except the Krutzers; and who can identify *them* after twenty years?"

"I shall never feel safe again."

"Yes, you will. You always feel safe when the dollars jingle in your pockets, although it's precious little good they bring you."

"But *her* money is already gone."

"Her husband has a full purse."

"But how—"

"Oh, I see the way clear enough. It's only half the work of the other job, and double the money."

"The money! Ah! how do you think to get it?"

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"Honestly, this time; honestly, old man. It shall come to us *as a reward!*"

Drawing nearer still to her hesitating partner, the woman began to whisper rapidly, gesticulating fiercely now and then, while the old man listened in amazement, admiration, doubt, and fear; asking eager questions, and feeling his way cautiously toward conviction.

When the argument was ended, he said, slowly:

"I shall never feel safe until it's over, and we are away from this place. When can you do—the job?"

"To-morrow night."

"To-morrow night!"

"Yes; it's the very time of times. To-morrow night it shall be."

"It's a big risk! We will have to bluff the detectives, old woman."

"A fig for the detectives! They will have a cold scent; besides—we have dodged detectives before."

CHAPTER IV.

ENLISTED AGAINST EACH OTHER.

It is early in the evening of the day that has witnessed the events recorded in the preceding chapters, and the Chief of the detectives is sitting in his easiest office chair, listening attentively to the words that fall from the lips of a tall, bronzed, gray-bearded man who sits opposite him, talking fast and earnestly.

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He has been thus talking, and the Chief thus listening, for more than an hour, and the story is just reaching its conclusion when the stranger says:

"There, sir, you have the entire case, so far as I know it. What I ask is something unusual, but what I offer, in compensation, is something unusual too."

"A queer case, I should say," returns the Chief, half to himself; "and a difficult one. Twenty years ago a man was murdered—killed by a nail driven into his skull. Detectives have hunted for the murderer, singly, in twos and threes. English experts have crossed the ocean to unravel the mystery and it remains a mystery still. And now, when the secret is twenty years old, and the assassin dead and buried, perhaps, you come and ask me for my two best men,—men who have worked together as brothers—and ask me to set their skill *against each other*, in a struggle, which, if it ends as you desire, will mean victory and fortune for the one, defeat and loss of prestige for the other."

"There is no such thing as loss of prestige. A man may bow to a superior and yet retain his own skill. Plainly, I have come to you as an honorable man should. I wish to deal with these men through you, if possible. But they are free agents. What you refuse to do for me, I must do for myself; and I tell you plainly, that if money can purchase their services, I will have Van Vernet and Richard Stanhope to work this case."

"You are frank, sir! But I have observed that, in relating your story, you have been careful to avoid giving either your own name or the name of the murdered man."

"As I shall continue to do until I state the case to the two detectives, *after* they have enlisted in my service."

The Chief ponders for a time and then says:

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"Now, hear my proposition: you are justified in believing that, if there *is* a bottom to this ancient mystery, Vernet and Stanhope, singly or together, are the men to find it. That is my belief also. As for your idea of putting them on their mettle, by offering so magnificent a reward to the man who succeeds, *that* is not bad—for you and the man who wins. Vernet and Stanhope have, this very day, taken in hand two cases,—working separately, understand. If you will wait in patience until these cases are finished, you shall have the men from this office,—if they will accept the case."

"Put my proposition before the two men at once. When I know that I shall have their services, I can wait in patience until their duty of the present is done."

"Then," said the Chief rising, "the question can soon be settled; Vernet is in the outer office; Stanhope will soon be here. You will find the evening papers upon that desk; try and entertain yourself while I put your case before Vernet."

Ten minutes later, Van Vernet was standing before his Chief, listening with bent head, compressed lip, and glowing cheek, to the story of the man who was murdered twenty years before, and to the splendid proposal of the tall stranger. When it was all told, and the Chief paused for a reply, the young detective moved a pace nearer and said with decision:

"Tell him that I accept the proposition. A man can't afford to lose so splendid a chance for friendship's sake. Besides," his eyes darkening and his mouth twitching convulsively, "it's time for Dick and I to find out *who is the better man!*"

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Returning to the inner office, the Chief of the force found his strange patron walking fiercely up and down the room, with a newspaper grasped firmly in his hand, and on his countenance traces of agitation.

"Look!" he cried, approaching and forcing the paper upon the astonished Chief; "see what a moment of waiting has brought me!"

And he pointed to a paragraph beginning:

WANTED. INFORMATION OF ANY SORT CONCERNing one Arthur Pearson, etc. etc.

"An advertisement, I see;" said the Chief. "But I fail to understand why it should thus excite you."

"A moment ago it was my intention to keep the identity of the murdered man a secret. This," indicating the paper by a quick gesture, "changes the face of affairs. After twenty years, some one inquires after Arthur Pearson—"

"Then Arthur Pearson is—"

"The man who was murdered near the Marais des Cygnes!"

"And the child?"

"I never knew her name until now. No doubt it is the little girl that was in Pearson's care."

"What became of the child?"

"I never knew."

"And how does this discovery affect your movements?"

"I will tell you; but, first, you saw Vernet?"

"Yes; and he accepts."

"Good! That notice was inserted either by some friend of Pearson's, or by the child's father, John Ainsworth."

"What do you know of him?"

"Nothing; I never met him. But, as soon as you have

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seen Stanhope, and I am sure that these two sharp fellows are prepared to hunt down poor Pearson's assassins, I *will* meet him, if the notice is his, for I am going to Australia."

"Ah!"

"Yes; I can do no good here. To-morrow morning, business will take me out of the city. When I return, in two days, let me have Stanhope's answer."

When Richard Stanhope appeared at the office that night a little later than usual, the story of Arthur Pearson and his mysterious death was related for the third time that day, and the strange and munificent offer of the stranger, for the second time rehearsed by the Chief.

"What do you think of it, my boy? Are you anxious to try for a fortune?"

"No, thank you."

It was said as coolly as if he were declining a bad cigar.

"Consider, Dick."

"There is no need. Van and I have pulled together too long to let a mere matter of money come between us. *He* would never accept such a proposition."

The Chief bit his lip and remained silent.

"Or if he did," went on Stanhope, "he would not work against me. Tell your patron that *with* Van Vernet I will undertake the case. He may make Van his chief, and I will gladly assist. *Without* Van as my rival, I will work it alone; but *against* him, as his rival for honors and lucre, *never!*"

The Chief slowly arose, and resting his hands upon the shoulders of the younger man, looked in his face with fatherly pride.

"Dick, you're a splendid fellow, and a shrewd detec-

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tive," he said, "but you have a weakness. You study strangers, but you trust your friends with absolute blindness. Van is ambitious."

"So am I."

"He loves money."

"A little too well, I admit."

"If he should accept this offer?"

"But he wont."

"If he *should*;" persisted the Chief.

"If such a thing were possible,—if, without a friendly consultation, and a fair and square send off, he should take up the cudgel against me, then—"

"Then, Dick?"

Richard Stanhope's eyes flashed, and his mouth set itself in firm lines.

"*Then*," he said, "I would measure my strength against his as a detective; but always as a friend, and never to his injury!"

"And, Dick, if, in the thick of the strife, Van forgets his friendship for you and becomes your enemy?"

"Then, as I am only human, I should be his enemy too. But that will not happen."

"I hope not; I hope not, my boy. But—Van Vernet has already accepted the stranger's proposition."

Stanhope leaped to his feet.

"What!" he cried, "has Van *agreed* to work against me—without a word to me—and so soon!"

His lips trembled now, and his eyes searched those of his Chief with the eager, inquiring look of a grieved child.

"It is as I say, Stanhope."

"Then," and he threw back his head and instantly re-

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"What, has Van *agreed* to work against me—without a word to me—and so soon!"—page 50.

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sumed his usual look of careless indifference, "tell your patron, whoever he may be, that *I am his man*, for one year, or for twenty!"

CHAPTER V.

"STANHOPE'S FIRST TRICK."

Van Vernet and Richard Stanhope had been brother detectives during the entire term of their professional career.

Entering the Agency when mere striplings, they had at once formed a friendship that had been strong and lasting. Their very differences of disposition and habits made them the better fellow-workmen, and the *role* most difficult for one was sure to be found the easier part for the other to play.

They had been a strong combination, and the Chief of the detectives wasted some time in pondering the question: what would be the result, when their skill and courage stood arrayed against each other?

Meantime, Richard Stanhope, wasting no thought upon the matter, hastened from the presence of his Chief to his own quarters.

"It's my last night," he muttered, as he inserted his key in the lock, "and I'll just take one more look at the slums. I don't want to lose one bird from that flock."

Half an hour later, there sallied forth from the door where Stanhope had entered, a roughly-dressed, swagger-

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ing, villainous-looking fellow, who bore about with him the strongly defined odors of tobacco and bad whiskey.

This individual, armed with a black liquor flask, two revolvers, a blood-thirsty-looking dirk, a pair of brass knuckles, and a quantity of plug tobacco, took his way through the streets, avoiding the more popular and respectable thoroughfares, and gradually approaching that portion of the city almost entirely given over to the worst of the bad,—a network of short streets and narrow alleys, as intricate as the maze, and as dangerous to the unwary as an African jungle.

But the man who now entered these dismal streets walked with the manner of one familiar with their sights and sounds. Moving along with an air of stolid indifference to what was before and about him, he arrived at a rickety building, somewhat larger than those surrounding it, the entrance to which was reached by going down, instead of up, a flight of stone steps. This entrance was feebly illuminated by a lantern hung against the doorway, and by a few stray gleams of light that shone out from the rents in the ragged curtains.

Pushing open the door, our visitor found himself in a large room with sanded floor, a counter or bar, and five or six tables, about which a number of men were lounging,—some at cards, some drinking, and some conversing in the queer jargon called thieves' slang, and which is as Greek to the unenlightened.

The buzz of conversation almost ceased as the door opened, but was immediately resumed when the new comer came forward toward the light.

"Is that you, Cull?" called the man behind the bar. "You've been keepin' scarce of late."

The man addressed as "Cull" laughed discordantly.

"I've been visitin' in the country," he returned, with a

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knowing wink. "It's good for my health this time o' year. How's business? You've got the hull deck on hand, I should say."

"You better say! Things is boomin'; nearly all of the old uns are in."

"Well, spread out the drinks, Pap, I'm tolerably flush. Boys, come up, and if I don't know any of ye we'll be interduced."

Almost instantly a dozen men were flocking about the bar, some eager to grasp the hand of the liberal last arrival, and others paying their undivided attention to the bar keeper's cheerful command:

"Nominate yer dose, gentlemen."

While the party, glasses in hand, were putting themselves *en rapport*, the door again opened, and now the hush that fell upon the assembled "gentlemen" was deeper and more lasting.

Evidently, the person who entered was a stranger to all in the Thieves' Tavern, for such the building was.

He was a young man, with a countenance half fierce, half desperate, wholly depraved. He was haggard, dirty, and ragged, having the look and the gait of a man who has travelled far and is footsore and weary. As he approached the group about the bar it was also evident that he was half intoxicated.

"Good evenin', sirs," he said with surly indifference. Then to the man behind the bar: "Mix us a cocktail, old Top, and strong."

While the bar keeper was deftly shaking up the desired drink, the men before the counter drew further away from the stranger, and some of them began a whispered conversation.

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The last arrival eyed them with a sneer of contempt, and said to the bar keeper, as he gulped down his drink: "Your coves act like scared kites. Probably they ain't used to good society."

"See here, my friend," spoke a blustering fellow, advancing toward him, "you made a little mistake. This ere ain't a tramps' lodgin' house."

"Ain't it?" queried the stranger; "then what the Moses are *you* doin' here?"

"You'll swallow *that*, my hearty!"

"When?"

The stranger threw himself into an attitude of defence and glared defiance at his opponent.

"Wax him, Charley!"

"Let's fire him out!"

"Hold on gentlemen; fair play!"

"I'll give you one more chance," said the blusterer. "Ask my pardon and then mizzle instantly, or I'll have ye cut up in sections as sure as my name's Rummey Joe."

The half intoxicated man was no coward. Evidently he was ripe for a quarrel.

"I intend to stop here!" he cried, bringing his fist down upon the counter with a force that made it creak. "I'm goin' to stay right here till the old Nick comes to fetch me. And I'm goin' ter send your teeth down your big throat in three minutes."

There was a chorus of exclamations, a drawing of weapons, and a forward rush. Then sudden silence.

The man who had lately ordered drinks for the crowd, was standing between the combatants, one hand upon the breast of the last comer, the other grasping a pistol levelled just under the nose of Rummey Joe.

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"Drop yer fist, boy! Put up that knife, Joe! Let's understand each other."

Then addressing the stranger, but keeping an eye upon Rummey Joe, he said:

"See here, my hearty, you don't quite take in the sitera-tion. This is a sort of club house, not open to the general public. If you want to hang out here, you must show your credentials."

The stranger hesitated a moment, and then, without so much as a glance at his antagonist, said:

"*Your* racket is fair enough. I know where I am, and ye've all got a right to see my colors. I'll show ye my hand, and then"—with a baleful glare at Rummey Joe—"I'll settle with *that* blackguard."

Advancing to one of the tables, he deliberately lifted his foot and, resting it upon the table top, rolled up the leg of his trousers, and pulled down a dirty stocking over his low shoe.

"There's my passport, gentlemen."

They crowded about him and gazed upon the naked ankle, that bore the imprint of a broad band, sure indication that the limb had recently been decorated with a ball and chain.

"And now," said the ex-convict, turning fiercely, "I'll teach you the kind of a tramp I am, Mr. Rummey Joe!"

Before a hand or voice could be raised to prevent it, the two men had grappled, and were struggling fiercely for the mastery.

"Give them a show, boys!" some one said.

The crowd drew back and watched the combat; watched with unconcern until they saw their comrade, Rummey Joe, weakening in the grasp of his antagonist; until knives flashed in the hand of each, and fierce blows were struck on both sides.

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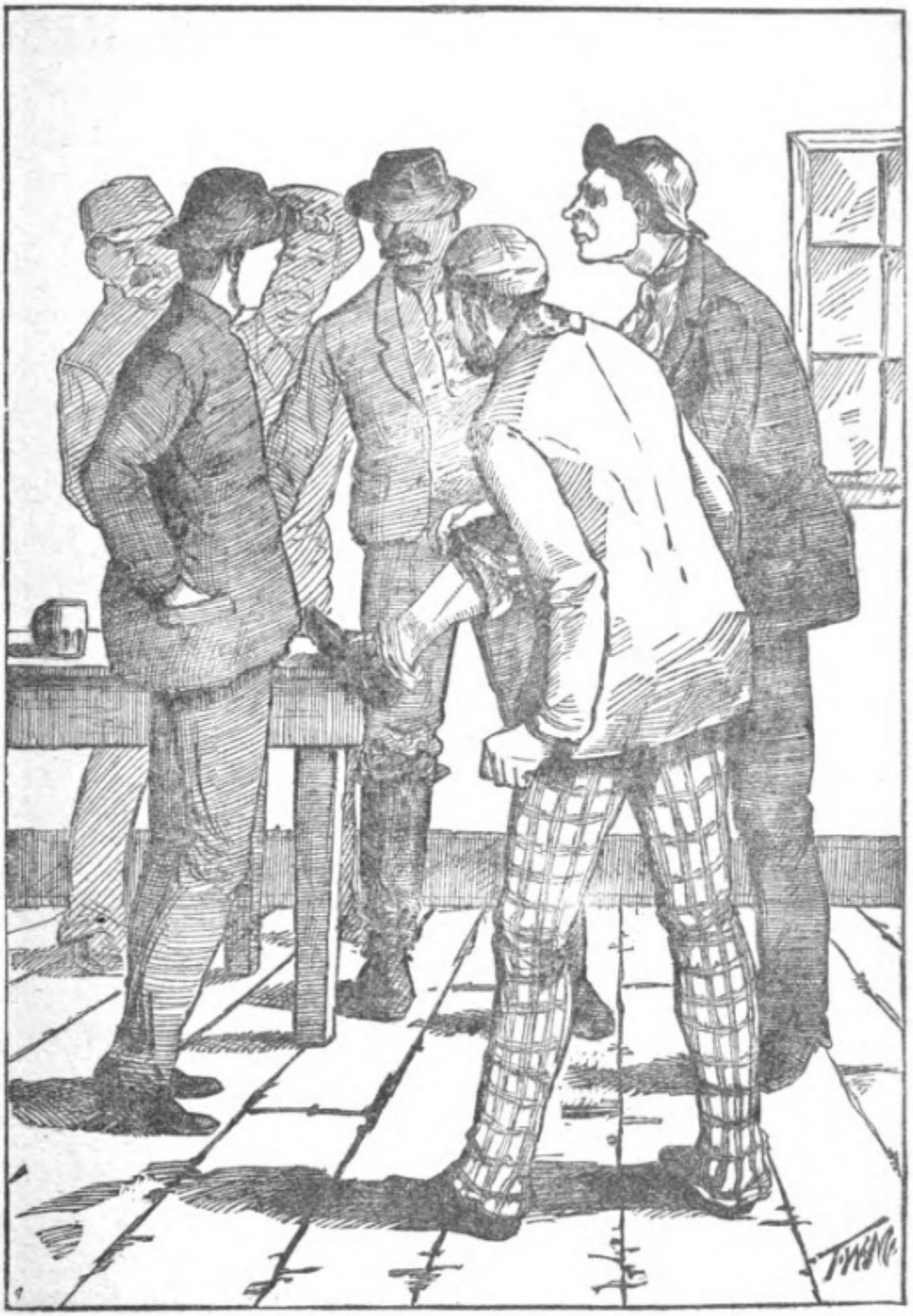

"There's my passport, gentlemen."—page 56.

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Then, when Rummey Joe, uttering a shriek of pain, went down underneath the knife of the victor, there was a roar and a rush, and the man who had conquered their favorite was borne down by half a dozen strong arms, menaced by as many sharp, glittering knives.

But again the scene shifted.

An agile form was bounding about among them; blows fell swift as rain; there was a lull in the combat, and when the wildly struggling figures, some scattered upon the floor, some thrown back upon each other, recovered from their consternation, they saw that the convict had struggled up upon one elbow, while, directly astride of his prostrate body, stood the man who had asked for his credentials, fierce contempt in his face, and, in either hand, a heavy six shooter.

"Don't pull, boys, I've got the drop on ye! Cowards, to tackle a single man, six of ye!"

"By Heavens, he's killed Rummey!"

"No matter; it was a fair fight, and Rummey at the bottom of the blame."

"All the same he'll never kill a pal of ours, and live to tell it! Stand off, Cully Devens!"

"*No, sir!* I am going to take this wounded man out of this without another scratch, if I have to send every mother's son of you to perdition."

His voice rang out clear and commanding. In the might of his wrath, he had forgotten the language of Cully Devens and spoken as a man to cowards.

The effect was electrical.

From among the men standing at bay, one sprang forward, crying:

"Boys, here's a traitor amongst us! Who are ye, ye sneak, that has played yerself fer Cully Devens?"

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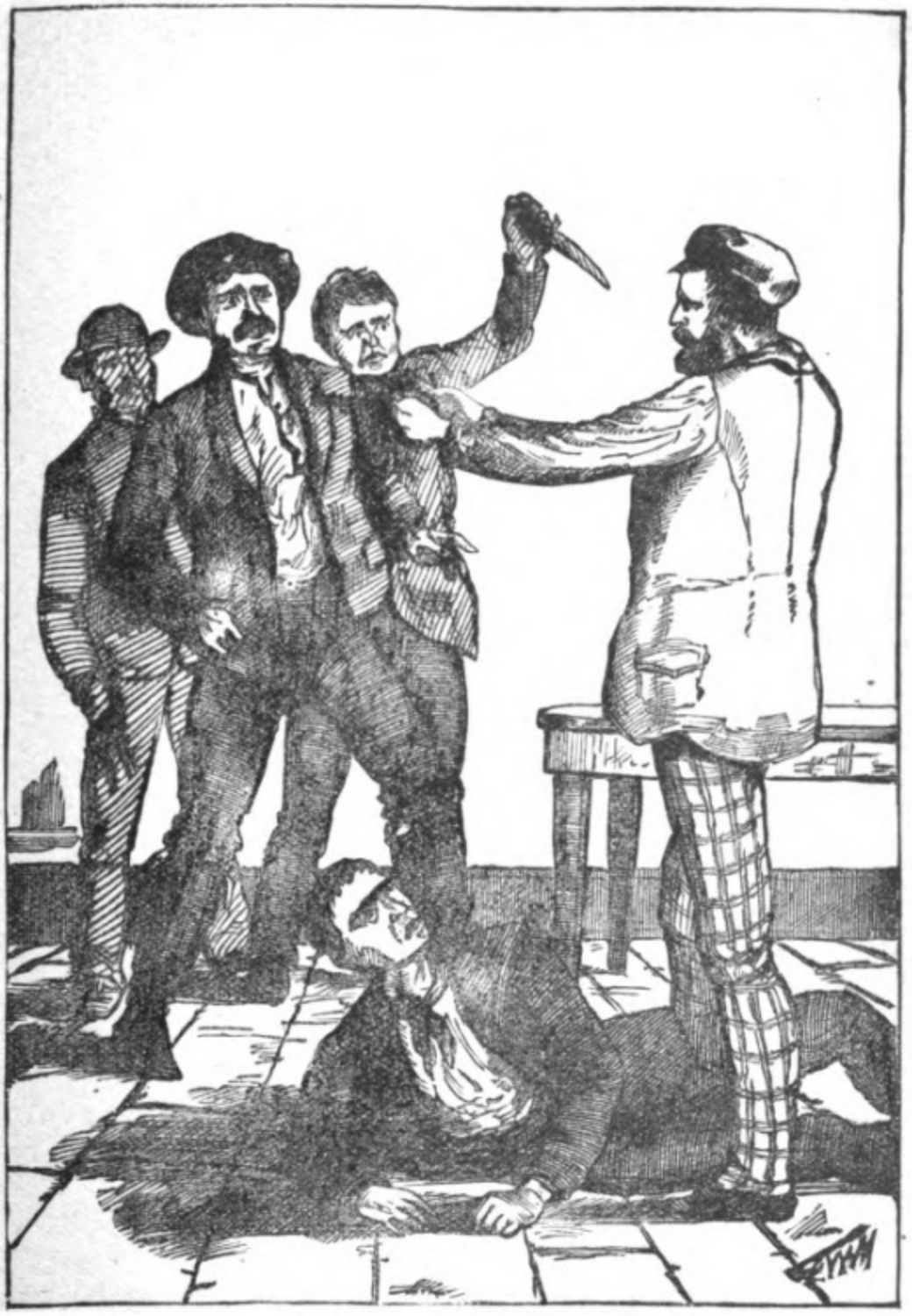

"Don't pull, boys, I've got the drop on ye!"—page 58.

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The lithe body bent slightly forward, a low laugh crossed the lips of the bogus Cully, the brown eyes lighted up, and flashed in the eyes of the men arrayed against him. Then came the answer, coolly, as if the announcement were scarcely worth making:

"Richard Stanhope is my name, and I've got a trump here for every trick you can show me. Step up, boys, don't be bashful!"

CHAPTER VI.

STANHOPE'S HUMANITY.

"Richard Stanhope is my name, and I've got a trump here for every trick you can show me. Step up, boys, don't be bashful!"

Momentous silence followed this announcement, while the *habitues* of the Thieves' Tavern glanced into each others' faces in consternation.

An ordinary meddler, however much his courage and skill, would have met with summary chastisement; but *Dick Stanhope!*

Not a man among them but knew the result of an attack upon him. Bullets swift and sure, in the brains or hearts of some; certain vengeance, sooner or later, upon all.

To avoid, on all possible occasions, an open encounter with an officer of the law, is the natural instinct of the crook. Besides, Stanhope was never off his guard; his presence, alone

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among them, was sure indication that *they* were in more danger than he.

So reasoned the astonished scoundrels, instantly, instinctively.

"Look here, boys," Stanhope's cool voice broke in upon their silence; "I'm here on a little private business which need not concern you, unless you make me trouble. This man," nodding down at the prostrate ex-convict, "is my game. I'm going to take him out of this, and if you raise a hand to prevent it, or take a step to follow me, you'll find yourselves detained for a long stretch."

He threw back his head and gave a long, low whistle.

"Hear that, my good sirs. That's a note of preparation. One more such will bring you into close quarters. If you are not back at those tables, every man of you, inside of two minutes, I'll give the second call."

Some moved with agility, some reluctantly, some sullenly; but they all obeyed him.

"Now, Pap, come out and help me lift this fellow. Are you badly hurt, my man?"

The wounded man groaned and permitted them to lift him to his feet.

"He can walk, I think," went on Stanhope, in a brisk, business-like way. "Lean on me, my lad." Then, turning to the bar keeper and thrusting some money into his hand: "Give these fellows another round of drinks, Pap. Boys, enjoy yourselves; ta-ta."

And without once glancing back at them he half led, half supported, the wounded man out from the bar-room, up the dirty stone steps, and into the dirtier street.

"Boys," said the bar keeper as he distributed the drinks at

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Stanhope's expense, "you done a sensible thing when you let upon Dick Stanhope. He's got the alley lined with peelers and don't you forget it."

For a little way Stanhope led his man in silence. Then the rescued ex-convict made a sudden convulsive movement, gathered himself for a mighty effort, broke from the supporting grasp of the detective, and fled away down the dark street.

Down one block and half across the next he ran manfully. Then he reeled, staggered wildly from side to side, threw up his arms, and fell heavily upon his face.

"I knew you'd bring yourself down," said Stanhope, coming up behind him. "You should not treat a man as an enemy, sir, until he's proven himself such."

He lifted the prostrate man, turning him easily, and rested the fallen head upon his knee.

"Can you swallow a little?" pressing a flask of brandy to the lips of the ex-convict.

The man gasped and feebly swallowed a little of the liquor.

"There," laying down the flask, "are your wounds bleeding?"

The wounded man groaned, and then whispered feebly:

"I'm done for—I think—are you—an officer?"

"Yes."

"Af—after me?"

"No."

"Do—do you—know—"

"Do I know who you are? Not exactly, but I take you to be one of the convicts who broke jail last week."

The man made a convulsive movement, and then, battling for breath as he spoke, wailed out:

"Listen—you want to take me back to prison—there is a

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reward—of course. If you only knew—when I was a boy—on the western prairies—free, free. Then here in the city—driven to beg—to steal to—. Oh! *don't* take me back to die in prison! You don't know the horror of it!"

A look of pitying tenderness lighted the face bent above the dying man.

"Poor fellow!" said Stanhope softly. "I am an officer of the law, but I am also human. If you recover, I must do my duty: if you must die, you shall not die in prison."

"I shall die," said the man, in a hoarse whisper; "I know I shall die—die."

His head pressed more heavily against Stanhope's knee; he seemed a heavier weight upon his arm. Bending still lower, the detective listened for his breathing, passed his hand over the limp fingers and clammy face. Then he gathered the form, that was more than his own weight, in his muscular arms, and bore it away through the darkness, muttering, as he went:

"That *was* a splendid stand-off! What would those fellows say, if they knew that Dick Stanhope, single-handed and alone, had walked their alleys in safety, and bluffed their entire gang!"

CHAPTER VII.

HOW A MASQUERADE BEGAN.

A crush of carriages about a stately doorway; a flitting of gorgeous, mysterious, grotesque and dainty figures through the broad, open portal; a glow of lights; a gleaming of vivid color; a glory of rich blossoms; a crash of music; a bubble

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of joyous voices; beauty, hilarity, luxury everywhere.

It is the night of the great Warburton masquerade, the event of events in the social world. Archibald Warburton, the invalid millionaire, has opened his splendid doors, for the pleasure of his young and lovely wife, to receive the friendly five hundred who adore her, and have crowned her queen of society.

He will neither receive, nor mingle with his wife's guests; he is too much an invalid, too confirmed a recluse for that. But his brother, Alan Warburton, younger by ten years, handsomer by all that constitutes manly beauty, will play the host in his stead—and do it royally, too, for Alan is a man of the world, a man of society, a refined, talented, aristocratic young man of leisure. Quite a Lion as well, for he has but recently returned from an extended European tour and is the "newest man" in town. And society dearly loves that which is new, especially when, with the newness, there is combined manly beauty—and wealth.

With such a host as handsome Alan Warburton, such a hostess as his brother's beautiful wife, and such an assistant as her sparkling, piquant little companion, Winnifred French, who could predict for this masquerade anything but the most joyous ending, the most pronounced success? Ah! our social riddles are hard to read.

Into this scene of revelry, while it is yet early, before the music has reached its wildest strains, and the dancing its giddiest whirl, comes a smart servant girl, leading by the hand a child of four or five summers, a dainty fair-haired creature. In her fairy costume of white satin with its silvery frost work and gleaming pearls; with her gossamer wings and glittering aureole of spun gold; her dainty wand and childish grace,

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she is the loveliest sight in the midst of all that loveliness, for no disfiguring mask hides the beautiful, eager face that gazes down the long vista of decorated drawing rooms, library, music room, boudoir, in wondering, half frightened expectation.

"They're beginning to dance down there," says the maid, drawing the child toward a lofty archway, through which they can watch the swiftly whirling figures of the dancers. "Why, *do* come along, Miss Daisy; one would think your Pa's house was full of bears and wild-cats, to see your actions."

But the child draws back and grasps fearfully at the skirts of her attendant.

"What makes 'em look so queer, Millie? Isn't you afraid?"

"Why no, Miss Daisy. There's nothing to be afraid of. See; all these funny-looking people are your papa's friends, and your new mamma's, and your uncle Alan's. Look, now,"—drawing the reluctant child forward,—"just look at them! There goes a—a *Turk*, I guess, and—"

"What makes they all have black things on their faces, Millie?"

"Why, child, that's the fun of it all. If it wasn't for them masks everybody would know everybody else, and there wouldn't be no masquerade."

"No what?"

"No *masquerade*, child. Now look at that; there goes a pope, or a cardinal; and there, oh my! that must be a Gipsy—or an Injun."

"A Gipsy or an Indian; well done, Millie, ha ha ha!"

At the sound of these words they turn swiftly. A tall masker, in a black and scarlet domino, is standing just behind them, and little Daisy utters one frightened cry and buries her face in Millie's drapery.

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"Why, Daisy;" laughs the masker; "little Daisy, are you frightened? Come, this will never do."

With a quick gesture he flings off the domino and removes the mask from his face, thus revealing a picturesque sailor's costume, and a handsome face that bears, upon one cheek, the representation of a tattooed anchor.

While he is thus transforming himself, the outer door opens and admits a figure clad in soft flowing robes of scarlet and blue and white, with a mantle of stars about the stately shoulders, and the cap of Liberty upon the well-poised head. The entrance of the Goddess of Liberty is unnoticed by the group about the archway, and, after a swift glance at them, that august lady glides behind a screen which stands invitingly near the door, and, sinikng upon a divan in the corner, seems intent upon the classic arrangement of her white and crimson draperies.

"Now look," says Alan Warburton, flinging the discarded domino upon a chair; "look, Daisy, darling. Why, pet, you were afraid of your own uncle Alan."

The little one peers at him from behind Millie's skirts and then comes slowly forward.

"Why, uncle Alan, how funny you look, and—your face is dirty!"

"Oh! Daisy," taking her up in his arms and smiling into her eyes; "you are a sadly uncultivated young person. My face is tattooed, for 'I'm a sailor bold.'"

While uncle and niece are thus engaged in playful talk, and Millie is intently watching the dancers, they are again approached; this time by two ladies,—one in the flowing, glittering, gorgeous robes of Sunlight, the other in a dainty Carmen costume of scarlet and black and gold. Both ladies are masked,

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"See all those funny-looking people are your papa's friends."—page 65

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and, as they enter from an alcove in the rear of the room, they, too, approach unperceived. Seeing the group about the archway, one of them makes a signal of silence. They stop, and standing close together, wait.

"It just occurs to me, Millie," says Alan Warburton, turning suddenly to the maid; "it just occurs to me to inquire how you came in charge of Miss Daisy here. Where is Miss Daisy's maid?"

The girl throws back her head, with a gesture that causes every ribbon upon her cap to flutter, as she replies, with a look of defiance and an indignant sniff:

"*Mrs.* Warburton put Miss Daisy in my care, sir, and I don't know *where* Miss Daisy's maid may be."

"Umph! well it seems to me that—" He stops and looks at the child.

"That I ain't the properest person to look after Miss Daisy, I 'spose you mean —"

"Millie, you are growing impertinent."

"Because I'm a poor girl that the *mistress* of this house took in out of kindness—"

"Millie; *will* you stop!" and he puts little Daisy down with a gesture of impatience.

"I'm trying to do my duty," goes on the irate damsel; "and Mrs. Warburton, *my* mistress, has given me my orders, sir, *consequently*—"

"Oh! if Mrs. Warburton has issued such judicious orders," and he takes up his mask and domino, "I retire from the field."

"It's time to stop them, Winnie," says the lady in the garments of Sunlight, taking off her mask hastily. "Alan never could get on with a raw servant. I see war in Millie's eyes."

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Then she comes forward, mask in hand, and followed by the laughing Carmen.

"Alan, you are in difficulty, I see," laughing, in spite of her attempt at gravity. "Millie, I fear, is not quite up to your standard of silent perfection."

"May I ask, Mrs. Warburton, if she is your ideal of a companion for this child?"

The tone is faintly tinged with scorn and sternness, and Leslie Warburton's eyes cease to smile as she replies, with dignity:

"She is my servant, Mr. Warburton. We will not discuss her merits in her presence. I will relieve you of any further trouble on her account."

"Where, may I ask, is Daisy's own maid?"

"In her room, with a headache that unfits her for duty. Come here, Daisy."

Up to this moment Alan Warburton has kept the hand of the child clasped in his own. He now releases it with evident reluctance, and the little fairy bounds toward her stepmother.

"Mamma, how lovely you look!" reaching up her arms to caress the head that bends toward her. "Mamma, take me with you where the music is."

"Have you been to Papa's room, Daisy? You know we must not let him feel lonely to-night."

"Exceeding thoughtfulness," mutters Alan Warburton to himself, as he turns to resume his domino. Then aloud, to his sister-in-law, he says:

"I have just visited my brother's room, Mrs. Warburton; he wished to see you for a moment, I believe. Daisy, will you come with me?"

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He extends his hand to the child, who gives a willful toss of the head as she replies, clinging closer to her stepmother the while:

"No; I going to stay with my new mamma."

As Alan Warburton turns away, with a shade of annoyance upon his face, he meets the mirthful eyes of Carmen, and is greeted by a saucy sally.

"What a bear you can be, Alan, when you try your hand at domestic discipline. Put on your domino and your dignity once more. You look like a school boy who has just been whipped."

"Ah, Winnie," he says seriously, coming close to her side and seeking to look into the blue, mocking eyes, "no need for me to see *your* face, your sweet voice and your saucy words both betray you."

"Just as your bad temper has betrayed you! It's a pity you can't appreciate Millie, sir; but then your sense of the ridiculous is shockingly deficient. There goes a waltz," starting forward hastily.

"It's my waltz; wait, Winnie."

But the laughing girl is half way down the long drawing-room, and he hurries after, replacing his mask and pulling on his domino as he goes.

Then Leslie Warburton, with a sigh upon her lips, draws the child again toward her and says:

"You may wait here, Millie; I will take care of Daisy for a short time. And, Millie, remember in future when Mr. Warburton addresses you, that you are to answer him respectfully. Come, darling."

She turns toward the entrance, the child's hand clasped tightly in her own, and there, directly before her, stands a

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figure which she has longed, yet dreaded, to meet—the Goddess of Liberty.

With a gasp of surprise, and a heart throbbing with agitation, Leslie Warburton hurriedly replaces her mask and turns to Millie.

"Millie, on second thought, you may take Daisy to her papa's room, and tell him I will be there soon. Daisy, darling, go with Millie."

"But, Mamma,—"

"There, there, dear, go to papa now; mamma will come."

With many a reluctant, backward glance, Daisy suffers herself to be led away, and then the Goddess of Liberty advances and bows before the lady of the mansion.

"I am not mistaken," whispers that lady, glancing about her as if fearing an eavesdropper; "you are—"

"First," interrupts a mellow voice from behind the starry mask, "are *you* Mrs. Warburton?"

"Yes."

"Then I am Richard Stanhope."

CHAPTER VIII.

Leslie Warburton had replaced her mask, but the face she concealed was engraven upon the memory of her *vis-a-vis*.

A pure pale face, with a firm chin; a rare red mouth, proud yet sensitive; a pair of brown tender eyes, with a touch of sadness in their depths; and a broad low brow, over which

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clustered thick waves of sunny auburn. She is slender and graceful, carrying her head proudly, and with inherent self-poise in gait and manner.

She glances about her once more, and then says, drawing still nearer the disguised detective:

"I have been looking for you, Mr. Stanhope, and we have met at a fortunate moment. Nearly all the guests have arrived, and everybody is dancing; we may hope for a few undisturbed moments now. You—you have no reason for thinking yourself watched, or your identity suspected, I hope?"

"None whatever, madam. Have *you* any fears of that sort?"

"No; none that are well grounded; I dislike secrecy, and the necessity for it; I suppose I am nervous. Mr. Stanhope," with sudden appeal in her voice, "how much do you know concerning me, and my present business with you?"

"Very little. During my drive hither with Mr. Follingsbee, he told me something like this: He esteemed you very highly; he had known you for years; you desired the services of a detective; he had named me as available, and been authorized by you to secure my services. He said that he knew very little concerning the nature of your business with me, but believed that all that you did would be done wisely, discreetly, and from the best of motives. He pointed you out to me when we entered the house. That is all, madam."

"Thank you. Mr. Follingsbee is, or was, the tried friend, as well as legal adviser, of my adopted father, Thomas Uliman, and I know him to be trustworthy. When he spoke of you, Mr. Stanhope, he knew that I desired, not only a skillful detective, but a true-hearted man; one who would hold a promise sacred, who would go no further than is required in

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the matter in hand, and who would respect an unhappy woman's secret—should it become known to him."

Her voice died in her throat, and Stanhope rustled his garments uneasily. Then she rallied and went on bravely:

"Mr. Follingsbee assured me that you were all I could desire."

"Mr. Follingsbee does me an honor which I appreciate."

"And so, Mr. Stanhope, I am about to trust you. Let us sit here, where we shall be unobserved, and tolerably secure from interruption."

She turns toward the divan behind the screen and seats herself thereon, brushing aside her glittering drapery to afford the disguised detective a place beside her.

He hesitates a moment, then takes the proffered seat and says, almost brusquely:

"Madam, give me my instructions as rapidly as possible; the very walls have eyes sometimes, and—I must be away from here before midnight."

"My instructions will be brief. I will state my case, and then answer any questions you find it necessary to ask."

"I shall ask no needless questions, madam."

"Then listen." She nerves herself for a brave effort, and hurries on, her voice somewhat agitated in spite of herself. "For three months past I have been conscious that I am watched, followed, spied upon. I have been much annoyed by this *espionage*. I never drive or walk alone, without feeling that my shadow is not far away. I begin to fear to trust my servants, and to realize that I have an enemy. Mr. Stanhope, I want you to find out who my enemy is."

Behind his starry mark, her listener smiled at this womanlike statement of the case. Then he said, tersely:

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"You say that you are being spied upon. How do you know this?"

"At first by intuition, I think; a certain vague, uneasy consciousness of a strange, inharmonious presence near me. Being thus put on my guard and roused to watchfulness, I have contrived to see, on various occasions, the same figure dogging my steps."

"Um! Did you know this figure?"

"No; it was strange to me, but always the same."

"Then your spy is a blunderer. Let us try and sift this matter: A lady may be shadowed for numerous reasons; do you know why you are watched?"

"N—no," hesitatingly.

"So," thought the detective, "she is not quite frank, with me." Then aloud: "Do you suspect any one?"

"No."

"Madam, I must ask some personal questions. Please answer them frankly and truly, or not at all, and be sure that every question is necessary, every answer important."

The lady bows her head, and he proceeds:

"First, then, have you a secret?"

She starts, turns her head away, and is silent.

The detective notes the movement, smiles again, and goes on:

"Let us advance a step; you *have* a secret."

"Why—do you—say that?"

"Because you have yourself told me as much. We never feel that uneasy sense of *espionage*, so well described by you, madam, until we have something to conceal—the man who carries no purse, fears no robber. You have a secret. This has made you watchful, and, being watchful, you discover

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that you have—what? An enemy, or only a tormentor?"

"Both, perhaps," she says sadly.

"My task, then, is to find this enemy. Mrs. Warburton, I shall not touch your secret; at the same time I warn you in this search it is likely to discover itself to me without my seeking. Rest assured that I shall respect it. First, then, you have a secret. Second, you have an enemy. Mrs. Warburton, I should ask fewer questions if I could see your face."

Springing up suddenly, she tears off her mask, and standing before him says with proud fierceness:

"And why may you not see my face! There is no shame for my mask to conceal! I *have* a secret, true; but it is not of *my* making. It has been forced upon me. I am not an *intriguante:* I am a persecuted woman. I am not seeking it to conceal wrong doing, but to protect myself from those that wrong me."

The words that begin so proudly, end in a sob, and, covering her face with her white, jeweled hands, Leslie Warburton turns and rests her head against the screen beside her.

Then impulsive, unconventional Dick Stanhope springs up, and, as if he were administering comfort to a sorrowing child, takes the two hands away from the tear-wet face, and holding them fast in his own, looks straight down into the brown eyes as he says:

"Dear lady, trust me! Even as I believe you, believe *me*, when I say that your confidence shall not be violated. Your secret shall be safe; shall remain yours. Your enemy shall become mine. If you cannot trust me, I cannot help you."

"Oh! I do trust you, Mr. Stanhope; I *must*. Ask of me nothing, for I can tell you no more. To send for you was unwise, perhaps, but I have been so tormented by this spy

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upon my movements . . . . and I cannot fight in the dark. It was imprudent to bring you here to-night, but I dared not meet you elsewhere."

There is a lull in the music and a hum of approaching voices. She hastily resumes her mask, and Stanhope says:

"We had better separate now, madam. Trust your case to me. I cannot remain here much longer, otherwise I might find a clue to-night,—important business calls me. After to-night my time is all yours, and be sure I shall find out your enemy."

People are flocking in from the dancing-room. With a gesture of farewell, "Sunlight" flits out through the door just beside the screen, and a moment later, the Goddess of Liberty is sailing through the long drawing-rooms on the arm of a personage in the guise of Uncle Sam.

"What success, my friend?"

"It's all right," replies the Goddess of Liberty; "I have seen the lady."

A moment more and her satin skirts trail across the toes of a tall fellow in the dress of a British officer, who is leaning against a vine-wreathed pillar, intently watching the crowd through his yellow mask. At sight of the Goddess of Liberty, he starts forward and a sharp exclamation crosses his lips.

"Shades of Moses," he mutters to himself, "I can't be mistaken; that *is* Dick Stanhope's Vienna costume! Is that Dick inside it? It is! it must be! What is he doing? On a lay, or on a lark? Dick Stanhope is not given to this sort of frolic; I must find out what it means!"

And Van Vernet leaves his post of observation and follows slowly, keeping the unconscious Goddess of Liberty always in sight.

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"Dear lady, trust me! Your secret shall be safe; your enemy shall become mine!"—page 75.

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Passing through a net-work of vines, the British officer comes upon two people in earnest conversation. The one wears a scarlet and black domino, the other a coquettish Carmen costume.

"That black and red domino is my patron," mutters the officer as he glides by unnoticed. "He does not see me and I do not wish to see *him* just at present." A few steps farther and the British officer comes to a sudden halt.

"By Heavens!" he ejaculates, half aloud; "what a chance I see before me! It would be worth something to know what brought Dick Stanhope here to-night; it would be worth yet more to *keep* him here *until after midnight.* If I had an accomplice to detain *him* while I, myself, appear at the Agency in time, then the C—— street Raid would move without him, the lead would be given to *me.* It's worth trying for. It *shall* be done, and my patron in black and red shall help me."

He turns, and only looks back to mutter:

"Go on, Dick Stanhope; this night shall begin the trial that, when ended, shall decide which of the two is the better man!"

And the British officer hurries straight on until he stands beside the black and scarlet domino.

CHAPTER IX.

"A FALSE MOVE IN THE GAME."

Pretty, piquant Winnifred French was the staunch friend of Leslie Warburton.

When Winnie was the petted only daughter of "French, the rich merchant," she and Leslie Uliman had been firm

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friends. When Leslie Uliman, the adopted daughter of the aristocratic Uliman's, gave her hand in marriage to Archibald Warburton, a wealthy invalid and a widower with one child, Winnie was her first bridesmaid.

Time had swept away the fortune of French, the merchant, and death had robbed Leslie of her adopted parents, and then Winnifred French gladly accepted the position of salaried companion to her dearest friend.

Not long after, Alan Warburton had returned from abroad, and then had begun a queer complication.

For some reason known only to himself, Alan Warburton had chosen to dislike his beautiful sister-in-law, and he had conceived a violent admiration for Winnie,—an admiration which might have been returned, perhaps, had Winnie been less loyal in her friendship for Leslie. But, perceiving Alan's dislike for her dearest friend, Winnie lost no opportunity for annoying him, and lavishing upon him her stinging sarcasms.

On her part, Leslie Warburton loved her companion with a strong sisterly affection. As for her feelings toward Alan Warburton, it would have been impossible to guess, from her manner, whether he was to her an object of love, hatred, or simple indifference.

When Winnie and Alan turned their backs upon the scene in the anteroom, and entered the dancing hall, the girl was in a particularly perverse mood.

"I shall not dance," she said petulantly. "It's too early and too warm," and she entered a flowery alcove, and seated herself upon a couch overhung with vines.

"May I sit down, Winnie?"

"No."

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"Just for a moment's chat." And he seated himself as calmly as if he had received a gracious permission.

"You are angry with me again, Winnie. Is my sister-in-law always to come between us?"

She turned and her blue eyes flashed upon him.

"Once and for all," she said sharply, "tell me why you hate Leslie so?"

"Tell *me* why she has poisoned your mind against me?" he retorted.

"*She!* Leslie Warburton! This goes beyond a joke, sir. Leslie Warburton *is* what Leslie Uliman was, a *lady*, in thought, word, and deed. Oh, I can read you, sir! Her crime, in your eyes, is that she has married your brother. Is she not a good and faithful wife; a tender, loving mother to little Daisy? You have hinted that she does not love her husband—by what right do you make the assertion? You believe that she has married for money,—at least these are *fashionable* sins! Humph! In all probability I shall marry for money myself."

"Winnifred!"

"I *shall;* I am sure of it. It's an admirable feature of our best society. If we are heiresses, we are surrounded with lovers who are fascinated by our bank account. If we are poor, we are all in search of a bank account; and many of us have to do some sharp angling."

"My sister-in-law angled very successfully."

"So she did, if you *will* put it so. And she did not land her last chance; she might have married as wealthy a man as Mr. Warburton, or as handsome a man as his *brother*. But then," with a provoking little gesture of disdain, "Leslie and I never did admire handsome men."

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There was just a shade of annoyance in the voice that answered her:

"Pray go on, Miss French; doubtless yourself and Mrs. Warburton have other tastes in common."

"So we have," retorted the girl, rising and standing directly before him, "but I won't favor you with a list of them. You don't like Leslie, and I do; but let me tell you, Mr. Alan Warburton, if the day ever comes when you know Leslie Warburton *as I know her*, you will go down into the dust, ashamed that you have so misjudged, so wronged, so slandered one who is as high as the stars above you. And now I am going to join the dancers; you can come—or stay."

The last words were flung at him over her shoulder, and before he could rise to follow, she had vanished in the throng that was surging to and fro without the alcove.

He starts forward as if about to pursue her, and then sinks back upon the couch.

"I won't be a greater fool than nature made me," he mutters in scornful self-contempt. "If I go, she'll flirt outrageously under my very nose; if I stay—she'll flirt all the same, of course. Ah! if a man would have a foretaste of purgatory let him live under the same roof with the woman he loves and the woman he hates!"

A shadow comes between his vision and the gleam of light from without, and, lifting his eyes, he encounters two steady orbs gazing out from behind a yellow mask.

"Ah!" He half rises again, then sinks back and motions the mask to the seat beside him.

"I recognize your costume," he says, as the British officer seats himself. "How long since you came?"

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"Only a few moments. I have been waiting for your interview with the lady to end."

"Ah!" with an air of abstraction; then, recalling himself: "Do you know the nature of the work required of you?"

Under his mask, Van Vernet's face flamed and he bit his lip with vexation. This man in black and scarlet, this aristocrat, addressed him, not as one man to another, but loftily as a king to a subject. But there was no sign of annoyance in his voice as he replied:

"Um—I suppose so. Delicate bit of a shadowing, I was told; no particulars given."

"There need be no particulars. I will point you out the person to be shadowed. I want you to see her, and be yourself unseen. You are simply to discover,—find out where she goes, who she sees, what she does. Don't disturb yourself about motives; I only want the *facts*."

"Ah!" thought Van Vernet; "it's a *she*, then." Aloud, he said: "You have not given the lady's name?"

"You would find it out, of course?"

"Of course; necessarily."

"The lady is my—is Mrs. Warburton, the mistress of the house."

"Ah!" thought the detective; "the old Turk wants me to shadow his wife!"

By a very natural blunder he had fancied himself in communication with Archibald, instead of Alan, Warburton.

"Have you any suspicions? Can you give me any hint upon which to act?" he asked.

"I might say this much," ventured Alan, after a moment's hesitation: "The lady has made, I believe, a mercenary marriage and she is hiding something from her husband and friends."

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"I see," said Vernet. And then, laughing inwardly, he thought: "A case of jealousy!"

In a few words Alan Warburton described to Vernet the "Sunlight," costume worn by Leslie, and then they separated, Vernet going, not in search of "Sunlight," but of the Goddess of Liberty.

What he found was this:

In the almost deserted music room stood the Goddess of Liberty, gazing down into the face of a woman in the robes of Sunlight, and both of them engaged in earnest conversation.

He watched them until he saw the Goddess lift the hand of Sunlight with a gesture of graceful reverence, bow over it, and turn away. Then he went back to the place where he had left his patron. He found the object of his quest still seated in the alcove, alone and absorbed in thought.

"I beg your pardon for intruding upon your solitude," began the detective hastily, at the same time seating himself close beside Alan; "but there is a *lady* here whose conduct is, to say the least, mysterious. As a detective, it becomes my duty to look after her a little, to see that she does not leave this house *until I can follow her.*"

"Well?" with marked indifference in his tone.

"If she could be detained," went on Vernet, "by—say, by keeping some one constantly beside her, so that she cannot leave the house without being observed—"

Alan Warburton threw back his head.

"Pardon me," he said, "but I object to thus persecuting a lady, and a guest."

"But if I tell you that this *lady* is a man in silken petticoats?"

"What!"

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"And that he seems on very free and friendly terms with *your wife.*"

"With my wi—"

Alan Warburton stopped short and looked sharply at the eyes gazing out from behind the yellow mask.

Did this detective think himself conversing with Archibald? If so—well, what then? He shrank from anything like familiarity with this man before him. Why not leave the mistake as it stood? There could be no harm in it, and he, Alan, would thus be free from future annoyance.

"I will not remove my mask," thought Alan. "He is not likely to see Archibald, and no harm can come of it. In fact it will be better so. It would seem more natural for him to be investigating his wife's secrets than for *me.*"

So the mistake was not corrected—the mistake that was almost providential for Alan Warburton, but that proved a very false move in the game that Van Vernet was about to play.

There was but one flaw in the plan of the proposed incognito.

Alan's voice was a peculiarly mellow tenor, and Van Vernet never forgot a voice once heard.

"Did you say that this disguised person knows—Mrs. Warburton?"

"I did."

"Who is the fellow, and what disguise does he wear?"

"I am unable to give his name. He is costumed as the Goddess of Liberty."

"Oh!"

Van Vernet had his own reasons for withholding Richard Stanhope's name.

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"So!" he thought, while he waited for Alan's next words. "I'll spoil your plans for this night, Dick Stanhope! I wonder how our Chief will like to hear that 'Stanhope the reliable,' neglects his duty to go masquerading in petticoats, the better to make love to another man's wife."

For Van Vernet, judging Stanhope as a man of the world judges men, had leaped to the hasty, but natural, conclusion, that his masquerade in the garb of the mother of his country, was in the character of a lover.

"Vernet," said Alan at last, "you are a clever fellow! Let me see; there are half a dozen young men here who are ripe for novelty—set the whisper afloat that behind that blue and white mask is concealed a beautiful and mysterious intruder, and they will hang like leeches about her, hoping to discover her identity, or see her unmask."

"It's a capital plan!" cried Vernet, "and it can't be put into execution too soon."

CHAPTER X.

"I AM YOUR SHADOW."

It is not a pleasing task to Alan Warburton, but, spurred on by Vernet, and acting according to his suggestions, it is undertaken and accomplished. Within twenty minutes, two gay, fun-loving young fellows, one habited in the garb of a Celestial, the other dressed as a Troubador, are hastening from room to room in search of the mysterious Goddess of Liberty.

"Who was the Mask that posted us about this mysterious

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lady?" queries the Celestial, as he lifts a *portierie* for his comrade to pass.

"If I am not mistaken, it was Warburton."

"Isn't that a queer move for His Dignity?"

"Well, I don't know. Presuming the fair Mystery to be an intruder, he may think it the easiest way of putting her to rout. At any rate there's a little spice in it."

And there is spice in it. Before the evening closes, the festive Celestial is willing to vote this meeting with a veiled mystery an occasion full of flavor, and worthy to be remembered.

Leaving the pair in full chase after the luckless, petticoat-encumbered Stanhope, we follow Van Vernet, who, having set this trap for the feet of his unconscious comrade, is about to play his next card.

Gliding among the maskers, he makes his way to a side entrance, and passing the liveried servant on guard at the door with a careless jest, he leaves the house, and hastens where, a few rods distant, a solitary figure is standing.

"How long have you been here, Harvey?" he asks hurriedly, but with noticeable affability.

"About half an hour."

"Good; now listen, for you are to begin your business. Throw on that domino and follow me; the servants have seen me in conversation with the master of the house and they will not require your credentials. Keep near me, and follow me to the dressing-rooms; by-and-by we will exchange costumes there, after which, you will personate me."

"But,—"

"There will be no trouble; just mingle with the throng, saying nothing to anyone. No one will address you who

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could doubt your identity; I will arrange all that. You comprehend?"

"I think so. You are wanted, or you want to be, in two places at once. This being the least important, you place me here as figure-head, while you fill the bill at the other place."

"You have grasped the situation, Harvey. Let us go in, and be sure you do justice, in my stead, to the banquet—and the Warburton champagne."

Van Vernet had planned well. Knowing the importance of the Raid in hand for that night, he had determined to be present and share with Stanhope the honors of the occasion, while he seemed to be devoting all his energies to the solution of the mystery that was evidently troubling his wealthy patron, the master of Warburton place.

Vernet was a man of many resources, and trying, indeed, must be the situation which his fertile brain could not master.

Having successfully introduced his double into the house, he made his way, once more, to the side of his patron, and, drawing him away from the vicinity of possible listeners, said:

"Mr. Warburton, if you have anything further to say to me, please make use of the present moment. After this it will be best for us to hold no further conversation to-night."

Alan Warburton turned his eyes toward the detective with a cold, scrutinizing stare.

"Why such caution?"

"Because it seems to me necessary; and, if I may be permitted to suggest, you may make some slight discoveries by keeping an eye, more or less, upon Mrs. Warburton."

With these words Van Vernet turns upon his heel, and strides away with the air of a man who can do all that he essays.

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"He is cool to the verge of impudence!" mutters Alan, as he gazes after the receding figure in the British uniform. "But I will act upon his advice; I *will* watch Mrs. Warburton."

It is some moments before he catches sight of her glimmering robes, and then he sees them receding, gliding swiftly, and, as he thinks, with a nervous, hurried movement unusual to his stately sister-in-law.

She is going through the drawing-room, away from the dancers, and he hastens after, wondering a little as to her destination.

From a flower-adorned recess, a fairy form springs out, interrupting the lady in the glimmering robes.

"Mamma!" cries little Daisy, "oh Mamma, I have found Mother Goose—*real, live* Mother Goose!"

And she points with childish delight to a quaintly dressed personation of that old woman of nursery fame, who sits within the alcove, leaning upon her oaken staff, and peering out from beneath the broad frill of her cap, her gaze eagerly following the movements of the animated child.

"Oh Mamma!" continues the little one, "can't I stay with Mother Goose? Millie says I must go to bed."

At another time Leslie Warburton would have listened more attentively, have answered more thoughtfully, and have noted more closely the manner of guest that was thus absorbing the attention of the little one. Now she only says hurriedly:

"Yes, yes, Daisy; you may stay a little longer,—only," with a hasty glance toward the alcove, "you must not trouble the lady too much."

"The lady wants me, mamma."

"Then go, dear."

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And Leslie gathers up her glimmering train and hastens on without once glancing backward.

Pausing a few paces behind her, Alan Warburton has noted each word that has passed between the lady and the child. And now, as the little one bounds back to Mother Goose, who receives her with evident pleasure, he moves on, still following Leslie.

She glides past the dancers, through the drawing rooms, across the music room, and then, giving a hasty glance at the few who linger there, she pulls aside a silken curtain, and looks into the library. The lights are toned to the softness of moonlight; there is silence there, and solitude.

With a long, weary sigh, Leslie enters the library and lets the curtain fall behind her.

Alan Warburton pauses, hesitates for a moment, and then, seeing that the little group of maskers near him seem wholly absorbed in their own merriment, he moves boldly forward, parts the curtain a little way, and peers within.

He sees a woman wearing the garments of Sunlight and the face of despair. She has torn off her mask, and it lies on the floor at her feet. In her hand is a crumpled scrap of paper, and, as she holds it nearer the light and reads what is written thereon, a low moan escapes her lips.

"Again!" she murmurs; "how can I obey them?—and yet I *must* go." Then, suddenly, a light of fierce resolve flames in her eyes. "I *will* go," she says, speaking aloud in her self-forgetfulness; "I will go,—but it shall be *for the last time*!"

She thrusts the crumpled bit of paper into her bosom, goes to the window and looks out. Then she crosses to a door opposite the curtained entrance, opens it softly, and glides away.

In another moment, Alan Warburton is in the library.

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Tearing off the black and scarlet domino he flings it into a corner, and, glancing down at his nautical costume mutters:

"Sailors of this description are not uncommon. Wherever she goes, I can follow her—in this."

Ten minutes later, while Leslie Warburton's guests are dancing and making merry, Leslie Warburton, with sombre garments replacing the robes of Sunlight, glides stealthily out from her stately home, and creeps like a hunted creature through the darkness and away!

But not alone. Silently, with the tread of an Indian, a man follows after; a man in the garments of a sailor, who pulls a glazed cap low down across his eyes, and mutters as he goes:

"So, Madam Intrigue, Van Vernet advised me well. Glide on, plotter; from this moment until I shall have unmasked you, *I am your shadow!*"

CHAPTER XI.

"DEAR MRS FOLLINSBEE."

While the previously related scenes of this fateful night are transpiring Richard Stanhope finds his silken-trained disguise a snare in which his own feet become entangled, both literally and figuratively.

Moving with slow and stately steps through the vista of splendid rooms, taking note of all that he sees from behind his white and blue mask, he suddenly becomes the object of too much attention. A dashing Troubador presents himself, and

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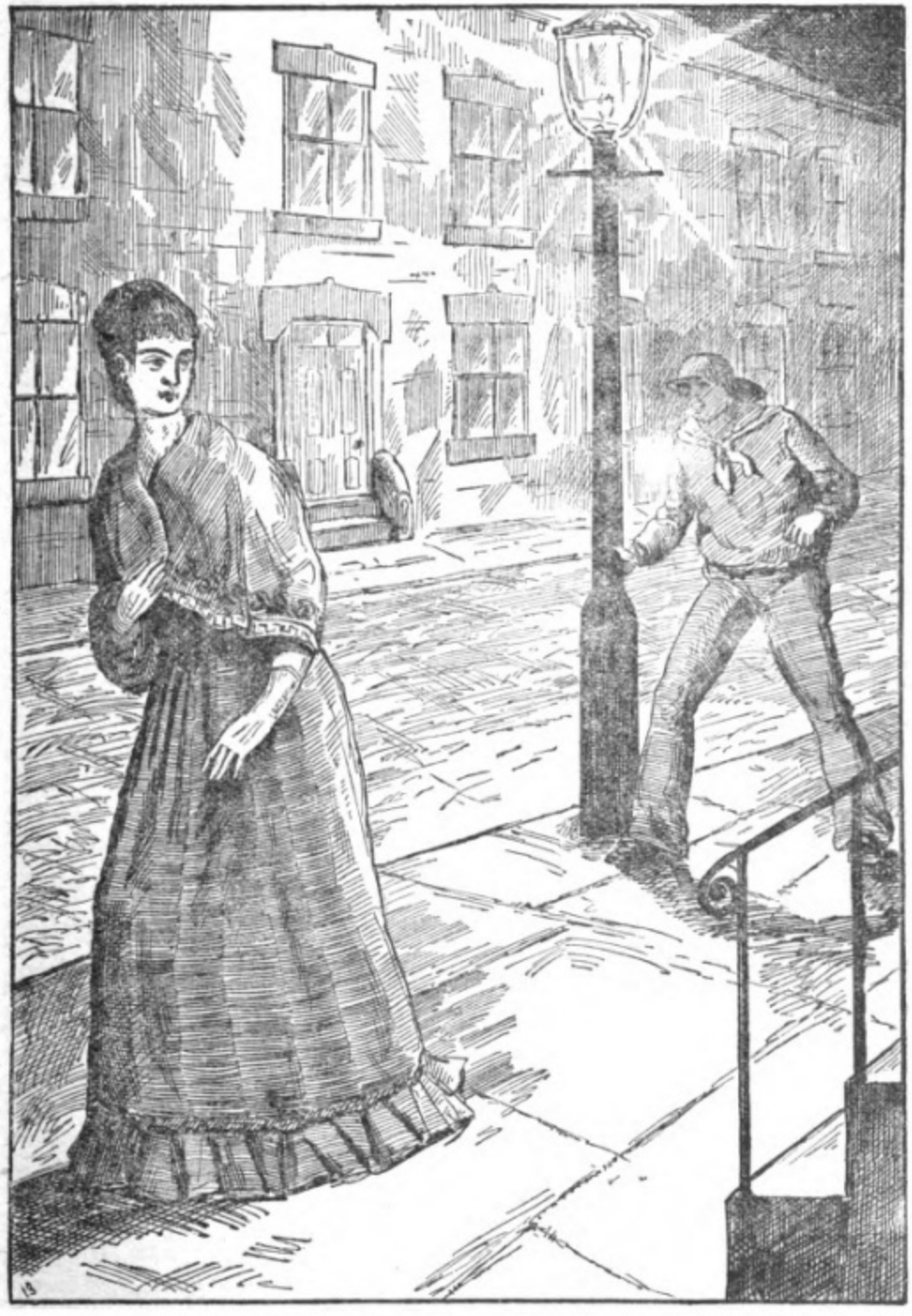

"Silently, with the tread of an Indian, a man follows after; a man in the garments of a sailor."—page 90.

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will not be denied the pleasure of a waltz with "the stately and graceful Miss Columbia."

The detective's feet are encased in satin shoes that, if not small, are at least shapely. He has yet nearly an hour to spare to the masquerade, and his actual business is done. Why not yield to the temptation? He dances with the grace and abandon of the true music worshipper; he loves brightness and gayety, laughter and all sweet sounds; above all, he takes such delight in a jest as only healthy natures can.

"It would be a pity to disappoint such a pretty Troubador," muses Richard while he seems to hesitate; "he may never have another opportunity to dance with a lady like me."

And then, bowing a stately consent, he moves away on the arm of the Troubador, who, chuckling at his success, mentally resolves to make a good impression on this mysterious uninvited lady.

Van Vernet's plot works famously. The Troubador is enchanted with the dancing of the mysterious Goddess, who looks at him with the handsomest, most languid and melting of brown, brown eyes, letting these orbs speak volumes, but saying never a word. And when his fellow-plotter claims the next dance, he yields his place reluctantly, and sees the waist of the Goddess encircled by the arm of the Celestial, with a sigh of regret.

Richard Stanhope, now fully given over to the spirit of mischief, leans confidingly upon the arm of this second admirer, looking unutterable things with his big brown eyes.

They hover about him after this second dance, and he dances again with each. If the Troubador is overflowing with flattery, the Celestial is more obsequious still. Stanhope finds the moments flying, and the attention of the two gallants cease to

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amuse, and begin to annoy. In vain he tries to shake them off. If one goes, the other remains.

After many futile efforts to free himself from his tormentors, he sees Mr. Follingsbee approach, and beckons him forward with a sigh of relief.

The two maskers, recognizing Uncle Sam as a fitting companion for Miss Columbia, reluctantly yield their ground and withdraw.

"Have those fellows been pestering you?" queries the lawyer, with a laugh.

"Only as they bade fair to prove a hindrance," with an answering chuckle. "They're such nice little lady killers: but I must get away from this in a very few minutes. My disguise has been very successful."

"I should think so! Why, my boy, half the people here, at least those who have recognized me through my costume, think you are—ha! ha!—my wife!"

"So much the better."

"Why, little Winnie French—she found me out at once—has been looking all through the card rooms for "Dear Mrs. Follingsbee." And the jolly lawyer laughs anew.

"Mr. Follingsbee,"—Stanhope has ceased to jest, and speaks with his usual business brusqueness—"Mrs. Warburton, I don't know for what reason, wished to be informed when I left the house. Will you tell her I am about to go, and that I will let her hear from me further through you? I will go up to the dressing room floor, and wait in the boudoir until you have seen her."

The boudoir opening upon the ladies' dressing rooms, is untenanted. But from the inner room, Stanhope catches the hum of feminine voices, and in a moment a quartette of ladies come

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forth, adjusting their masks as they move toward the stairway.

Suddenly there is a little exclamation of delight, and our detective, standing near the open window, with his face turned from the group, feels himself clasped by a pair of pretty dimpled arms, while a gay voice says in his ear:

"Oh! you dear old thing! Have I found you at last? Follingsbee, you look stunning in that costume. Oh!—" as Stanhope draws back with a deprecating gesture—"you need'nt deny your identity: is'nt Mr. Follingsbee here as Uncle Sam? I found him out at once, and didn't Leslie and I see you enter together?"

Stanhope quakes inwardly, and the perspiration starts out under his mask. It is very delightful, under most circumstances, to be embraced by a pair of soft feminine arms, but just now it is very embarrassing and—very ridiculous.

Divided between his desire to laugh and his wish to run away, the detective stands hesitating, while Winnie French, for she it is, begins a critical examination of his costume.

"Don't you think the dress muffles your figure a little too much, Follingsbee? If it were snugger here,"—giving him a little poke underneath his elbows,—"and not so straight from the shoulders. Why didn't you shorten it in front, and wear pointed shoes?"

And she seizes the flowing drapery, and draws it back to illustrate her suggestion.

Again Stanhope recoils with a gesture which the gay girl misinterprets, and, quite ignoring the persistent silence of the supposed Mrs. Follingsbee, she chatters on:

"I hope you don't resent *my* criticisms, Follingsbee; you've picked *me* to pieces often enough. Or are you still vexed because

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"Don't you think your dress muffles your figure a little too much, Follingsbee?"—page 94.

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I *won't* fall in love with your favorite Alan? There, now,"—as Stanhope, grown desperate, seems about to speak,—"I know just what you want to say, and you need not say it. Follingsbee," lowering her voice to a more confidential tone, "if I ever *had* a scrap of a notion of that sort, I have been cured of it since I came into this house to live. Oh! I know he's your prime favorite, but you can't tell *me* anything about Alan; I've got him all catalogued on my ten fingers. Here he is pro and con; pro's *your* idea of him, you know. You say he is rich. Well, that's something in these days! He's handsome. Bah! a man has no business with beauty; it's woman's special prerogative. He came of a splendid blue-blooded family. Fudge! American aristocracy is American *rubbish*. He's talented. Well, that's only an accident for which *he* deserves no credit. He's thoroughly upright and honorable. Well, he's *too* bolt upright for me."

"So," murmurs Stanhope to his inner consciousness, "I am making a point in personal history, but—it's a tight place for me!" And as Winnie's arms give him a little hug, while she pauses to take breath, he feels tempted to retort in kind.

"Now, then," resumes Winnie, absorbed in her topic; and releasing her victim to check off her "cons" on the pretty right hand; "here's *my* opinion of Mr. Warburton. He's *proud*, ridiculously proud. He worships his *name*, if not himself. He is suspicious, uncharitable, unforgiving. He's *hard-hearted*. If Leslie were not an angel she would hate him utterly. He treats her with a lofty politeness, a polished indifference, impossible to resent and horrible to endure,—and all because he chooses to believe that she has tarnished the great Warburton name, by taking it for love of the Warburton fortune instead of the race."

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Up from the ball-room floats the first strains of a delicious waltz. Winnie stops, starts, and turns toward the door.

"That's my favorite waltz, and I'm engaged to Charlie Furbish—he dances like an angel. Follingsbee, bye, bye!"

She flits to the mirror, gives two or three dainty touches to her coquettish costume, tosses a kiss from her finger tips, and is gone.

"Thank Heaven," mutters Stanhope. "I consider *that* the narrowest escape of my life! What a little witch it is, and pretty, I'll wager."

He draws from beneath his flowing robe a tiny watch such as ladies carry, and consults its jewelled face.

"My time is up!" he ejaculates. "Twenty minutes delay, now, will ruin my Raid. Ah! here's Follingsbee." And he moves forward at the sound of an approaching step.

But it is not Follingsbee who appears upon the threshold. It is, instead, Stanhope's too-obsequious, too-attentive admirer, the Celestial, who has voted the prospect of a flirtation with a mysterious mask, a thing of spice.

CHAPTER XII.

A "'MELLICAN LADY'S" LITTLE TRICK.

In such an emergency, when every moment has its value, to think is to act with Richard Stanhope. And time just now is very precious to him.

This importunate fellow is determined to solve the mystery

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of his identity, to see him unmask. Ten minutes spent in an attempt to evade him will be moments of fate for the ambitious detective.

And, for the sake of his patroness, he cannot leave the house at the risk of being followed. This difficulty must be overcome and at once.

These thoughts flash through his mind as if by electricity; and then, as the Celestial approaches, he turns languidly toward the open window and rests his head against the casement, as if in utter weariness.

"'Mellican lady slick?" queries the masker solicitously; "'Mellican lady walm? Ching Ling flannee, flannee."

And raising his Japanese fan, he begins to ply it vigorously.

Mentally confiding "Ching Ling," to a region where fans are needed and are not, Stanhope sways, as if about to faint, and motions toward a reclining chair.

The mask propels it close to the window, and the detective sinks into it, with a long drawn sigh.

Then, plying his fan with renewed vigor, the Celestial murmurs tenderly:

"'Mellican lady slick?"

"Confound you," thinks Stanhope, "I will try and be too *slick* for you." Then, for the first time, he utters a word for the Celestial's hearing. Moving his head restlessly he articulates, feebly:

"The heat—I feel—faint!" Then, half rising from the chair, seeming to make a last effort, he reels and murmuring: "Water—water," sinks back presenting the appearance of utter lifelessness.

"Water!" The Celestial, utterly deceived, drops the fan

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and his dialect at the same moment, and muttering: "She has fainted !" springs to the door.

It is just what Stanhope had hoped for. When the Celestial returns with the water, the fainting lady will have disappeared.

But Fate seems to have set her face against Stanhope. The Celestial does not go. At the very door he encounters a servant, none other than the girl, Millie, who, having for some time lost sight of little Daisy, is now wandering from room to room in quest of the child.

"Girl," calls the masker authoritively, "get some water quick; a lady has fainted."

Uttering a startled: "Oh, my !" Millie skurries away, and the Celestial returns to the side of the detective, who seems just now to be playing a losing game.

But it is only seeming. The case, grown desperate, requires a desperate remedy, and the Goddess of Liberty resolves to do what, probably, no "'Mellican Lady" ever did before.

Through his drooping eyelids he notes the approach of the Celestial, sees him fling aside his fan to bend above him, and realizes the fact that he is about to be unmasked.

The Celestial bends nearer still. His hands touch the draped head, searching for the secret that releases the tightly secured mask. It is a sentimental picture, but suddenly the scene changes. Sentiment is put to rout, and absurdity reigns.

With indescribable swiftness, the body of the Goddess darts forward, and the head comes in sudden contact with the stomach of the too-devoted Celestial, who goes down upon the floor in a state of collapse, while Stanhope, bounding to his feet and gathering up his trailing draperies, springs through the open window!

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When Millie returns with water and other restoratives, she finds only a disarranged masker sitting dolefully upon the floor, with one hand pressed against his stomach and the other supporting his head; still too much dazed and bewildered to know just how he came there.

When he has finally recovered sufficiently to be able to give a shrewd guess as to the nature of the calamity that so suddenly overcame him, he is wise enough to see that the victory sits perched on the banner of the vanished Goddess, and to retire from the field permanently silent upon the subject of "spicy flirtations" and mysterious ladies.

Meantime, Stanhope having alighted, with no particular damage to himself or his drapery, upon a balcony which runs half the length of the house, is creeping silently along that convenient causeway toward the gentlemen's dressing-room, situated at its extreme end.

Foreseeing some possible difficulty in leaving the house unnoticed while attired in so conspicuous a costume, the Goddess had come prepared with a long black domino, which had been confided to Mr. Follingsbee, who, at the proper moment, was to fetch it from the gentlemen's dressing-room, array Stanhope in its sombre folds, and then see him from the house, and safely established in the carriage which the detective had arranged to have in waiting to convey him to the scene of the Raid.

Owing to his little encounter with the Celestial, Stanhope knows himself cut off from communication with Mr. Follingsbee, and he now creeps toward the dressing-room wholly intent upon securing the domino and quitting the house in the quickest manner possible.

As he approaches the window, however, he realizes that there is another lion in his path.

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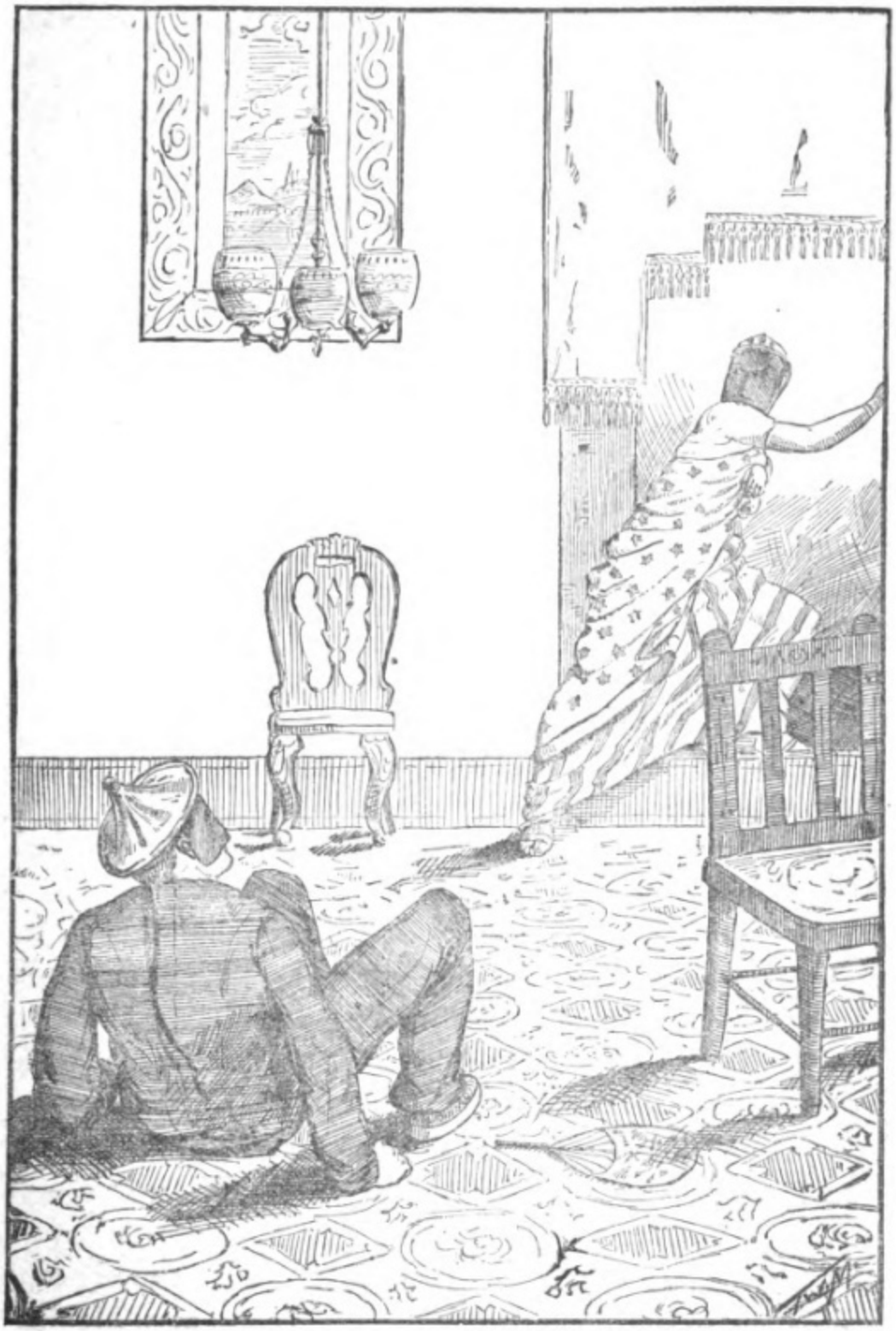

"Stanhope, bounding to his feet, springs through the open window"—page 99.

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The room is already occupied; he hears two voices speaking in guarded tones.

"Be quick, Harvey; some one may come in a moment."

"I have locked the door."

"But it must be opened at the first knock. There must be no appearance of mystery, no room for suspicion, Harvey."

At the sound of a most familiar voice, Richard Stanhope starts, and flushes with excitement underneath his mask. Then he presses close against the window and peers in.

Two men are rapidly exchanging garments there; the one doffing a uniform such as is worn by an officer of Her Majesty's troops, the other passing over, in exchange for said uniform, the suit of a common policeman.

With astonished eyes and bated breath, Stanhope recognizes the two. Van Vernet, his friend, and Harvey, a member of the police force, who is Vernet's staunch admirer and chosen assistant when such assistance can be of use.

How came Vernet at this masquerade, of all others? And what are they about to do?

He is soon enlightened, for Van Vernet, flushed with his success, present and prospective, utters a low triumphant laugh as he dons the policeman's coat, and turns to readjust his mask.

"Ah! Harvey," he says gayly; "if you ever live to execute as fine a bit of strategy as I did to-night, you may yet be Captain of police. Ha! ha! this most recent battle between America and England has turned out badly for America—all because she *will* wear petticoats!"

America! England! petticoats! Stanhope can scarcely suppress an exclamation as suddenly light flashes upon his mental horizon.

"I've done a good thing to-night, Harvey," continues Ver-

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net with unusual animation, "and I've got the lead on a sharp man. If I can hold my own to-night, you'll never again hear of Van Vernet as only '*one* of our best detectives.' Is your mask adjusted? All right, then. Now, Harvey, time presses; there's a big night's work before me. You are sure you understand everything?"

"Oh, perfectly; *my* work's easy enough."

"And mine begins to be difficult. Unlock the door, Harvey, I must be off." Then turning sharply he adds, as if it were an after-thought: "By the way, if you happen to set your eye on a Goddess of Liberty, just note her movements; I would give something to know when she contrives to leave the house and," with a dry laugh, "and *how*."

In another moment the dressing-room is deserted.

And then Richard Stanhope steps lightly through the window. With rapid movements he singles out his own dark domino, gathers his colored draperies close about him, and flings it over them, drawing the hood down about his head, and the long folds around his person. Then he goes out from the dressing-rooms, hurries down the great stairway, and passing boldly out by the main entrance, glances up and down the street.

Only a few paces away, a dark form is hurrying toward a group of carriages standing opposite the mansion, and Stanhope, in an instant, is gliding in the same direction. As the man places a foot upon the step of a carriage that has evidently awaited his coming, Stanhope glides so near that he distinctly hears the order, given in Vernet's low voice:

"To the X— street police station. Drive fast."

A trifle farther away another carriage, its driver very alert and expectant, stands waiting.

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Having heard Vernet's order, Stanhope hurries to this carriage, springs within, and whispers to the driver:

"The old place, Jim; and your quickest time!"

Then, as the wheels rattle over the pavement, the horses speeding away from this fashionable quarter of the city, a strange transformation scene goes on within the carriage, which, evidently, has been prepared for this purpose. The Goddess of Liberty is casting her robes, and long before the carriage has reached its destination, she has disappeared, there remaining, in her stead, a personage of fantastic appearance. He is literally clothed in rags, and plentifully smeared with dirt; his tattered garments are decorated with bits of tinsel, and scraps of bright color flutter from his ragged hat, and flaunt upon his breast; there is a monstrous patch over his left eye and a mass of disfiguring blotches covers his left cheek; a shock of unkempt tow-colored hair bristles upon his head, and his forehead and eyes are half hidden by thick dangling elf-locks.

If this absurd apparition bears not the slightest resemblance to the Goddess of Liberty, it resembles still less our friend, Richard Stanhope.

Suddenly, and in an obscure street, the carriage comes to a halt, and as its fantastically-attired occupant descends to the ground, the first stroke of midnight sounds out upon the air.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CRY IN THE DARK.

One more scene in this night's fateful masquerade remains to be described, and then the seemingly separate threads of our

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plot unite, and twine about our central figures a chain of Fate.

While Van Vernet is setting snares for the feet of his rival, and while that young man of many resources is actively engaged in disentangling himself therefrom,—while Leslie Warburton, tortured by a secret which she cannot reveal, and dominated by a power she dare not disobey, steals away from her stately home—and while Alan Warburton, soured by suspicion, made unjust by his own false pride, follows like a shadow behind her—a cloud is descending upon the house of Warburton.

Sitting apart from the mirthful crowd, quite unobserved and seemingly wholly engrossed in themselves, are little Daisy Warburton and the quaintly-attired Mother Goose, before mentioned.

It is long past the child's latest bedtime, but her step-mamma has been so entirely preoccupied, and Millie so carelessly absorbed in watching the gayeties of the evening, that the little one has been overlooked, and feels now quite like her own mistress.

"Ha! ha!" she laughs merrily, leaning, much at her ease, upon the knee of Mother Goose; "ha! ha! what nice funny stories you tell; almost as nice as my new mamma's stories. Only," looking up with exquisite frankness, "your voice is not half so nice as my new mamma's."

"Because I'm an old woman, dearie," replies Mother Goose, a shade of something like disapproval in her tone. "Do you really want to see Mother Hubbard's dog, little girl?"

"Old Mother Hubbard—she went to the cupboard," sings Daisy gleefully. "Of course I do, Mrs. Goose. Does Mother Hubbard look like you?"

"A little."

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"And—you said Cinderella's coach was down near my papa's gate?"

"So it is, dearie." Then looking cautiously about her, and lowering her voice to a whisper: "How would you like to ride to see Mother Hubbard in Cinderella's coach, and come right back, you know, before it turns into a pumpkin again?"

The fair child clasps two tiny hands, and utters a cry of delight.

"Oh! *could* we?" she asks, breathlessly.

"Of course we can, if you are very quiet and do as I bid you, and if you don't get afraid."

"I don't get afraid—not often," replies the child, drawing still closer to Mother Goose, and speaking with hushed gravity. "When I used to be afraid at night, my mamma, my *new* mamma, you know, taught me to say like this."

Clasping her hands, she sinks upon her knees and lifts her face to that which, behind its grotesque mask, is distorted by some unpleasant emotion. And then the childish voice lisps reverently:

"Dear God, please take care of a little girl whose mamma has gone to Heaven. Keep her from sin, and sickness, and danger. Make the dark as safe as the day, and don't let her be afraid, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

Something like a smothered imprecation dies away in the throat of the listener, and then she says, in honeyed accents:

"That's a very nice little prayer, and your new mamma is a very fine lady. When you come back from your ride in Cinderella's carriage, you can tell your new mamma all about it."

"Oh! how nice!"

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"It will be charming. Come into the conservatory, dearie. I think we can see Cinderella's lamps from there."

With the confidence born of childish innocence, the little one places her hand in that of Mother Goose, and is led away.

The conservatory is all aglow with light and color and rich perfume, and it is almost tenantless. The broad low windows are open, and a narrow balcony, adorned with tall vases and hung with drooping vines, projects from them scarce three feet from the ground.

Out upon this balcony, and close to the railing, the child follows the old woman confidently. Then, as she peers out into the night, she draws back.

"It's—very—dark," she whispers.

"It's the light inside that makes it seem so dark, dearie. Ah! I see a glimmer of Cinderella's lamp now; look, child!"

Stooping quickly, she lifts the little one and seats her upon the railing of the balcony. Then, as the child, shading her eyes with a tiny hand, attempts to peer out into the darkness, something damp and sickening is pressed to her face; there is an odor in the air not born of the flowers within, and Daisy Warburton, limp and unconscious, lies back in the arms of her enemy.

In another moment, the woman in the garb of Mother Goose has dropped from the balcony to the ground beneath, and, bearing her still burden in her arms, disappeared in the darkness.

And as her form vanishes from the balcony, a city clock, far away, tolls out the hour: *midnight.*

At this same hour, with the same strokes sounding in their

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ears, a party of men sally forth from the X— street Police station, and take their way toward the river.

They are policemen, mostly dressed in plain clothes, and heavily armed, every man. They move away silently like men obeying the will of one master, and presently they separate, dropping off by twos and threes into different by-ways and obscure streets, to meet again at a certain rendezvous.

It is the Raiding Party on its way to the slums, and, contrary to the hopes of the Chief of the detectives and the Captain of the police, it is led, not by Dick Stanhope, but by Van Vernet.

Contrary to all precedent, and greatly to the surprise of all save Vernet, Richard Stanhope has failed to appear at the time appointed; and so, after many doubts, much hesitation, and some delay, Van Vernet is made leader of the expedition.

"I shall send Stanhope as soon as he reports here," the Chief had said as a last word to Vernet. "His absence tonight is most reprehensible, but his assistance is too valuable to be dispensed with."

Mentally hoping that Stanhope's coming may be delayed indefinitely, Van Vernet bites his lip and goes on his way, while the Chief sits down to speculate as to Stanhope's absence, and to await his coming.

But he waits in vain. The long night passes, and day dawns, and Richard Stanhope does not appear.

Meanwhile, Van Vernet and the two men who accompany him, arrive first of the party at their rendezvous.

It is at the mouth or entrance to a dark, narrow street, the beginning of that labyrinth of crooked by-ways, and blind alleys, from the maze of which Richard Stanhope had rescued

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himself and the wounded convict, on the night previous.

Halting here Van Vernet waits the arrival of his men, and meditates. He is tolerably familiar with this labyrinth; knows it as well, perhaps, as most men on such a mission would deem necessary, but he has not given the locality and its denizens the close study and keen investigation that Stanhope has considered essential to success. And now, as he peers down the dark street, thinking of the maze beyond, and the desperate character of the people who inhabit it, he involuntarily wishes for that closer knowledge that only Stanhope possesses.

He knows that Stanhope, in various disguises, has passed days and nights among these haunts of iniquity; that he can thread these intricate alleys in the darkest night, and identify every rogue by name and profession.

He thinks of these things, and then shrugs his shoulder with characteristic inconsequence. He has, and with good reason, unbounded confidence in himself. He has tact, skill, courage; what man may do, *he* can do.

What are these miserable outlaws that they should baffle Van Vernet the skillful, the successful, the daring?

Some one is coming toward them from out the dark alley. They hear the fragment of an idiotic street song, trolled out in a maudlin voice, and then feet running, skipping, seeming now and then to prance and pirouette absurdly.

"What the—"

The exclamation of the policeman is cut short by the sudden collision of his stationary figure with a rapidly moving body. Then he grapples with his unintentional assailant only to release him suddenly, as Van Vernet throws up the slide of his dark lantern and turns its rays upon the new-comer.

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Involuntarily all three utter sharp exclamations as they gather around the apparation.

What a figure! Ragged, unkempt, fantastic; the same which a short time ago we saw descending from a carriage only a few rods distant from this very spot.

It is the same figure; the same rags and tinsel and dirt; the same disfigured face, with its black patch and its fringe of frowzy hair; the same, yet worse to look upon; for now the under jaw is dropped, the mouth drivels, the eye not concealed by the patch leers stupidly.

Unmistakably, it is the face of an idiot.

"How!" ejaculates this being, peering curiously at the three. "How do? Where ye goin'?"

Van Vernet gazes curiously for a moment, then utters a sound expressive of satisfaction, He has heard of a fool that inhabits these alleys; Stanhope has mentioned him on one or two occasions. "A modernized Barnaby Rudge," Stanhope had called him. Surely this must be him.

Turning to one of his men he says, in an undertone:

"If I'm not mistaken this fellow is a fool who grew up in these slums, and knows them by heart. 'Silly Charlie,' I think, they call him. I believe we can make him useful."

Then turning to the intruder he says suavely:

"How are you, my man? How are you?"

But a change has come over the mood of the seeming idiot. Striking his breast majestically, and pointing to a huge tin star which decorates it, he waves his hand toward them, and says with absurd dignity:

"G'way—*g'way*! Charlie big p'liceman. Gittin' late; *g'way*."

"We must humor him, boys," says Vernet aside. Then to

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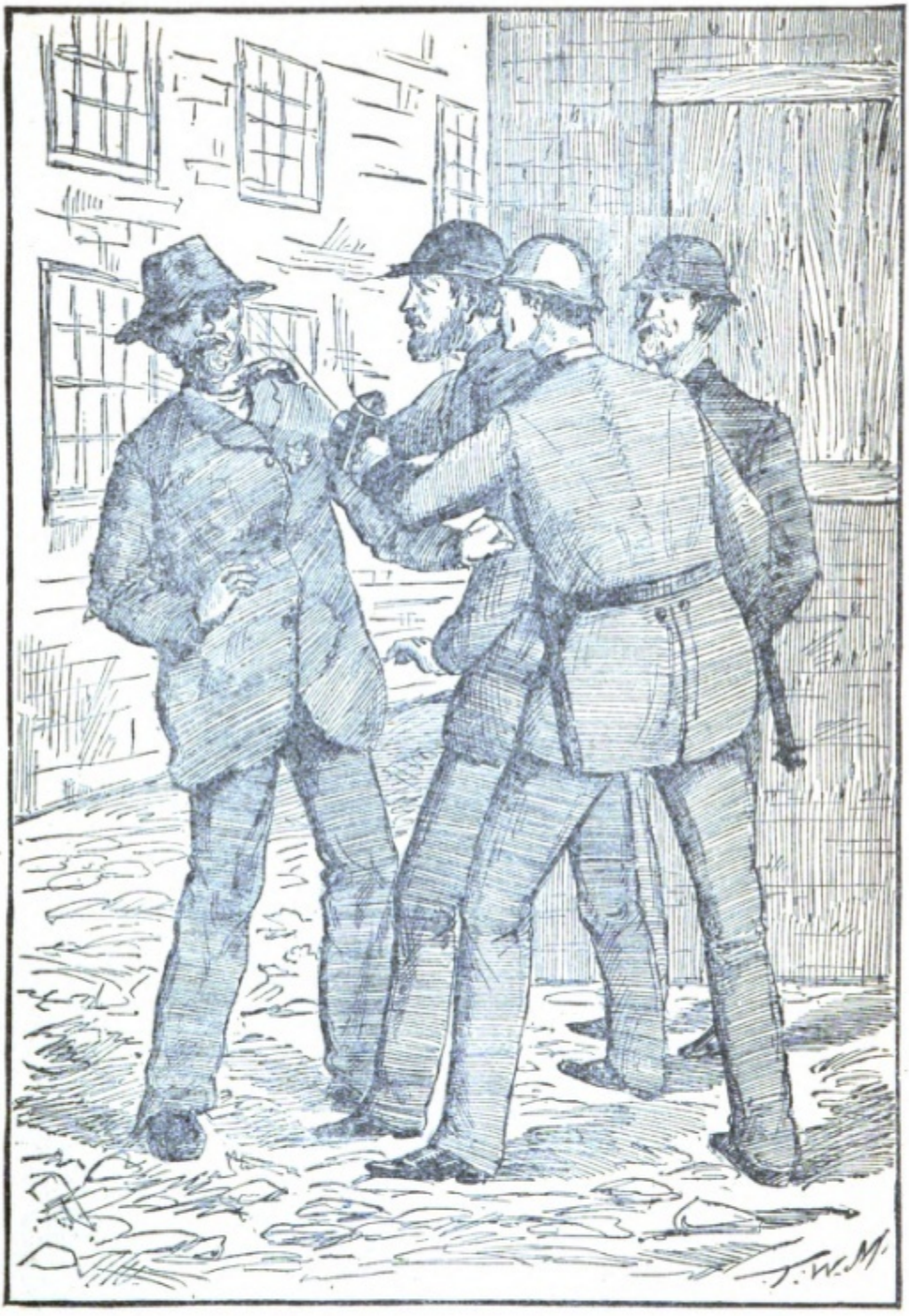

"G'way—*g'way!* Charlie big p'liceman. Gittin' late; *g'way!*"—page 110.

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Charlie—"So you're a policeman? Well, so am I; look."

And turning back the lapel of his coat he displays, on the inner side, the badge of an officer.

Silly Charlie comes close, peers eagerly at the badge, fingers it curiously, then, grasping it firmly, gives a tug at the lapel, saying:

"Gimme it. Gimme it."

Van Vernet laughs good-naturedly.

"Don't pull so hard, Charlie, or you'll have off my entire uniform. Do you want to do a little police duty to-night?"

Silly Charlie nods violently.

"And you want my star, or one like it?"

"*Um hum!*" with sudden emphasis.

Van Vernet lays a hand on the shoulder of the idiot, and then says:

"Listen, Charlie. I want you to help me to-night. Wait," for Charlie has doubled himself up in a convulsion of laughter. "Now, if you'll stand right by me, and tell me what I want to know, you and I will do some splendid work, and both get promoted. You will get a new star, big and bright, and a uniform all covered with bright buttons. Hold on," for Charlie is dancing in an ecstasy of delight. "What do you say? Will you come with me, and work for your star and uniform?"

Charlie's enthusiastic gestures testify to his delight at this proposition.

"Um hum," he cries gleefully; "Charlie go; Charlie be big p'liceman."

And as if suddenly realizing the dignity of his new employment, he ceases his antics and struts sedately up and down before Vernet and his assistants. Then turning to the detec-

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tive, with a doleful whine, he extends his hand, saying:

"Gimme star *now*."

"Not now, Charlie; you must earn it first. I had to earn mine. Do you know the way to Devil's alley?"

"Um hum!"

"Good: do you know where Black Nathan lives?"

"Um hum!"

"Can you take me to Nancy Kaiser's lushing ken?"

"Um hum; Charlie knows."

"Then, Charlie, you shall have that star soon."

And Vernet turns to his men. "I will take this fellow for guide, and look up these places: they are most important," he says rapidly. "I shall be less noticed in company with this fellow than if alone. Riley, I leave you in command until I return. Remain here, and keep the fellows all together; some of them are coming now."

Riley's quick ear detects the approach of stealthy feet, and as Vernet shuts his lantern, and utters a low "Come, Charlie," the first installment of the Raiders appears, a few paces away.

Seizing Vernet by the arm, Silly Charlie lowers his head and glides down the alley, as stealthily as an Indian.

"Charlie," whispers Vernet, imperatively, "you must be very cautious. I want you to take me first to where Black Nathan lives."

"Hoop la!" replies Charlie in subdued staccato; "I'm takin' ye; commalong."

Cautiously they wend their way down the dark, narrow street, into a filthy alley, and through it to an open space laid bare by some recent fire.

Here they halt for a moment, Charlie peering curiously

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around him, and stooping to search for something among the loose stones.

Suddenly a shriek pierces the silence about them—a woman's shriek, thrice repeated, its tones fraught with agony and terror!

Silly Charlie lifts himself suddenly erect, and turns his face toward a dark building just across the open space. Then, as the third cry sounds upon the air, both men, as by one humane instinct, bound across the waste regardless of stones and bruises, Silly Charlie flying on before, as if acquainted with every inch of the ground, straight toward the dark and isolated building.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PRETTY PLOT.

In order to comprehend the cause of the alarm which stimulated to sudden action both the wise man and the fool, Van Vernet and Silly Charlie, let us turn back a little and enter the dark house at the foot of the alley.

It is an hour before midnight. The place is dark and silent; no light gleams through the tightly boarded windows, there is no sign of life about the dwelling. But within, as on a previous occasion, there is light, life, and a measure of activity. The light is furnished by a solitary tallow candle, and the life supplied by the same little old man who, on a former occasion, was thrown into a state of unreasonable terror at sight of a certain newspaper advertisement.

It is the same room, its appointments unchanged; the same

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squalor and dirt, the same bottle upon the same shelf, the same heap of rags in the corner, the same fragments of iron and copper on the floor. The same deal table and scrap of carpet are there, but not arranged as on a former occasion, for now the table is pushed back against the wall, the piece of carpet is flung in a wrinkled heap away from the place which it covered, exposing to view a dark gap in the floor, with a dangling trap-door opening downward. Beside this opening squats the little old man, his eyes as ferret-like and restless as usual, but his features more complacent and less apprehensive than when last we saw him.

By his side is the sputtering tallow candle, and in his hand a long hooked stick, with which he is lowering sundry bags and bundles down the trap, lifting the candle from time to time to peer into the opening, then resuming his work and muttering meanwhile.

"What's *this*?" he soliloquizes, lifting a huge bundle and scrutinizing it carefully. "Ah-h! a gentleman's fine overcoat; *that* must have a nice, safe corner. Ah-h! there you go," lowering the bundle down the aperture and poking it into position with his stick. "It's amazin' what valuables my people finds about the streets," he chuckles facetiously. "'Ere's a—a little silver tea-pot; some rich woman must a-throwed that out. I will put it on the shelf."

Evidently the shelf mentioned is in the cellar below, for this parcel, like the first, is lowered and carefully placed by means of the stick. Other bundles of various sizes follow, and then the old man rests from his labor.

"What a nice little hole that is," he mutters. "Full of rags—nothin' else. Suppose a cop comes in here and looks down, what 'ud he see? Just rags. S'pose he went down,

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ha! ha! he'd go waist-deep in a bed of old rags, and he wouldn't like the smell overmuch; such a *nice* smell—for cops. He couldn't *see* anything, couldn't *feel* anything but rags, just rags."

A low tap at the street-door causes the old man to drop his stick and his soliloquy at-once. He starts nervously, listens intently for a moment, and then rises cautiously. A long, low whistle evidently reassures him, for with suddenly acquired self-possession he begins to move about.

Swiftly and noiselessly he closes the trap, spreads down the bit of carpet, and replaces the table. Then he shuffles toward the entrance, pulls out the pin from the hole in the door, and peeps out. Nothing is visible but the darkness, and this, somehow, seems to reassure him, for with a snort of impatience he calls out:

"Who knocks?"

"It's Siebel," replies a voice from without. "Open up, old Top."

Instantly the door is unbarred and swung open, admitting a burly ruffian, who fairly staggers under the weight of a monstrous sack which he carries upon his shoulders.

At sight of this bulky burden the old man smiles and rubs his palms together.

"Ah! Josef," he says, reaching out to relieve the new-comer, "a nice load that; a very nice load!"

But the man addressed as Josef retains his hold upon his burden, and, resting himself against it, looks distrustfully at his host.

"It's been a fine evening, Josef," insinuates the old man, his eyes still fixed upon the bag.

"Fair enough," replies Josef gruffly, as he unties the bag

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and pushes it toward the old man. "Take a look at the stuff, Papa Francoise, and make a bid. I'm dead thirsty."

Eagerly seizing the bag, Papa Francoise drags it toward the table, closely followed by Josef, and begins a hasty examination of its contents, saying:

"Rags is rags, you know, Josef Siebel. It's not much use to look into 'em; there's nothing here but rags, of course."

"No, course not," with a satirical laugh.

"That's right, Josef; I won't buy nothing but rags,—*never*. I don't want no ill-gotten gains brought to me."

Josef Siebel utters another short, derisive laugh, and discreetly turns his gaze toward the smoky ceiling while Papa begins his investigations. From out the capacious bag he draws a rich shawl, hurriedly examines it, and thrusts it back again.

"The rag-picker can be an honest man as well as another, Josef," continues this virtuous old gentleman, drawing forth a silver soup-ladle and thrusting it back. "These are very good rags, Josef," and he draws out a switch of blonde hair, and gazes upon it admiringly. Then he brings out a handful of rags, examines them ostentatiously by the light of the candle, smells them, and ties up the bag, seeing which Josef withdraws his eyes from the cobwebs overhead and fixes them on the black bottle upon the shelf.

Noting the direction of his gaze, Papa Francoise rests the bag against the table-leg, trots to the shelf, pours a scanty measure from the black bottle into a tin cup, and presents it to Josef with what is meant for an air of gracious hospitality.

"You spoke of thirst, Josef; drink, my friend."

"Umph," mutters the fellow, draining off the liquor at a draught. Then setting the cup hastily down; "Now, old Top, wot's your bid?"

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"Well," replies Papa Francoise, trying to look as if he had not already settled that question with his own mind; "well, Josef I'll give you—I'll give you a dollar and a half."

"The dickens you will!"

Josef makes a stride toward the bag, and lifts it upon his shoulder.

"Stop, Josef!" cries Papa, laying eager hands upon the treasure. "What do you want? That's a good price for rags."

"Bah!" snarls the burly ruffian, turning toward the door, "wot d'ye take me for, ye blasted old fence?"

But Papa has a firm clutch upon the bag.

"Stop, Josef!" he cries eagerly; "let me see," pulling it down from his shoulder and lifting it carefully. "Why, it's *heavier* than I thought. Josef, I'll give you two dollars and a half,—*no more*."

The "no more" is sharply uttered, and evidently Siebel comprehends the meaning behind the words, for he reseats himself sullenly, muttering:

"It ain't enough, ye cursed cantin' old skinflint, but fork it out; I've got to have money."

At this instant there comes a short, sharp, single knock upon the street-door, and Papa hastens to open it, admitting a squalid, blear-eyed girl, or woman, who enters with reluctant step, and sullen demeanor.

"Oh, it's *you*, Nance," says Papa, going back to the table and beginning to count out some money, eyeing the girl keenly meanwhile. "One dollar,—sit down, Nance,—two dollars, fifty; there! Now, Nance," turning sharply toward the girl, "what have you got, eh?"

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"The rag-picker can be an honest man as well as another, Josef. — page 117

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"Nothin'," replies Nance sullenly; "nothin' that will suit you. I ain't had no luck."

"Nobody left nothin' lyin' round loose, I s'pose," says Siebel with a coarse laugh, as he pockets the price of his day's labor. "Wal, ye've come ter a poor place for sympathy, gal." And he rises slowly and shuffles toward the door.

But Papa makes a gesture to stay him.

"Hold on, Josef!" he cries; "wait Nance!"

He seizes the bag, hurries it away into an inner room, and returns panting for breath. Drawing a stool toward the table, he perches himself thereon and leers across at the two sneak thieves.

"So ye aint had any luck, girl?" he says, in a wheedling tone, "and Josef, here, wants money. Do ye want more than ye've got Josef?"

"Ha ha! *Do* I?" And Josef slaps his pockets suggestively.

"Now listen, both of you. Suppose, I could help you two to earn some money easy and honest, what then?"

"Easy and *honest!*" repeats Siebel, with a snort of derision; "Oh, Lord!"

But the girl leans forward with hungry eyes, saying eagerly: "How? tell us how."

"I'll tell you. Suppose, just suppose, a certain rich lady—*very* rich, mind—being a little in my debt, should come here to-night to see me. And suppose she is very anxious not to be seen by any body—on account of her high position, you know—"

"Oh, lip it livelier!" cries Siebel impatiently. "Stow yer swash."

"Well; suppose you and Nance, here, was to come in sud-

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den and see the lady face to face, why, for fear she might be called on by—say by Nance, she might pay a little, don't you see—"

But Siebel breaks in impatiently:

"Oh, skip the rubbish! Is there any body to bleed?"

"Is it a safe lay?" queries Nance.

"Yes, yes; it's safe, of course," cries Papa, thus compelled to come down to plain facts.

"Then let's get down to business. Do you expect an angel's visit here to-night?"

"Yes."

"Well, what's yer plan? Out with it: Nance and I are with ye, if ye divvy fair."

Beckoning them to come closer, Papa Francoise leans across the table, and sinking his voice to a harsh whisper, unfolds the plan by which, without danger to themselves, they are to become richer.

It is a pretty plan but—"*Man sows; a whirlwind reaps.*"

CHAPTER XV.

A COUNTERPLOT.

It is a half hour later. The light in the room is increased by a sputtering additional candle, and Papa Francoise, sitting by the deal table, is gazing toward the door, an eager expectant look upon his face.

"If that old woman were here!" he mutters, and then starts forward at the sound of a low hesitating tap.

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Hurrying to the door he unbars it with eager haste, and a smile of blandest delight overspreads his yellow face as the new-comer enters.

It is a woman, slender and graceful; a *lady*, who holds up her trailing black garments daintily as she steps across the threshold, repulsing the proffered hand-clasp with a haughty gesture, and gliding away from him while she says in a tone of distressful remonstrance:

"Man, *why* have you sent for me? Don't you know that there is such a thing as a last straw?".

"A last straw!" His voice is a doleful whine, his manner obsequious to servility. "Ah, my child, I wanted to see you so much; your poor mother wanted to see you so much!"

The woman throws back her veil with a gesture of fierce defiance, disclosing the face of Leslie Warburton pale and woe-stricken, but quite as lovely as when it shone upon Stanhope, surrounded by the halo of "Sunlight."

"You hypocrite!" she exclaims scornfully. "Parents do not persecute their children as you and the woman you call my mother have persecuted me. You gave me to the Ulimans when I was but an infant,—that I know,—but the papers signed by you do not speak of me as *your child*. Besides, does human instinct go for nothing? If you were my father would I loathe these meetings? Would I shudder at your touch? Would my whole soul rise in rebellion against your persecutions?"

Her eyes flash upon him and the red blood mounts to her cheeks. In the excitement of the moment she has forgotten her fear. Her voice rises clear and ringing; and Papa Francoise, thinking of two possible listeners concealed not far away, utters a low "sh-h-h-h!"

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"Not so loud, my child," he says in an undertone; "not so loud. Ah! you ungrateful girl, we wanted to see you rich and happy, and this is how you thank us," affecting profound grief. "These rich people have taught you to loathe your poor old father!"

He sinks upon the stool as if in utter dejection, wipes away an imaginary tear, and then resumes, in the same guarded tone:

"My dear child, when we gave you to the Ulimans we were very poor, and they were very rich,—a great deal richer than when they died, leaving you only a few thousands."

"Which *you* have already extorted from me! I have given you every dollar I possess and yet you live like beggars."

"And we *are* beggars, my child. Some unfortunate speculations have swept away all our little gains, and now—"

"And now you want more money,—the old story. Listen: you have called me to-night from my husband's home, forced me to steal away from my guests like the veriest criminal, threatening to appear among them if I failed to come. At this moment you, who call yourself my father, stand there gloating and triumphant because of the power you hold over me. I knew you were capable of keeping your word, and rather than have my husband's home desecrated by such presence as yours, I am here. But I have come for the last time—"

"No, my child, oh!—"

But she pays no heed to his expostulations.

"I have come *for the last time!*" she says with fierce decision. "I have come to tell you that from this moment I defy you!"

"Softly, my dear; sh-h-h!"

His face, in spite of his efforts to retain its benign expres-

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sion, is growing vindictive and cruel. He comes toward her with slow cat-like movements.

But she glides backward as he advances, and, putting the table between herself and him, she hurries on, never heeding that she has, by this movement, increased the distance from the outer door—and safety.

"You have carried your game too far!" she says. "When you first appeared before me, so soon after the loss of my adopted parents that it would seem you were waiting for that event—"

"So we were, my child," he interrupts, "for we had promised not to come near you during their lifetime."

"You had promised *never* to approach me, *never* to claim me, as the documents I found among my mother's—among Mrs. Uliman's papers prove. Oh," she cries, wringing her hands and lifting her fair face heavenward; "oh, my mother! my dear, sweet, gentle mother! Oh, my father! the truest, the tenderest a wretched orphan ever had on earth! that Death should take *you*, and Life bring me such creatures to fill your places! But they cannot, they never shall!"

"Oh, good Lord!" mutters Papa under his breath, "those fools up stairs will hear too much!"

But Leslie's indignation has swallowed up all thought of caution, and her words pour out torrent-like.

"Oh, if I had but denounced you at the first!" she cries; "or forced you to prove your claim! Oh, if you had shown yourselves *then* in all your greed and heartlessness! But while I was Leslie Uliman, with only a moderate fortune, you were content to take what I could give, and not press what you are pleased to term your *claim* upon my affections. Affections! The word is mockery from your lips! In considera-

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tion of the large sums I paid you, you promised never to approach me in the future, and I, fool that I was, believing myself free from you, married David Warburton, only to find myself again your victim, to know you at last in all your baseness."

Papa Francoise, unable to stem the tide of her eloquence, shows signs of anger, but she never heeds him.

"Since I became the wife of a rich man, you have been my constant torment and terror. Threatening and wheedling by turns, black-mailing constantly, you have drained my purse, you have made my life a burden. And I came here to-night to say, I will have no more of your persecution! All of *my* money has been paid into your hands, but not one dollar of my *husband's* wealth shall ever come to you from me. I swear it!"

The old man again moves nearer.

"Ah, ungrateful girl!" he cries, feigning the utmost grief; "ah, unkind girl!"

And his affectation of sorrow causes two unseen observers to grin with delight, and brings to Leslie's countenance an expression of intense disgust.

Moving back as he approaches, she throws up her head with an impatient gesture, and the veil which has covered it falls to her shoulders, revealing even by that dim light, the glisten of jewels in her ears—great, gleaming diamonds, which she, in her haste and agitation, has forgotten to remove before setting out upon this unsafe errand.

It is a most unfortunate movement, for two pair of eyes are peering down from directly above her, and two pair of avaricious hands itch to clutch the shining treasures.

Obeying Papa's instructions, Josef Siebel and the girl

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Nance, had mounted the rickety stairway which they reached through a closet-like ante-room opening from the large one occupied by Papa and Leslie. And having stationed themselves near the top of the stairs they awaited there the coming of the lady who, surprised by their presence, was to proffer them hush-money with a liberal hand; but—

"The best-laid plans of men and mice gang aft agleg."

And Papa Francoise has not anticipated the spirited outbreak with which Leslie has astonished him. Startled by this, and fearful that, by a false move, he should entirely lose his power over her, he has made feeble efforts to stay the flow of her speech and neglected to give the signal for which the concealed sneak thieves have waited, until it was too late.

Crouched on the floor near the stairway, the two thieves have heard the entrance of Leslie, heard the hum of conversation, low and indistinct at first, until the voice of Leslie, rising high and clear, startled Siebel into a listening attitude. Touching Nance on the arm, he begins slowly to drag himself along the floor to where a faint ray of light tells him there is a place of observation.

The floor is exceedingly dilapidated, and the ceiling below warped and sieve-like; and, having reached the chink in the floor, Siebel finds himself able to look directly down upon Leslie as she stands near the table.

In another moment Nance is beside him, and then the two faces are glued to the floor, their eyes taking in the scene below, their ears listening greedily.

At first they listen with simple curiosity; then with astonished interest; then with intense satisfaction at Papa's evident discomfiture, for they hate him as the slave ever hates his tyrant.

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When the veil falls from Leslie's head, Siebel's quick eye is the first to catch the shine of the diamonds in her ears. He stifles an exclamation, looks again, and then grasps the arm of his confederate:

"Nance," he whispers eagerly, "Nance, look—in her ears."

The girl peers down, and fairly gasps.

"Shiners!" she whispers; "ah, they make my eyes water!"

"They make my fingers itch," he returns; "d'ye twig, gal?"

"Eh?"

Drawing her away from the aperture, he says, in a hoarse whisper:

"Gal, I've got a plan that'll lay over old Beelzebub's down there, if we kin only git the chance ter play it. See here, Nance, are ye willin' to make a bold stroke fer them shiners?"

"How?"

"By surprisin' 'em. If I'll floor the old man, can't you tackle the gal?"

Nance takes a moment for consideration; they exchange a few more whispered words and then begin to creep stealthily toward the stairway.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DETECTIVE TRAPPED.

While the thieves are gazing upon her from above, Leslie Warburton, unconscious of this new danger that threatens her, replaces her veil and continues to address the old man.

"Once more, and for the last time," she pleads, "I ask you tell me the truth. Give up this claim of kinship. If

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you were my father, something in my heart would tell me so; God has not created me lower than the brutes. What do you know of my parentage? You must possess some knowledge. Man, I would go upon my knees to you to learn the truth!"

Papa is silent a moment, then he begins to cough violently. It is the signal for the two thieves to enter, but they do not respond as promptly as Papa could wish.

"My child," he begins feebly, but leaves the sentence unfinished at the sound of a double knock upon the door.

"Ah-h-h!" he cries with evident relief, "here comes your mother; she can tell you how wrong you are."

And he hastens to admit an old woman, literally lost in an ample old-fashioned cloak, and bearing in her arms a long and apparently heavy bundle.

"Ah," says the old hypocrite, "here you are at last, after being at the toil of the poor. Come in, old woman, here is our proud girl come to see us." Then as his eyes rest upon the bundle, he grasps her wrist and hisses in her ear: "You old fool! to bring *that* here."

"I had to do it," she retorts in a whisper; "there are cops in the alleys."

With a fierce gesture toward the rear door, Papa seizes the bundle, saying:

"Why, it is very heavy; old iron, I suppose; and how horrid those old rags smell. We must take them away, old woman."

And with a jerk of the head which, evidently, she understands, he turns toward the aforementioned door, and they bear the big bundle out between them.

Perhaps it is the flickering light, perhaps it is her disordered fancy, but as they bear their burden through the doorway,

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Leslie Warburton half believes that she sees it move. A moment later she starts forward, her face blanched, her eyes distended.

"Oh, am I losing my senses?" she cries, "or *did* I hear a child's voice, a voice like my little Daisy's, calling 'mamma?'"

A moment she listens, but no child's voice breaks the stillness; even Papa and Mamma Francoise are silent in the room without.

A sudden feeling of terror possesses Leslie.

"Oh, these wicked people are driving me mad!" she murmurs brokenly. "*Anything* is better than this. I will go home and confess all to my husband. I will brave the worst, rather than be so tortured!"

Drawing her cloak about her, she makes a step toward the door.

Only a single step, for strong hands seize her from behind, and, uttering a shriek of terror, she sees a ferocious face close to her own, feels a clutch upon her throat, and is struggling between two fierce assailants.

"Get on to the shiners, gal," commands Siebel, as he pinions her arms with his powerful hands.

Again Leslie utters a cry for help, and what follows is the work of a moment.

The outer door, left unbarred after the entrance of Mamma Francoise, is dashed open and a man attired as a sailor bounds into the room. At the same moment Papa and Mamma Francoise rush upon the scene.

"Stop, Josef, you demon, stop!" cries Papa wildly, and scarce noticing the stranger in their midst; while the sailor, without uttering a word, hurls himself upon Leslie's assailants.

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Then follows a moment of confusion, a wild struggle for the mastery, which ends soon in a horrible tableau.

Near the door stands Papa Francoise, his face livid, his teeth chattering, his foot poised for instant flight. In the corner, borne down by the force and fury of Mamma Francoise, the girl, Nance, lies prostrate, her throat still in the clutch of the virago, whose face bears bloody evidence that Nance has not succumbed without a struggle. In the center of the room stands Alan Warburton, one arm supporting the half fainting form of Leslie, the other hanging limp by his side; and at his feet, ghastly and horrible, lies the form of Josef Siebel, his skull crushed out of all semblance to humanity, and a bar of rusty iron lying close beside him.

There is a moment of awful stillness in the room.

Then Leslie Warburton's strong nature asserts itself. Withdrawing from Alan's supporting arm, she fixes her eyes upon his face.

"Oh, Alan," she says, "you followed—"

"I followed you? Yes," he answers sternly. "Hush!" as she is about to speak, "this is no time for words."

There is a shout from the street, and the sound of approaching footsteps. Papa Francoise seems galvanized into new life.

"The police!" he cries, springing through the door by which he has lately entered. Mamma Francoise, releasing her hold upon the girl, Nance, bounds up in affright, and hurries after her partner in iniquity; while Nance, who evidently fears her less than she dreads the police, loses no time in following the pair, leaving Alan and Leslie alone, with the dead man at their feet.

The approaching footsteps come nearer, and Alan, seizing

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"There is a moment of awful stillness in the room."—page 130.

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Leslie by the arm, drags her toward the door by which the others have escaped.

"Go!" he says fiercely, "the police are coming; go, for the sake of the name you bear, for your husband's sake, go! *go!* GO!"

As he forces her resisting form across the threshold she turns upon him a face of piteous appeal.

"Alan! And you—"

His lip curls scornfully.

"I am not a *woman*," he says impatiently; "*go, or*—"

Some one is entering at the outer doorway. He pushes her fiercely out into the rear room, from which he knows there is a means of exit, closes the door, and turns swiftly to face the intruders.

Silly Charlie has crossed the threshold just in time to see Leslie as she disappears through the opposite door. He has one swift glimpse of the fair vanishing face, and then turns suddenly, and with a sound indicative of extreme terror, brings himself into violent contact with Van Vernet who is close behind.

Before he has so much as obtained a glimpse of the scene, Vernet finds his legs flying from under him, and in another moment is rolling upon the floor, closely locked in the embrace of Silly Charlie, who, in his terror, seems to mistake him for an enemy.

When he has finally released himself from the grasp of the seeming idiot, and is able to look about him, Van Vernet sees only a dead man upon the floor, and a living one standing at bay, with his back against a closed door, a deal table before him serving as barricade, and, in his hand, a bar of rusty iron. There is no trace of the Francoises, and nothing to indicate the recent presence of Leslie Warburton.

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Struggling away from the embrace of Silly Charlie, and bringing himself slowly to his feet, Vernet says angrily:

"You confounded idiot, what do you mean?"

But the "idiot" only sits upon the floor and stares stupidly, and Vernet turns from him to glance about the room. At sight of the dead man he starts eagerly forward.

"What's this?" he queries sharply, glancing down at the body and drawing a pistol with a quick movement. "A murder!" And he levels the weapon at Alan, dropping upon one knee, at the same instant, and with the unoccupied hand touching the face of the dead man. "A murder! yes; and just committed. Don't you stir, my man," as Alan makes a slight movement, "I'm a dead shot. This is your work, and it seems that we heard this poor fellow's death-cry. Skull crushed in. Done by that bar of iron in your hand, of course. Well, you won't crack any more skulls with *that*."

While Vernet delivers himself thus, Alan Warburton is thinking vigorously, his eyes, meanwhile, roving about the room in search of some avenue of escape other than the door over which he stands guard, and through which, he is resolved, the detective shall not pass, at least until Leslie has made good her escape from the vicinity. He is unarmed, save for the bar of iron, but he is no coward, and he resolves to make a fight for Leslie's honor and his own liberty.

Gazing thus about him he sees the seeming idiot rise from his crouching posture and creep behind Vernet, beginning, over that officer's shoulder, a series of strange gestures.

Shaking his fist defiantly behind Vernet's left ear, in token, Alan conjectures, of his opposition to that gentleman, he makes a conciliatory gesture towards Alan. And then, placing his fingers upon his lips, he shakes his head, and points again to

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Vernet, who now rises from his examination of the body, and calls over his shoulder:

"Charlie, come here."

Leering and laughing, Charlie comes promptly forward.

"Ugh!" he says, making a detour around the body of Siebel, "Charlie was scared. Charlie don't like dead folks." And he plants himself squarely before Vernet, grinning and staring at Alan the while.

"Out of my range, fool!" cries Vernet angrily. And then, as Charlie springs aside with absurd alacrity, he says to Alan: "Fellow, throw down that iron."

But Alan Warburton gives no sign that he hears the command. He has not recognized the voice of Vernet, and is not aware of the man's identity, but he has an instinctive notion that his address will not be in keeping with his nautical costume, and he is not an adept at dissimulation.

"You won't eh?" pursues Vernet mockingly. "You are very mum? and no wonder."

"Mum, mum," chants Silly Charlie, approaching Alan with gingerly steps, and peering curiously into his face.

Then bending suddenly forward he whispers quickly: "*Keep mum!*" and bursting into an idiotic laugh, *pirouettes* back to the side of Vernet.

"Charlie," says Vernet suddenly, and without once removing his eyes from Alan's face, "put your hand in my side pocket—no, no! the other one," as Charlie makes a sudden dive into the pocket nearest him. "That's right; now pull out the handcuffs, and take out the rope."

Charlie obeys eagerly, and examines the handcuffs with evident delight.

"Charlie" says Vernet, "you and I have got to make this

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man a prisoner. If we do, you will get your star and uniform."

"Hooray!" cries Charlie, fairly dancing with delight. "Gimme, gum—gimme knife!"

"Why, the blood-thirsty fool!" exclaims Vernet. "No, no, Charlie; we must put on these handcuffs, and rope his feet."

"Hoop la!" cries Charlie; "gimme rope."

Seizing the rope from Vernet's hand, he advances toward Alan, gesticulating savagely. Suddenly Alan raises the iron bar and menaces him. Charlie stops a moment, then flinging aside the rope he makes a swift spring, hurling himself upon Alan with such sudden force that the latter loses his guard for a moment, and then Van Vernet is upon him. He makes such resistance as a brave man may, when he has a single hand for defence and two against him, but he is borne down, handcuffed, and bound.

As he lies fettered and helpless, in close proximity to the murdered sneak thief, Alan Warburton's eyes rest wonderingly upon Silly Charlie, for during the struggle that strange genius has contrived to whisper in his ear these words:

"*Don't resist—keep silence—we are gaining time for her!*"

"Charlie," says Vernet, "that's a good bit of work, and I'm proud of you. Now, let's make our prisoner more comfortable."

Together they lift Alan, and place him in a chair near the centre of the room. Then, finding it impossible to make him open his lips, Van Vernet begins a survey of the premises.

"We must get one or two of my men here," he says, after a few moments of silent investigation. "Charlie, can I trust you to go back to the place where we left them?"

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Charlie nods confidently, and makes a prompt movement toward the door. Then suddenly he stops and points upward with a half terrified air.

"Some one's up there," he whispers.

"What's that, Charlie?"

"Somebody's there. Charlie heard 'em."

Van Vernet hesitates a moment, looks first at the prisoner, then at Charlie, and slowly draws forth his dark lantern.

"I'll go up and see," he says half reluctantly, and making his pistol ready for use. "Watch the prisoner, Charlie."

But Silly Charlie follows Vernet's movements with his eyes until he has passed through the low door leading to the stairway. Then, gliding stealthily to the door, he assures himself that Vernet is already half-way up the stairs. The next moment he is standing beside the prisoner.

"Hist, Mr. Warburton!"

"Ah! who—," Alan Warburton checks himself suddenly.

"Hush!" says this strangest of all simpletons, in a low whisper, at the same moment beginning to work rapidly at the rope which binds Alan's feet. "Be silent and act as I bid you; I intend to help you out of this. There," rising and searching about his person, "the ropes are loosened, you can shake them off in a moment. Now, the darbies."

He produces a key which unlocks the handcuffs.

"Now, you are free, but remain as you are till I give you the signal,—ah!"

The tiny key has slipped through his fingers and fallen to the floor. It is just upon the edge of the scrap of dirty carpet; as he stoops to take it up, it catches in a fringe, and in extricating it the carpet becomes a trifle displaced.

Something underneath it strikes the eye of the seeming

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idiot. He bends closer, and then drags the carpet quite away, seizes the candle, and springs the trap which he has just discovered. Holding the candle above the opening, he looks down, and then, with a low chuckle, spreads the carpet smoothly over it, rises to his feet, and listens.

He hears footsteps crossing the rickety floor above. Van Vernet, having failed to find what he sought for aloft, is about to descend.

Stepping quickly to Alan's side, Silly Charlie whispers:

"Fortune favors us. We have got Vernet trapped."

"*Vernet!*" Alan Warburton starts and the perspiration comes out on his forehead.

Is this man who is his captor, Van Vernet? Heavens! what a complication, what a misfortune! And this other,—this wisest of all idiots, who calls him by name; who knows the reason for his presence, then, perhaps, knows Leslie herself; who, without any motive apparent, is acting so strange a part, who is *he?*

Mentally thanking the inspiration which led him to retain his incognito while negotiating with Van Vernet, Alan's eyes still follow the movements of Silly Charlie.

As he gazes, Vernet enters the room, a look of disappointment and disgust upon his face.

"Charlie, you were scared at the rats," he says; "there's nothing else there."

The trap is directly between him and the prisoner, and as he walks toward it, Silly Charlie fairly laughs with delight.

"What are you—"

The sentence is never finished. Vernet's foot has pressed the yielding carpet; he clutches the air wildly, and disappears like a clown in a pantomine.

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"Now," whispers Silly Charlie, "off with your fetters, Warburton, and I will guide you out of this place. You are not entirely safe yet."

Up from the trap comes a yell loud enough to waken the seven sleepers, and suddenly, from without, comes an answering cry.

"It's Vernet's men," says Silly Charlie. "Now, Warburton, your safety depends upon your wind and speed. Come!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A PROMISE TO THE DEAD.

Guided by Silly Charlie, Alan Warburton finds himself hurrying through crooked streets and dismal alleys, for what seems to him an interminable distance. Now they run forward swiftly; now halt suddenly, while Charlie creeps ahead to reconnoiter the ground over which they must go. At last they have passed the Rubicon, and halting at the corner of a wider street than any they have as yet traversed, Alan's strange guide says.

"You are tolerably safe now, Mr. Warburton; at least you are not likely to be overtaken by Vernet or his men. You are still a long distance from home, however, and possibly the way is unfamiliar. I would pilot you further, but must hurry back to see how Vernet is coming out."

For the first time Alan Warburton, the self-possessed,

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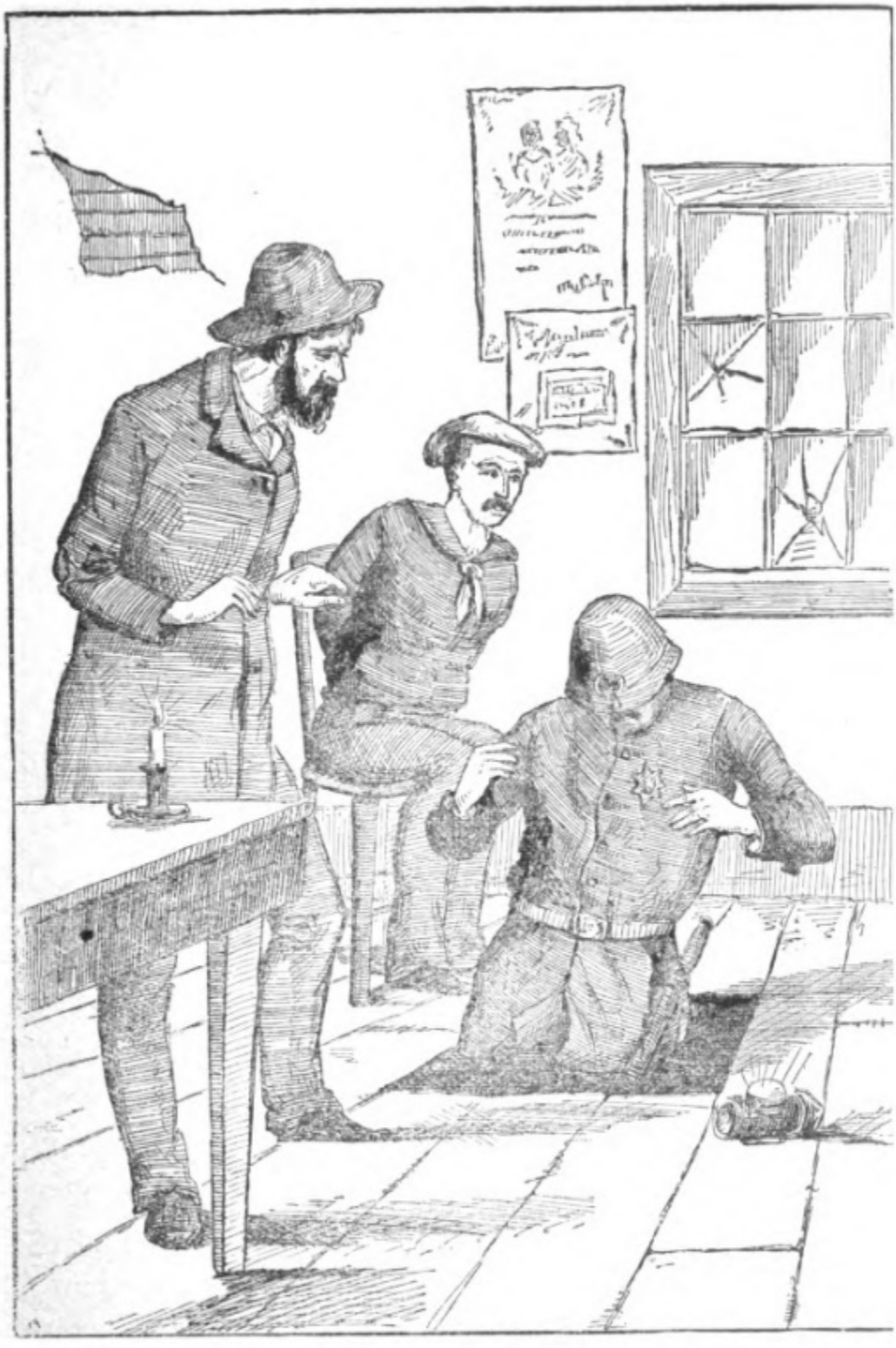

"Vernet's foot has pressed the yielding carpet; he clutches the ai wildly, and disappears."—page 137.

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polished man of society, is at a loss for words. Society has given him no training, taught him no lessons applicable to such emergencies as this.

"Of one thing you must be warned," continues the guide. "Van Vernet is a sleuth-hound on a criminal secret, and he considers you a criminal. He has seen you standing above that dead man with a bar of iron in your hand—did you know that bar of iron was smeared with blood, and that wisps of human hair clung to its surface? Never mind; *I* do not accuse you. I do not ask you to explain your presence there. You have escaped from Van Vernet, and he will never forgive you for it. He will hunt you down, if possible. You know the man?"

"I never saw his face until to-night."

"What! and yet, two hours ago, he was at your brother's house, a guest!"

"True. My dear sir, I am deeply indebted to you, but just now my gratitude is swallowed up in amazement. In Heaven's name, who are you, that you know so much?"

"'Silly Charlie' is what they call me in these alleys, and I pass for an idiot."

"But you are anything but what you 'pass for.' You have puzzled me, and outwitted Van Vernet. Tell me who you are. Tell me how I can reward your services."

"In serving you to-night, Mr. Warburton, I have also served myself. As to who I am, it cannot matter to you."

"That must be as you will,"—Alan is beginning to recover his conventional courtesy—"but at least tell me how I may discharge my obligations to you. *That* does concern me."

Alan's companion ponders a moment, and then says:

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"Perhaps we had better be frank, Mr. Warburton. You are a gentleman, and, I trust, so am I. If you owe me anything, you can discharge your debt by answering a single question."

"Ask it."

"Van Vernet was a guest at your masquerade—why was he there?"

The question startles Alan Warburton, but he answers after a moment's reflection:

"He came at my invitation, and on a matter of business."

"And yet you say that you never saw his face before?"

"True; our business was arranged through third parties, and by correspondence. He came into my presence, for the first time, masked. Until I saw his face in that hovel yonder, I had never seen it."

"And you?"

"A kind fortune has favored me. This dress I wore as a masquerade costume; over it I threw a black and scarlet domino. Van Vernet saw me in that domino, and with a mask before my face."

"You may thank your stars for that, and for your silence at the hovel. If you had opened your lips then, your voice might have betrayed you."

"It would have betrayed the fact that I was no seaman, at the least, and that is why I had resolved upon silence as the safest course."

"You have come out of this night's business most fortunately. But you still have reason to fear Vernet. Your very silence may cause him to suspect you of playing a part. Your features are photographed upon his memory; alter the cut of your whiskers or, better still, give your face a clean

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shave; crop your hair, and above all leave the city until this affair blows over."

"Thank you," Alan replies; "I feel that your advice is good." Then, after a struggle with his pride, he adds:

"I could easily clear myself of so monstrous a charge as that which Vernet would prefer against me, but, for certain reasons, I would prefer not to make a statement of the case."

"I comprehend."

Again Alan is startled out of his dignity. "You were the first to arrive in response to that cry for help to-night?" he begins.

"The first, after you."

"You saw those who fled?"

"I saw only one fugitive. Mr. Warburton, I know what you would ask. I saw and recognized your brother's wife. I understood your actions; you were guarding her retreat at the risk of your own life or honor. You are a brave man!"

Alan's tone is a trifle haughty as he answers:

"In knowing Mrs. Warburton and myself, you have us at a disadvantage. In having seen us as you saw us to-night, we are absolutely in your power, should you choose to be unscrupulous. Under these circumstances, I have a right to demand the name of a man who knows *me* so intimately. I have a right to know why you followed us, or me, to that house to-night?"

His companion laughs good-naturedly.

"In spite of your airs, Mr. Warburton," he says candidly, "you would be a fine fellow if you were not—such a prig. So you demand an explanation. Well, here it is, at least as much as you will need to enlighten you. Who am I? I am a friend to all honest men. Why did I follow you? Neither

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Vernet nor myself followed you or the lady. Vernet was there as the leader of an organized Raid. I was there—ahem! as a pilot for Vernet. *You* were there as a spy upon the lady. Mrs. Warburton's presence remains to be accounted for. And now, Mr. Warburton, adieu. You are out of present danger; if I find that Mrs. Warburton has not fared so well, you will hear from me again. If otherwise, you look your last upon Silly Charlie."

With a mocking laugh he turns, and pausing at the corner to wave his hand in farewell, he darts away in the direction whence he came.

Puzzled, chagrined, his brain teeming with strange thoughts, Alan Warburton turns homeward.

What is it that has come upon him this night? Less than two hours ago, an aristocrat, proud to a fault, with an unblemished name, and with nothing to fear or to conceal. Now, stealing through the dark streets like an outcast, his pride humbled to the dust, his breast burdened with a double secret, accused of murder, creeping from the police, a hunted man! To-morrow the town will be flooded with descriptions of this escaped sailor. To-morrow he must change his appearance, must flee the city.

And all because of his zeal for the family honor; all because of his brother's wife, and her horrible secret! To-night charity hath no place in Alan Warburton's heart.

Meanwhile, Van Vernet, covered with rags and dust, sickened by the foul smell of the vault into which he has been precipitated, and boiling over with wrath, is being rescued from his absurd and uncomfortable position by three policemen, who, being sent forward to ascertain if possible the cause

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of their leader's prolonged absence, have stumbled upon him in the very nick of time.

As he emerges from the trap, by the aid of the same rope with which not long before he had secured Alan Warburton's feet, he presents a most ludicrous appearance. His hat has been lost in the darkness of the cellar, and his head is plentifully decorated with rags and feathers, which have adhered tenaciously to his disarranged locks. He is smeared with dirt, pallid from the stench, nauseated, chagrined, wrathful.

Instinctively he comprehends the situation. The simpleton has played him false, the prisoner has escaped.

On the floor lie the handcuffs which Alan Warburton has shaken off as he fled. He picks them up and examines them eagerly. Then an imprecation breaks from his lips. They have been *unlocked!* And by whom? Not by the man who wore them; that was impossible.

Suddenly, flinging down the handcuffs, he turns to the policemen.

"Two men have escaped from this house, after throwing me into that cellar," he says rapidly. "They must be overtaken—a sailor and a pretended simpleton tricked out in rags and tinsel. After them, boys; out by that door. They can't be far away. Capture them *alive or dead!*"

The door by which Alan and his rescuer made their exit stands invitingly open, and the three officers, promptly obeying their leader, set off in pursuit of the sailor and the simpleton.

Left alone, Van Vernet plucks the extempore adornments from his head and person, and meditates ruefully, almost forgetting the original Raid in the chagrin of his present failure.

He goes to the side of the murdered man, who still lies as he had fallen, and looks down upon him.

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"Ah, my fine fellow," he mutters, "you give me a chance to redeem myself. If I have been outwitted to-night by a sailor and a fool, you and I will have fine revenge. A sailor! Ah, it was no common sailor, if I may trust my eyes and my senses. The hands were too white and soft; the feet too small and daintily clad; the face, in spite of the low-drawn cap and the tattooing, was too aristocratic and too *clean*. And the fool! Ah, it is no common fool who carries keys that unlock our new patent handcuffs, and who managed this rescue so cleverly. For once, Van Vernet has found his match! But the scales shall turn. The man who killed *you*, my lad, and the man who outwitted *me*, shall be found and punished, or Van Vernet will have lost his skill!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

VERNET DISCOMFITED.

While the discomfited Vernet kept watch alone with the dead, his men were running up and down the alleys, listening, peering, searching in by-places, in the hope of finding the hiding-place, or to overtake the flight, of the fugitive sailor and his idiot guide.

More than an hour they consumed in this search, and then they returned to their superior officer to report their utter failure.

"It is what I expected," said Vernet, with severe philosophy. "Those fellows are no common rascals. They have spoiled our Raid; before this, every rogue in the vicinity has been

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warned. I would not give a copper for all we can capture now."

And Vernet was right, the Raid was a failure. Mustering his men, he made the tour of the streets and alleys, but everywhere an unnatural silence reigned. The Thieves' Tavern was fast shut and quite silent; the drinking dens, the streets and cellars, where riot and infamy reigned, were under the influence of a silent spell.

It was only the yelp of a dog, heard here and there as Silly Charlie and Alan Warburton sped through the streets and lanes, but its effect was magical. It told the rioters, the crooks and outlaws in hiding, that there was danger abroad,—that the police were among them. And their orgies were hushed, their haunts became silent and tenantless; while every man who had anything to fear from the hands of justice—and what man among them had not?—slunk away to his secret hiding-place, and laid a fierce clutch upon revolver or knife.

The Raid was an utter failure; and Van Vernet, as he led his men ruefully homeward, little dreamed of the cause of the failure.

This night's work, which had been pre-supposed a sure success, had been spoiled by a fool. A most unusual fool,—of that Vernet was fully aware; only a fool as he played his part. But he had played it successfully.

Vernet had been duped by this seeming idiot, and foiled by the sailor-assassin. Of this he savagely assured himself, in the depths of his chagrin.

But, shrewd man as he was, he never once imagined that under the rags and tinsel, the dirt and disfigurement of the fool, the strong will and active brain of *Richard Stanhope* were arrayed against him; nor dreamed that "Warburton, the

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aristocrat," the man who had wounded his pride and looked down upon him as an inferior, had escaped from his clutches in the garb of a common sailor.

Arrived at head-quarters, Vernet laid before his Chief a full report of the night's misadventures, and concluded his narrative thus:

"It has never before been my misfortune to report so complete a failure. But the affair shall not end here. I have my theory; I intend to run down these two men, and I believe they will be worth the trouble I shall take on their account. They were both shams, I am sure. The sailor never saw a masthead; he could not even act his part. The other—well, he played the fool to perfection, and—he outwitted *me*."

One thing troubled Vernet not a little. Richard Stanhope did not make a late appearance at the Agency. He did not come at all that night, or rather that morning. And Vernet speculated much as to the possible cause of this long delay.

It was late in the day when Stanhope finally presented himself, and then he entered the outer office alert, careless, *debonnaire* as usual; looking like a man with an untroubled conscience, who has passed the long night in peaceful repose.

Vernet, who had arrived at the office but a moment before, lifted his face from the newspaper he held and cast upon his *confrere* an inquiring glance.

But Dick Stanhope was blind to its meaning. With his usual easy morning salutation to all in the room, he passed them, and applied for admittance at the door of his Chief's private office. It was promptly opened to him, and he walked into the presence of his superior as jauntily as if he had not, by his unaccountable absence, spoiled the most important Raid of the season.

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It was a long interview, and as toward its close the sounds of uproarious laughter penetrated to the ears of the loungers in the outer room, Van Vernet bit his lip with vexation. Evidently the Chief was not visiting his displeasure too severely upon his dilatory favorite.

Vernet's cheeks burned as he realized how utterly he had failed. Not only had he heaped confusion upon himself, but he had not succeeded in lessening Stanhope's claim to favoritism by bringing upon him the displeasure of the Agency.

While he sat, still tormented by this bitter thought, Stanhope re-entered the room, and walking straight up to Vernet brought his hand down upon the shoulder of that gentleman with emphatic heartiness, while he said, his eyes fairly dancing with mischief, and every other feature preternaturally solemn:

"I say, Van, old fellow, how do you like conducting a Raid?"

It was a moment of humiliation for Van Vernet. But he, like Stanhope, was a skilled actor, and he lifted his eyes to the face of his inquisitor and answered with a careless jest, while he realized that in this game against Richard Stanhope he had played his first hand, and had lost.

"It shall not remain thus," he assured himself fiercely; "I'll play as many trumps as Dick Stanhope, before our little game ends!"

When Walter Parks returned from his two days' absence, and called at the office to receive the decisions of the two detectives, the Chief said:

"You may consider yourself sure of both men, after a little. Dick Stanhope, whose case promised to be a very short one,

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has asked for more time. And Van Vernet is in hot chase after two fly fellows, and won't give up until they are trapped. You may be sure of them both, however. And in order that they may start fair, after their present work is done, I have arranged that you meet them here to-night, and let them listen together to your statement."

"I like the idea," said Walter Parks earnestly, "and I will be here at the appointed time."

That evening, Vernet and Stanhope,—the former grave, courteous, and attentive; the latter cool, careless, and inconsequent as usual,—sat listening to the story of Arthur Pearson's mysterious death, told with all its details.

As the tale progressed, Van Vernet became more attentive, more eager, his eyes, flashing with excitement, following every gesture, noting every look that crossed the face of the narrator. But Dick Stanhope sat in the most careless of lounging attitudes; his eyes half closed or wandering idly about the room; his whole manner that of an individual rather more bored than interested.

"It's a difficult case," said Van Vernet, when the story was done. "It will be long and tedious. But as soon as I have found the man or men I am looking for, I will undertake it. And if the murderer is above ground, I do not anticipate failure."

But Stanhope only said:

"I don't know when I shall be at your disposal. The affair I have in hand is not progressing. Your case looks to me like a dubious one,—the chances are ninety to one against you. But when I am at liberty, if Van here has not already solved the mystery, I'll do my level best for you."

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CHAPTER XIX.

CALLED TO ACCOUNT.

It was a long road for a woman to travel at that unconventional hour, but Leslie Warburton was fleet-footed, and fear and excitement lent her strength.

Necessity had taught her how to enter and escape from the dangerous maze where the people who claimed a right in her existence dwelt. And on being forced to flee by her haughty brother-in-law, she bowed her head and wrapping herself in her dark cloak sped away through the night.

She had little fear of being missed by her guests,—a masquerade affords latitude impossible to any other gathering, and contrary to the usual custom, the maskers were to continue their *incognito* until the cotillion began. If her guests missed her, she would be supposed to be in some other apartment. If she were missed by Winnie, that little lady would say: "She is with Archibald, of course."

Nevertheless, it was an unsafe journey. But she accomplished it, and arrived, panting, weary, and filled with a terrible dread at the thought of the exposure that must follow her encounter with Alan.

They were dancing still, her light-hearted guests, and Leslie resumed her Sunlight robes, and going back to her place among them forced herself to smile and seem to be gay, while her heart grew every moment heavier with its burden of fear and dire foreboding.

Anxiously she watched the throng, hoping, yet dreading, to

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see the sailor costume of Alan, fearing lest, in spite of his high courage, disaster had overtaken him.

It was in the grey of morning, and her guests were dispersing, when Alan Warburton reappeared. He was muffled as at first, in the black and scarlet domino, and he moved with the slow languor of one utterly exhausted or worn with pain.

At length it was over; the last guest had departed, the house was silent, and Leslie and Alan stood face to face under the soft light of the library chandelier.

During the ceremonies of departure, he had remained constantly near her. And when they were left, at last, with only Winnie French beside them, Leslie, seeing that the interview was inevitable, had asked Winnie to look in upon little Daisy, adding, as the girl, with a gay jest, turned to go:

"I will join you there soon, Winnie, dear; just now Alan and I have a little to say about some things that have occurred to-night."

Tossing a kiss to Leslie, and bestowing a grimace upon Alan as he held open the door for her exit, Winnie had *pirouetted* out of the room, and sped up the broad stairway as fleetly as if her little feet were not weary with five hours' dancing.

Then Leslie, with a stately gesture, had led the way to the library.

Silently, and as if by one accord, they paused under the chandelier, and each gazed into the face of the other.

His eyes met hers, stern, accusing, and darkened with pain; while she—her bearing was proud as his, her face mournful, her eyes resolute, her lips set in firm lines. She looked neither criminal nor penitent; she was a woman driven to bay, and she would fight rather than flee.

Looking him full in the face, she made no effort to break

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the silence. Seeing which, Alan Warburton said:

"Madam, you play your part well. You are not now the nocturnal wanderer menaced by a danger—"

"From which you rescued me," she interrupts, her face softening. "Alan, it was a brave deed, and I thank you a thousand times!"

"I do not desire your gratitude, Madam. I could have done no less, and would do yet more to save from disgrace the name we bear in common. Was your absence noted? Did you return safely and secretly?"

"I have not been missed, and I returned as safely and as secretly as I went."

Her voice was calm, her countenance had hardened as at first.

"Madam, let us understand each other. One year ago the name of Warburton had never known a stain; now—"

He let the wrath in his eyes, the scorn in his face, finish what his lips left unsaid.

But the eyes of his beautiful opponent flashed him back scorn for scorn.

"Now," she said, with calm contempt in her voice, "now, the proudest man of the Warburton race has stepped down from his pedestal to play the spy, and upon a woman! I thank you for rescuing me, Alan Warburton, but I have no thanks to offer for *that!*"

"A spy!" He winced as his lips framed the word. "We are calling hard names, Mrs. Warburton. If I was a spy in that house, *what* were you! I *have* been a spy upon your actions, and I have seen that which has caused me to blush for my brother's wife, and tremble for my brother's honor. More than once I have seen you leave this house, and return

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to it, clandestinely. It was one of these secret expeditions, which I discovered by the merest chance, that aroused my watchfulness. More than once have letters passed to and fro through some disreputable-looking messenger. To-night, for the first time, I discovered *where* you paid your visits, but not to *whom*. To-night I traced you to the vilest den in all the city. Madam, this mystery must be cleared up. What wretched secret have you brought into my brother's house? What sin or shame are you hiding under his name? What is this disgrace that is likely to burst upon us at any moment?"

Slowly she moved toward him, looking straight into his angry, scornful face. Slowly she answered:

"Alan Warburton, you have appointed yourself my accuser; you shall not be my judge. I am answerable to you for nothing. From this moment I owe you neither courtesy nor gratitude. I *have* a secret, but it shall be told to my husband, not to you. If I have done wrong, I have wronged him, not you. You have insulted me under my own roof to-night, for the last time. I will tell my story to Archibald now; he shall judge between us."

She turned away, but he laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

"Stop!" he said, "you must not go to Archibald with this; you shall not!"

"Shall not!" she exclaimed scornfully; "and who will prevent it?"

"I will prevent it. Woman, have you neither heart nor conscience? Would you add murder to your list of transgressions?"

"Let me go, Alan Warburton," she answered impatiently; "I have done with you."

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"But I have not done with you! Oh, you know my brother well; he is trusting, confiding, blind where you are concerned. He believes in your truth, and he must continue so to believe. He must not hear of this night's work."

"But he shall; every word of it."

"Every word! Take care, Mrs. Warburton. Will you tell him of the lover who was here to-night, disguised as a woman, the better to hover about you?"

"You wretch!" She threw off his restraining hand and turned upon him, her eyes blazing. Then, after a moment, the fierce look of indignation gave place to a smile of contempt.

"Yes," she said, turning again toward the door, "I shall tell him of that too."

"Then you will give him his death-blow; understand that! Yesterday, when his physician visited him, he told us the truth. Archibald's life is short at best; any shock, any strong emotion or undue excitement, will cause his death. Quiet and rest are indispensable. To-morrow—to-day, you were to be told these things. By Archibald's wish they were withheld from you until now, lest they should spoil your pleasure in the masquerade."

The last words were mockingly uttered, but Leslie paid no heed to the tone.

"Are you telling me the truth?" she demanded. "Must I play my part still?"

"I am telling you the truth. You must continue to play your part, so far as he is concerned. For his sake I ask you to trust me. You bear our name, our honor is in your keeping. Whatever your faults, your misdeeds, have been, they must be kept secrets still. I ask you to trust me,—not that

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I may denounce you, but to enable me to protect us all from the consequences of your follies."

If the words were conciliatory, the tone was hard and stern. Alan Warburton could ill play the role he had undertaken.

The look she now turned upon him was one of mingled wonder and scorn.

"You are incomprehensible," she said. "I am gratified to know that it was not my life nor my honor, but your own name, that you saved to-night,—it lessens my obligation. Being a woman, I am nothing; being a Warburton, disgrace must not touch me! So be it. If I may not confide in my husband, I will keep my own counsel still. And if I cannot master my trouble alone, then, perhaps, as a last resort, and for the sake of the Warburton honor, I will call upon you for aid."

There was no time for a reply. While the last words were yet on her lips, the heavy curtains were thrust hastily aside and Winnie French, pallid and trembling, stood in the doorway.

"Leslie! Alan!" she cried, coming toward them with a sob in her throat, "we have lost little Daisy!"

"Lost her!"

Alan Warburton uttered the two words as one who does not comprehend their meaning. But Leslie stood transfixed, like one stunned, yet not startled, by an anticipated blow.

"We have hunted everywhere," Winnie continued wildly. "She is not in the house, she is not—"

She catches her breath at the cry that breaks from Leslie's lips, and for a moment those three, their festive garments in startling contrast with their woe-stricken faces, regard each other silently.

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Then Leslie, overcome at last by the accumulating horrors of this terrible night, sways, gasps, and falls forward, pallid and senseless, at Alan Warburton's feet.

CHAPTER XX.

BETRAYED BY A PICTURE.

Little Daisy Warburton was missing. The blow that had prostrated Leslie at its first announcement, struck Archibald Warburton with still heavier force. It was impossible to keep the truth from him, and when it became known, his feeble frame would not support the shock. At day-dawn, he lay in a death-like lethargy. At night, he was raving with delirium. And on the second day, the physicians said:

"There is no hope. His life is only a thing of days."

Leslie and Alan were faithful at his bedside,—she, the tenderest of nurses; he, the most sleepless of watchers. But they avoided an interchange of word or glance. To all appearance, they had lost sight of themselves in the presence of these new calamities—Archibald's hopeless condition, and the loss of little Daisy.

No time had been wasted in prosecuting the search for the missing child. When all had been done that could be done, —when monstrous rewards had been offered, when the police were scouring the city, and private detectives were making careful investigations,—Leslie and Alan took their places at the bedside of the stricken father, and waited, the heart of each heavy with a burden of unspoken fear and a new, terrible suspicion.

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"Leslie! Alan!" she cried, coming toward them with a sob in he hroat, "we have lost little Daisy!"—page 155.

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So two long, dreary days passed away, with no tidings from the lost and no hope for the dying.

During these two days, Van Vernet and Richard Stanhope were not idle.

The struggle between them had commenced on the night of the masquerade, and now there would be no turning back until the one became victor, the other vanquished.

Having fully convinced himself that Vernet had deliberately ignored all their past friendship, and taken up the cudgel against him, for reward and honor, Stanhope resolved at least to vindicate himself; while Vernet, dominated by his ambition, had for his watchword, "success! success!"

Fully convinced that behind that which was visible at the Francoise hovel, lay a mystery, Vernet resolved upon fathoming that mystery, and he set to work with rare vigor.

Having first aroused the interest of the authorities in the case, Vernet caused three rewards to be offered. One for the apprehension of the murderer of the man who had been identified as one Josef Siebel, professional rag-picker, and of Jewish extraction, having a sister who ran a thieving "old clo'" business, and a brother who kept a disreputable pawn shop.

The second and third rewards were for the arrest of, or information concerning, the fellow calling himself "Silly Charlie," and the parties who had occupied the hovel up to the night of the murder.

These last "rewards" were accompanied by such descriptions of Papa and Mamma Francoise as Vernet could obtain at second-hand, and by more accurate descriptions of the Sailor, and Silly Charlie.

Rightly judging that sooner or later Papa Francoise, or

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some of his confederates, would attempt to remove the concealed booty from the deserted hovel,—which, upon being searched, furnished conclusive proof that buying rags at a bargain was not Papa's sole occupation,—Van Vernet set a constant watch upon the house, hoping thus to discover the new hiding-place of the two Francoise's. Having accomplished thus much, he next turned his attention to his affairs with the aristocrat of Warburton place.

This matter he now looked upon as of secondary importance, and on the second day of Archibald Warburton's illness he turned his steps toward the mansion, intent upon bringing his "simple bit of shadowing" to a summary termination.

He had gathered no new information concerning Mrs. Warburton and her mysterious movements, nevertheless he knew how to utilize scant items, and the time had come when he proposed to make Richard Stanhope's presence at the masquerade play a more conspicuous part in the investigation which he was supposed to be vigorously conducting.

The silence and gloom that hung over the mansion was too marked to pass unnoticed by so keen an observer.

Wondering as to the cause, Vernet pulled the bell, and boldly handed his professional card to the serious-faced footman who opened the door.

In obedience to instructions, the servant glanced at the card, and reading thereon the name and profession of the applicant, promptly admitted him, naturally supposing him to be connected with the search for little Daisy.

"Tell your master," said Vernet, as he was ushered into the library, "tell your master that I must see him at once. My business is urgent, and my time limited."

The servant turned upon him a look of surprise.

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"Do you mean Mr. Archibald Warburton, sir?"

"Yes."

"Then it will be impossible. Mr. Warburton has been dangerously sick since yesterday. The shock—Mr. Alan receives all who have business."

Mentally wondering what the servant could mean, for in the intensity of his interest in his new search, he had not informed himself as to the late happenings that usually attract the attention of all connected with the police, and was not aware of the disappearance of Archibald Warburton's little daughter, Vernet said briefly, and as if he perfectly understood it all:

"Nevertheless, you may deliver my message."

Somewhat overawed by the presence of this representative of justice, the servant went as bidden, and in another moment stood before Alan Warburton, presenting the card of the detective and delivering his message.

Alan Warburton started at sight of the name upon the card, and involuntarily turned his gaze toward the mirror. The face reflected there was not the face we saw unmasked, for a moment, at the masquerade. The brown moustache and glossy beard, the abundant waving hair, were gone. To the wonder and disapproval of all in the house, Alan had appeared among them, on the morning following the masquerade, with smooth-shaven face and close-cropped hair, looking like a boy-graduate rather than the distinguished man of the world he had appeared on the previous day.

Van Vernet had seen his bearded face but once, and there was little cause to fear a recognition; nevertheless, recalling Stanhope's warning, Alan chose the better part of valor, and said calmly:

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"Tell the person that Mr. Warburton is so ill that his life is despaired of, and that he is quite incapable of transacting business. He cannot see him at present."

Wondering somewhat at this cavalier message, the servant retraced his steps, and Alan returned to the sick-room, murmuring as he went:

"It seems the only way. I dare not trust my voice in conversation with that man. For our honor's sake, my dying brother must be my representative still."

And then, as his eye rested upon Leslie, sitting by the bedside pale and weary, a thrill of aversion swept over him as he thought:

"But for her, and her wretched intrigue, I should have no cause to deceive, and no man's scrutiny to fear."

Alas for us who have secrets to keep; we should be "as wise as serpents," and as farseeing as veritable seers.

While Alan Warburton, above stairs, was congratulating himself, believing that he had neglected nothing of prudence or precaution, Van Vernet, below stairs, was grasping a clue by which Alan Warburton might yet be undone.

Reentering the library, the servant found Vernet, his cheeks flushed, his eyes ablaze with excitement, standing before an easel which upheld a life-sized portrait—a new portrait, recently finished and just sent home, and as like the original, as he had appeared on yesterday, as a picture could be like life.

When the servant had delivered his message, and without paying the slightest heed to its purport, Vernet demanded, almost fiercely:

"Who is the original of that portrait?"

"That, sir," said the servant, "is Mr. Alan Warburton."

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CHAPTER XXI.

A PROMISE TO THE DYING.

Paying no further heed to the servant, and much to the surprise of that functionary, Van Vernet turned his gaze back upon the picture, and looked long and intently, shifting his position once or twice to obtain a different view. Then taking up his hat, he silently left the house, a look of mingled elation and perplexity upon his face.

"It's the same!" he thought, as he hurried away; "it's the same face, or a most wonderful resemblance. Allow for the difference made by the glazed cap, the tattoo marks and the rough dress, and it's the very same face! It seems incredible, but I know that such impossibilities often exist. What is there in common between Mr. Alan Warburton, aristocrat, and a nameless sailor, with scars upon his face and blood upon his hands? The same face, certainly, and—perhaps the same delicate hands and dainty feet. It may be only a resemblance, but I'll see this Alan Warburton, and I'll solve the mystery of that Francoise hovel yet."

While Van Vernet thus soliloquizes over his startling discovery, we will follow the footsteps of Richard Stanhope.

He is walking away from the more bustling portion of the city, and turning into a quiet, home-like street, pauses before a long, trim-looking building, turns a moment to gaze about him in quest of possible observers, and then enters.

It is a hospital, watched over by an order of noble women,

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and affording every relief and comfort to the suffering ones within its walls.

Passing the offices and long wards, he goes on until he has reached a private room in the rear of the building. Here coolness and quiet reign, and a calm-faced woman is sitting beside a cot, upon which a sick man tosses and mutters feverishly. It is the ex-convict who was rescued from the Thieves' Tavern by Stanhope, only a few nights ago.

"How is your patient?" queries the detective, approaching the bed and gazing down upon the man whom he has befriended.

"He has not long to live," replies the nurse. "I am glad you are here, sir. In his lucid moments he asks for you constantly. His delirium will pass soon, I think, and he will have a quiet interval. I hope you will remain."

"I will stay as long as possible," Stanhope says, seating himself by the bed. "But I have not much time to spare tonight."

The dying man is living his childhood over again. He mutters of rolling prairies, waving trees, sweeping storms, and pealing thunder. He laughs at the review of some pleasing scene, and then cries out in terror as some vision of horror comes before his memory.

And while he mutters, Richard Stanhope listens—at first idly, then curiously, and at last with eager intensity, bending forward to catch every word.

Finally he rises, and crossing the room deposits his hat upon a table, and removes his light outer coat.

"I shall stay," he says briefly. "How long will he live?"

"He cannot last until morning, the surgeon says."

"I will stay until the end."

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He resumes his seat and his listening attitude. It is sunset when his watch begins; the evening passes away, and still the patient mutters and moans.

It is almost midnight when his mutterings cease, and he falls into a slumber that looks like death.

At last there comes an end to the solemn stillness of the room. The dying man murmurs brokenly, opens his eyes with the light of reason in them once more, and recognizes his benefactor.

"You see—I was—right," he whispers, a wan smile upon his face; "I am going to die."

He labors a moment for breath, and then says:

"You have been so good—will—will you do one thing—more?"

"If I can."

"I want my—mother to know—I am dead. She was not always good—but she was—my mother."

"Tell me her name, and where to find her?"

The voice of the dying man sinks lower. Stanhope bends to catch the whispered reply, and then asks:

"Can you answer a few questions that I am anxious to put to you?"

"Y—yes."

"Now that you know yourself dying, are you willing to tell me anything I may wish to know?"

"You are the—only man—who was ever—merciful to me," said the dying man. "I will tell you—anything."

Turning to the nurse, Stanhope makes a sign which she understands, and, nodding a reply, she goes softly from the room.

When Richard Stanhope and the dying man are left alone, the detective bends his head close to the pillows, and the

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questions asked, and the answers given, are few and brief.

Suddenly the form upon the bed becomes convulsed, the eyes roll wildly and then fix themselves upon Stanhope's face.

"You promise," gasps the death-stricken man, "you will tell them—"

The writhing form becomes limp and lifeless, the eyes take on a glassy stare, and there is a last fluttering breath.

Richard Stanhope closes the staring eyes, and speaks his answer in the ears of the dead.

"I will tell them, poor fellow, at the right time, but—before my duty to the dead, comes a duty to the living!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A BUSINESS CALL.

It was grey dawn when Stanhope left the hospital and turned his face homeward, and then it was not to sleep, but to pass the two hours that preceded his breakfast-time in profound meditation.

Seated in a lounging-chair, with a fragrant cigar between his lips, he looked the most care-free fellow in the world. But his active brain was absorbed in the study of a profound problem, and he was quite oblivious to all save that problem's solution.

Whatever the result of his meditation, he ate his breakfast with a keen relish, and a countenance of serene content, and then set off for a morning call upon Mr. Follingsbee.

He found that legal gentleman preparing to walk down to

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his office; and after an interchange of salutations, the two turned their faces townward together.

"Well, Stanhope," said the lawyer, linking his arm in that of the detective with friendly familiarity, "how do you prosper?"

"Very well; but I must have an interview with Mrs. Warburton this morning."

"Phew! and you want me to manage it?"

"Yes."

The lawyer considered a moment.

"You know that the Warburtons are overwhelmed with calamity?" he said.

Stanhope glanced sharply from under his lashes, and then asked carelessly:

"Of what nature?"

"Archibald Warburton lies dying; his little daughter has been stolen."

"What!" The detective started, then mastering his surprise, said quietly: "Tell me about it."

Briefly the lawyer related the story as he knew it, and then utter silence fell between them, while Richard Stanhope lost himself in meditation. At last he said:

"It's a strange state of affairs, but it makes an immediate interview with the lady doubly necessary. Will you arrange it at once?"

"You are clever at a disguise: can you make yourself look like a gentleman of my cloth?"

"Easily," replied Stanhope, with a laugh.

"Then I'll send Leslie—Mrs. Warburton, a note at once, and announce the coming of myself and a friend, on a matter of business."

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An hour later, a carriage stopped before the Warburton doorway, and two gentlemen alighted.

The first was Mr. Follingsbee, who carried in his hand a packet of legal-looking papers. The other was a trim, prim, middle-aged gentleman, tightly buttoned-up in a spotless frock coat, and looking preternaturally grave and severe.

They entered the house together, and the servant took up to Leslie the cards of Mr. Follingsbee and "S. Richards, attorney."

With pale, anxious face, heavy eyes, and slow, dragging steps, Leslie appeared before them, and extended her hand to Mr. Follingsbee, while she cast a glance of anxious inquiry toward the seeming stranger.

"How is Archibald?" asked the lawyer, briskly.

"Sinking; failing every moment," replied Leslie, sadly.

"And there is no news of the little one?"

"Not a word."

There was a sob in her throat, and Mr. Follingsbee, who hated a scene, turned abruptly toward his companion, saying:

"Ours is a business call, Leslie, and as the business is Mr. Stanhope's not mine, I will retire to the library while it is being transacted."

And without regarding her stare of surprise, he walked coolly from the room, leaving Leslie and the disguised detective face to face.

"Is it possible!" she said, after a moment's silence; "*is* this Mr. Stanhope!"

The middle-aged gentleman smiled and came toward her.

"It is I, Mrs. Warburton. An interview with you seemed to me quite necessary, and I considered this the safest disguise, and Mr. Follingsbee's company the surest protection."

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She bowed her head and looked inquiringly into his face.

"Mrs. Warburton, are you still desirous to discover the identity of the person who has been a spy upon you?" he asked gravely.

"I know—" she checked herself and turned a shade paler. "I mean I—" again she paused. What should she say to this man whose eyes seemed looking into her very soul? What did he know?

"Let me speak for you, madam," he said, coming close to her side, his look and manner full of respect, his voice low and gentle. "You do not need my information; you have, yourself, discovered the man."

Then, seeing the look of distress and indecision upon her face, he continued:

"On the night of our first interview, I pledged my word to respect any secret of yours which I might discover. At the same time I warned you that such discovery was more than possible. If, in saying what it becomes my duty to say, I touch upon a subject offensive to you, or upon which you are sensitive, pardon me. Under other circumstances I might have said: Mrs. Warburton, it is your brother-in-law who has constituted himself your shadow. But the events that followed that masquerade have made what would have been a simple discovery, a most complicated affair. Can we be sure of no interruption while you listen?"

She sank into a chair, with a weary sigh.

"There will be no interruption. Miss French and my brother-in-law are watching in the sick-room; the servants are all at their posts. Be seated, Mr. Stanhope."

He drew a chair near that which she occupied, and plunged

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at once into his unpleasant narrative, talking fast, and in low, guarded tones.

Beginning with a description of the Raid as it was planned, he told how he had been detained at the masquerade—how he had discovered the presence of Vernet, and suspected his agency in the matter—how, without any thought other than to be present at the Raid, to note Vernet's generalship, and satisfy himself, if possible, as to the exact meaning of his unfriendly conduct, he, Stanhope, had assumed the disguise of "Silly Charlie", had encountered Vernet and been seized upon by that gentleman as a suitable guide,—and how, while convoying his false friend through the dark alleys, they were startled by a cry for help.

As she listened, Leslie's face took on a look of terror, and she buried it in her hands.

"I need not dwell upon what followed," concluded Stanhope. "Not knowing what was occurring, I managed to enter first at the door. I heard Alan Warburton bid you fly for your husband's sake. I saw your face as he forced you through the door, and then I contrived to throw Vernet off his feet before he, too, should catch a glimpse of you."

Leslie shuddered, and as he paused, she asked, from behind her hands:

"And then—oh, tell me what happened after that!"

"Your brother-in-law closed and barred the door, and turned upon us like a lion at bay, risking his own safety to insure your retreat. What! has he not told you?"

"He has told me nothing."

"There is little more to tell. I knew him for your brother-in-law, because, here at the masquerade, I was a witness to a little scene in which he threw off his mask and domino. It

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was when he met and frightened the little girl, and then reproved the servant."

"I remember."

"I recognized him at once, and fearing lest, by arresting him, we might do harm to you, or bring to light the secret I had promised to help you keep, I connived at his escape."

She lifted her head suddenly.

"*Arrest!*" she exclaimed; "why should you arrest *him?*"

Stanhope fixed his eyes upon her face; then sinking his voice still lower, he said:

"Something had occurred before we came upon the scene; what that something was, you probably know. What we found in that room, after your flitting, was Alan Warburton, standing against the door with a table before him as a breast-work, in his hand a blood-stained bar of iron, and almost at his feet, a dead body."

"What!"

"It was the body of a dead rag-picker. Before you left that room, a fatal blow was struck."

"Yes—I—I don't know—I can't tell—it was all confused."

She sank back in her chair, her face fairly livid, her eyes looking unutterable horror.

"Some one had committed a murder," went on Stanhope, keeping his eyes fixed upon her pallid face; "and the instrument that dealt the blow was in your brother-in-law's hand. To arrest him would have been to compromise you, and I had promised you safety and protection."

She bent forward, looking eagerly into his face.

"And you rescued him?" she said, eagerly.

"You could scarcely call it that. He resisted grandly, and

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was brave enough to effect his own rescue. I guided him away from that unsafe locality, and warned him of the danger which menaced him."

"And is that danger now past?"

"Is it past!" He took from his pocket a folded placard, opened it, and put it into her hands.

It was the handbill containing the description of the escaped Sailor, and offering a reward for his capture.

With a cry of remorse and terror, Leslie Warburton flung it from her, and rose to her feet.

"My God!" she cried, wringing her hands wildly, "my cowardice, my folly, has brought this upon him, upon us all!"

Then turning toward the detective, a sudden resolve replacing the terror in her eye, a resolute ring in her voice, she said:

"Listen; you have proved yourself worthy of all confidence; you shall hear all I have to tell; you shall judge between my enemies and me."

"But, madam—"

"Wait; I want your advice, too, your aid, perhaps. Mr. Follingsbee also shall hear me."

She started toward the library, but the detective put out a detaining hand.

"Stop!" he said, firmly. "If what you are about to say includes anything concerning Alan Warburton, or the story of that night, we must have no confidants while his liberty and life are menaced. His identity with that missing Sailor must never be known, even by Mr. Follingsbee."

She breathed a shuddering sigh, and returned to her seat.

"You are right," she said hurriedly; "and until you shall advise me otherwise, I will tell my story to none but you."

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CHAPTER XXIII.

LESLIE'S STORY.

"I shall not weary you with a long story," began Leslie Warburton; "this is not the time for it, and I am not in the mood. My husband lies above us, hopelessly ill. My little step-daughter is lost, and in Heaven only knows what danger. My brother-in-law is a hunted man, accused of the most atrocious of crimes. And I feel that I am the unhappy cause of all these calamities. If I have erred, I am doubly punished. Let me give you the bare facts, Mr. Stanhope; such details as you may wish can be supplied hereafter.

"I am, as you have been told, the adopted child of Thomas Uliman, of the late firm of Uliman & French. Until his death, I had supposed myself to be his own child. During the last year of my adopted father's life, it was his dearest wish that I should marry his friend, Archibald Warburton, and we became affianced. After the death of my adopted father, Mr. Warburton urged a speedy marriage, and we fixed a day for the ceremony.

"Less than a week later, it became necessary to overlook my father's papers, in the search for some missing document. After looking through his secretary, and examining a great many papers without finding the one for which I searched, I remembered that my mother's desk contained many papers. As the missing document referred to some property held by them jointly, I made a search there. She had been dead for

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more than a year, and all her keys were in my possession, but until that day I had never had the courage to approach her desk.

"Searching among her papers, I found one which had never been intended for my eyes. It was folded tightly, and crowded into a tiny space behind a little drawer. My mother's death was quite sudden; had she died of a lingering sickness, the paper would doubtless have been destroyed, for it furnished proof that I was not the child of Thomas Uliman and his wife, Mathilde, but an adopted daughter, while I was represented in the will as their only child. The paper I found was in my father's writing, and by it, Franz Francoise and his wife, Martha—"

"What!" The exclamation fell involuntarily from Stanhope's lips. Then checking himself, he said quietly: "I beg your pardon; proceed."

"Franz Francoise and his wife, Martha, by this paper resigned all claim to the child, Lerchen, for a pecuniary consideration. The child was to be rechristened Leslie Uliman, and legally adopted by the Ulimans, the two Francoises agreeing never to approach or claim her.

"Imagine my consternation and grief! With this paper in my hand, I went straight to Mr. Follingsbee. He had known the truth from the first, but assured me that the Ulimans had never intended that I should learn it. I had been legally adopted, and the little fortune they had left me was lawfully mine.

"Then I told the story to my intended husband, and, knowing his pride, offered him a release. He only laughed at my Quixotism, and hastened the marriage preparations, bidding me never, under any circumstances, allude to the sub-

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ject again. Soon after that, I was approached by the Francoises—you have seen them?" lifting her eyes to his face.

"Yes."

"Then I need not tell you the miseries of my various interviews with them. They had learned that I was alone in the world, and they came to claim me; I was their child. Holding, as I did, the proofs of adoption, many women would have accepted their claim; I could not. My soul arose in revolt; every throb of my heart beat against them. If nature's voice ever speaks, it spoke in me against their claim. Not against their age, their poverty, or their ignorance; but against the greed, the selfishness, the vileness that was too much a part of them to remain hidden. Sooner than acknowledge their claim, I would have died by my own hand. They wanted money, and with that I purchased a respite. Then my great temptation came.

"Archibald Warburton had bidden me never to speak again on the subject of my parentage—why not take him at his word? If I broke off my marriage with him, I must give a reason; and the true reason I would never give. Not even to Mr. Follingsbee would I tell the truth. I kept my secret; and after much hesitation, the Francoises accepted the larger share of my little fortune, and swore never to approach me again,—to leave the city forever. I believed myself safe then, and married Mr. Warburton.

"The rest you can guess. Finding that I had married a wealthy man, disregarding their oaths, the Francoises came back, and renewed their persecutions. And I was more than ever in their power. They forced me to visit them when they would. Their demands for money increased. I grew desperate at last, and on the night of the masquerade, I went

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in obedience to an imperative summons, resolved that it should be the last time."

She paused here and looked, for the first time since the beginning of her recital, straight into the face of the detective, who, sitting with his body bent forward and his eyes fixed upon her, seemed yet to be listening after her words had ceased, so intent was his gaze, so absorbed his manner.

Thus a moment of silence passed. Then Stanhope, withdrawing his eyes, and leaning back in his seat, asked suddenly:

"Is that all?"

"It is not all, Mr. Stanhope. On the night of the masquerade, while I was absent from the house no doubt, my little step-daughter disappeared."

"I know."

"You have heard it, of course. I believe that I know why, and by whom, she was abducted."

"Ah!"

"I suspect the Francoises."

"Why?"

"I love the child, and they know it. She will be another weapon in their hands. Besides, if I cannot, or will not reclaim her, there is the reward."

Richard Stanhope leaned forward, and slightly lifted his right hand.

"Is there any one else who would be benefited by the death or disappearance of the child?" he asked.

Leslie started, and the hot blood rushed to her face.

"I—I don't understand," she faltered.

"Do you know the purport of your husband's will."

"Yes."

"How does he dispose of his large property?"

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"One third to me; the rest to little Daisy."

"And his brother?"

"Alan possesses an independent fortune."

"Are there no contingencies?"

"In case of my death, all comes to Daisy, Alan becoming her guardian. In case of Daisy's death, Alan and I share equally."

"Then by the loss of this child, both you and the young man become richer."

"Ah!" she gasped, "I had never thought of *that!*"

"Mrs. Warburton, beginning at the moment when you left this house to visit the Francoises, will you tell me all that transpired, up to the time of your escape from their house?"

With cheeks flushing and paling, and voice tremulous with the excitement of some new, strange thought, she described to him the scene in the Francoises' house.

"So," thought Stanhope, when all was told, "Mr. Alan Warburton's presence at that special moment was strangely opportune. Why was he there? What does he knqw of the Francoises? The plot thickens, and I would not be in Alan Warburton's shoes for all the Warburton wealth."

But, aloud, he only said:

"Thanks, Mrs. Warburton. If you are correct in your suspicions, and the Francoises have stolen the child, they will approach you sooner or later. Should they do so, make no terms with them, but communicate with me at once."

"By letter?"

"No; through the morning papers. Use this form."

Taking from his pocket a note-book, he wrote upon a leaf a few words, tore it from the book, and put it into her hand.

"That is safer than a letter," he said, rising. "One word

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more, madam. Tell Alan Warburton to be doubly guarded against Van Vernet. His danger increases at every step. Now we will call Mr. Follingsbee."

"One moment, Mr. Stanhope. Alan has employed detectives to search for Daisy, but none of them know what you know. Will *you* find her for me?" She held out her hands appealingly.

The detective looked at her in silence for a moment, then, striding forward, he took the outstretched hands in both his own, and gazing down into her face said, gently:

"I will serve you to the extent of my power, dear lady. I will find the little one, if I can."

Mr. Follingsbee had passed his hour of waiting in the most comfortable manner possible, fast asleep in a big lounging-chair. Being aroused, he departed with Stanhope, manifesting no curiosity concerning the outcome of the detective's visit.

While their footsteps yet lingered on the outer threshold, Winnie French came flying down the stairway.

"Come quick!" she cried to Leslie. "Archibald is worse; he is dying!"

"I will serve you to the extent of my power," Richard Stanhope had said, holding Leslie Warburton's hands in his, and looking straight into her appealing eyes. "I will find the little one, if I can."

Nevertheless he went straight to the Agency, and, standing before his Chief, said:

"I am ready to begin work for Mr. Parks, sir. I shall quit the Agency to-day. Give Vernet my compliments, and tell him I wish him success. It may be a matter of days,

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weeks, or months, but you will not see me here again until I can tell you *who killed Arthur Pearson.*"

CHAPTER XXIV.

VERNET ON THE TRAIL.

The discovery made by Van Vernet, on the day of his visit to the Warburton mansion, aroused him to wonderful activity, and made him more than ever eager to ferret out the hiding-place of Papa Francoise, who, he felt assured, could throw much light upon the mystery surrounding the midnight murder.

He set a constant watch upon the deserted Francoise house, and kept the dwelling of the Warburtons under surveillance, while he, in person, gravitated between these two points of interest, during the time when he was not employed in collecting items of information concerning the Warburton family. Little by little he gathered his bits of family history, and was now familiar with many facts concerning the invalid master of the house and his second marriage, and the travelled and aristocratic brother, who, so rumor said, was proud as a crown-prince, and blameless as Sir Galahad.

"These immaculate fellows are not to my taste," muttered Van Vernet, on the morning following the day when Stanhope held his last interview with Leslie, as he took his station at a convenient point of observation, prepared to pass the forenoon in watching the Warburton mansion.

His first glance toward the massive street-door caused him

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to start and mutter an imprecation. The bell was muffled, and the door-plate hidden beneath heavy folds of crape.

Archibald Warburton was dead. The hand that stole his little one had struck his death-blow, as surely as if by a dagger thrust. His feeble frame, unable to endure those long days of suspense, had given his soul back to its origin, his body back to nature.

Within was a household doubly stricken; without, a two-fold danger menaced.

"So," muttered Van Vernet, as he gazed upon this insignia of death; "so my patron is dead; that stately, haughty aristocrat has lost all interest in his wife's secrets. Well, so have I—but I have transferred my interest to his brother, Alan Warburton. Death caused by shock following loss of his little daughter, no doubt. That tall, straight seigneur looked like a man able to outlive a shock, too."

He was not at all ruffled by the sudden taking-off of the man he supposed to be his patron. He had not made a single step toward the clearing-up of the mystery surrounding the goings and comings of Mrs. Archibald Warburton. His discovery of Stanhope at the masked ball, and his machinations consequent upon that discovery, together with the fiasco of the Raid and all its after-results, had made it impossible that he could interest himself in what he considered "merely a bit of domestic intrigue."

He was not sorry that Archibald Warburton was dead, and he resolved to profit by that death.

Since the discovery of Alan Warburton's picture, Van Vernet's mind had been drifting toward dangerous conclusions.

Suppose this wealthy aristocrat and the Sailor assassin

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should prove the same, what would follow? Might he not naturally conclude that a secret existed between Alan Warburton and the Francoises, and, if so, what was the nature of that secret? Why was Alan Warburton, if it were he, absent from his house on a night of festivity, a night when he should have been making merry with his brother's guests?

If he were in league with those outlaws of the slums, it was not for plunder; surely the Warburtons were rich enough. What, then, was the secret which that stately mansion concealed?

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," quoted Vernet, grimly. "That Sailor assassin first—the Warburton skeleton first. They are almost under my hand, and once I grasp them, my clutch is upon the Warburton millions, too."

The morning was yet early, there was quiet in the street and Van Vernet, wearing for convenience sake the uniform of a policeman, paced slowly down toward the house of mourning. As he neared the street-corner, two women, beggars evidently, came hurrying around the corner straight toward him.

At sight of his uniform the larger and elder of the two, a stout woman with a vicious face, a sharp eye, and head closely muffled in a ragged shawl, started slightly. Then with a furtive glance and a fawning obeisance, she hurried her companion past him, and down the street.

This companion, a younger woman, her face covered with bruises and red with dissipation, walked with a painful limp, and the hesitating air of the blind, her eyes tightly shut and the lids quivering.

"Playing blind," muttered Vernet, as they hastened past him. "If I were the regular officer here, I'd have them out of this; as it is—"

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He gave a shrug of indifference and glanced back over his shoulder.

The two women had halted before the Warburton mansion, and the elder one was looking up at the crape-adorned door.

Then she glanced backward toward the officer, who seemed busy contemplating the antics of a pair of restive horses that were coming down the street. Seeing him thus employed, she darted down the basement-stairs, dragging her stumbling companion after her.

Suddenly losing his interest in the prancing horses, Van Vernet turned and hastily approached the mansion, screened from the view of the two women by the massive stone steps.

Even a beggar, of the ordinary type, respects the house of mourning. And as he drew near them, Vernet mentally assured himself that these were no ordinary mendicants.

They were standing close to the basement-entrance. And as he stealthily approached, he saw that the elder woman put into the hand of the servant, who had opened the door, a folded paper which she took reluctantly, glanced down at, and with a sullen nod put into the pocket of her apron. Then, without a word to the two beggars, she closed and locked the door, while they, seeming not in the least disconcerted, turned and moved leisurely up the basement-stairs.

They would have passed Vernet hurriedly, but he put out his hand and said:

"Look here, my good souls, don't you know that this is no place for beggars? You can't be very old in the business or you'd never trouble a house where you see *that* on the door." And pointing to the badge of mourning, he concluded his oration: "Be off, now, and thank fortune that I'm a good-natured fellow."

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The woman muttered something after the usual mendicant fashion, and hastened away down the street.

At the same moment the prancing horses, held to a walk by the firm hand of their stout driver, came opposite the mansion, and a face muffled in folds of crape looked out from the carriage.

But Van Vernet had now no eyes for the horses, the carriage, or its occupant.

Noting, with a hasty glance, the direction taken by the two women, he sprang down the basement-steps and rang the bell.

The servant who had opened to the women, again appeared at the door.

"What do *you* want?" she asked, crossly; for being an honest servant she had no fear of the blue coat and brass buttons of the law.

The bogus policeman touched his hat and greeted her with an affable smile.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I thought you might be annoyed by those beggars. I can remove them if you enter a complaint. I saw that they gave you some kind of a paper; a begging letter, probably. Just give it to me, and I will see that they don't intrude again upon people who are in trouble enough."

He extended his hand for the letter; but the servant drew back, and answered hastily:

"Don't bother yourself. I've had my orders, and I guess when I don't want beggars around, I know how to send them to the right-about."

And without waiting to note the effect of her speech, she shut the door in his face, leaving him to retreat as the two beggars had done.

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"Be off, now, and thank fortune that I am a good-natured fellow."—page 181.

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Hastening up the steps he looked after the women, who were already nearly two blocks away. Then, with one backward glance, he started off in the same direction, keeping at a safe distance, but always in sight of them.

"So," he mused, as he walked along, "the Warburton servant has had her orders. That was precisely the information I wanted. These women were not beggars, but messengers, and they brought no message of the ordinary kind."

Suddenly he uttered a sharp ejaculation, and quickened his pace.

"That old woman—why, she answers perfectly the description given of Mother Francoise! And if it *is* Mother Francoise, she has undoubtedly brought a message to Alan Warburton. If it is that old woman, I will soon know it, for I shall not take my two eyes off her until I have tracked her home."

CHAPTER XXV.

WHO KILLED JOSEF SIEBEL.

While Van Vernet was following after the two women, the carriage with the restless horses moved slowly past the Warburton dwelling.

An observer might have noted that the face of the crape-draped occupant was pressed close against the oval window, in the rear of the vehicle, watching the direction taken by Van Vernet. Then, suddenly, this individual leaned forward and said to the driver:

"Around the corner, Jim, and turn."

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The order was promptly obeyed.

"Now back, Jim," said this fickle-minded person. Then as the carriage again rounded the corner: "You see that fellow in policeman's uniform, Jim?"

"Yes, sir."

"Follow him."

Slowly the carriage moved along, picking its way across crowded thoroughfares, for many blocks, the occupant keeping a close watch upon the movements of Van Vernet, this time through the window in front.

Finally, leaning back in the carriage with a muttered, "That settles it; he's going to track them home," he again addressed the driver:

"Turn back, Jim."

"All right, sir."

"Drive to Warburton place, side entrance."

Leslie Warburton, her vigil being over, was alone in her room, pacing restlessly up and down, a look of dire foreboding on her face, and in her hand a crumpled note.

At the sound of an opening door she turned to confront her maid, who proffered her a card.

Leslie took it mechanically and then started as she read thereon:

MADAM STANHOPE,

Modeste.

And written in the corner of the card, the underlined word, *Imperative.*

There was a look of relief upon the face she turned to the servant.

"Where is the—lady?"

"In the little drawing-room, madam."

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Holding the card in her hand, Leslie hastened to the little drawing-room.

A tall, veiled woman advanced to meet her; it was the occupant of the carriage.

Leslie came close to this sombre-robed figure and said, almost in a whisper: "Mr. Stanhope?"

"It is I, Mrs. Warburton. Need I say that only the most urgent necessity could have brought me here at such a time?"

"It is the right time, sir."

She held up before him the crumpled note.

"It is from *them?*" he asked.

Leslie nodded.

"It contains the secret of their present whereabouts, and bids you come to them?"

"Yes."

"You will not go?"

"How can I, now?"—her voice almost a wail—"and yet—"

"You are safe to refuse, Mrs. Warburton. You need not comply with any instructions they may give you henceforth. Let me have that note."

"But—"

"I must have it, in order to save you. I must know where to find these people."

She looked at him inquiringly, and put the note into his hand.

"Thank you," he said. "Has Van Vernet visited this house, to your knowledge?"

"He has."

"And he saw—"

"No one. I obtained my information from a servant. He sent up his card to Alan, who refused to meet him."

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"Ah!" Stanhope turned toward the door, putting the note in his pocket as he did so. Suddenly he paused, his eyes resting upon the portrait of Alan Warburton.

"That is very imprudent," he said.

"I—I don't understand."

"That picture. It must be removed." Then turning sharply toward her: "Are there other pictures of Mr. Alan Warburton in this house?"

"No; this is the only recent portrait."

He sat down and looked at the picture intently.

"Van Vernet has been here, you tell me. Can he have seen *that?*"

Fully alive now to the delicacy and danger of the situation, Leslie lifted her hand and turned toward the door. "Wait," she said, and went swiftly out.

"So," muttered Stanhope, as he again contemplated the picture, "a square foot of canvas can spoil all my plans. If Van has seen *this*, my work becomes doubly hard, and Warburton's case a desperate one."

While he pondered, Leslie came softly back, and stood before him.

"It is as bad as your feared," she said, tremulously. "Van Vernet was received in this very room, the servant tells me. He saw the picture, examined it closely, and asked the name of the original."

"Then," said Stanhope, rising, "the picture need not be removed. It has done all the mischief it can. To remove it now would only make a suspicion a certainty. Listen, madam, and as soon as possible report what I tell you to Alan Warburton. A short time ago, Mamma Francoise and one of her tools left the note I hold, at your basement-door. Van

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Vernet, who was watching near here, saw them and followed them."

"Oh!"

"He has seen that picture. Tell your brother-in-law that Van Vernet has seen it and, doubtless, has traced the resemblance between it and the fugitive Sailor; tell him that Vernet is now on the track of the Francoises, who, if found, will be used to convict him of murder."

"But—Alan is not guilty."

"Are you *sure* of that?"

"I—I—" She faltered and was silent.

"Mrs. Warburton," he asked, slowly, "do you know *who* struck that blow?"

She trembled violently, and her face turned ashen white.

"I can't tell! I don't know!" she cried wildly. "It was a moment of confusion, but—it was not—oh, no, no, it was *not* Alan!"

Not a little surprised at this incoherent outburst, Stanhope looked her keenly in the face, a new thought taking possession of his mind.

Could it be that she, in the desperation of the moment, in her struggle for safety, had stricken that cruel blow? Such things had been. Women as frail, in the strength born of desperation, had wielded still more savage weapons with fatal effect.

The question, who killed Jose Siebel? was becoming a riddle.

"Let that subject drop," said Stanhope, withdrawing his eyes from her face. "Tell your brother-in-law of his danger, but do not make use of my name. He knows nothing about me. For yourself, obey no summons like this you have just re-

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ceived. You need not make use of my newspaper-telegraph now. What I saw this morning, showed me the necessity for instant action. There is one thing more: tell Alan Warburton that now, with Vernet's eye upon him, there will be no safety in flight. Let him remain here, but tell him, above all, to shun interviews with strangers, be their errand what it will. Let no one approach him whom he does not know to be a friend. After your husband's funeral, you too had better observe this same caution. Admit *no strangers* to your presence."

"But you—"

"I shall not apply for admittance; I am going away. Before you see me again, I trust your troubles will have ended."

"And little Daisy?"

"We shall find her, I hope. Mrs. Warburton, time presses; remember my instructions and my warning. Good-morning."

He moved toward the door, turned again, and said:

"One thing more; see that you and your household avoid any movement that might seem, to a watcher, suspicious. Vernet keeps this house under surveillance, night and day. He is a foe to fear. Once more, good-by."

It was long past noon when Van Vernet, weary but triumphant, reappeared upon the fashionable street where stood the Warburton mansion.

He had been successful beyond his utmost expectations. Not only had he succeeded in tracking the two women to their hiding-place, for it could scarcely be called their home, but he had also satisfied himself that the elder woman was indeed and in truth Mamma Francoise; and that Papa Francoise was also sheltered by the tumble-down roof under which the old

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woman and her companion had passed from his sight.

Vernet was tired with his long promenade at the heels of the two sham beggars, and he resolved to give the mansion a brief reconnoitring glance and then to turn the watch over to a subordinate.

Accordingly he sauntered down the street, noting as he walked the unchanged aspect of the shut-up house. He was still a few paces away, when a vehicle came swiftly down the street, rolling on noiseless wheels.

It was an undertaker's van, and it came to a halt before the door of the Warburton mansion. Two men were seated upon the van, and as one of them dismounted and ascended the stately steps, the other, getting down in more leisurely fashion, opened the door in the end of the vehicle, disclosing to the view of Vernet, who by this time was near enough to see, a magnificent casket.

In another moment, the man who had gone to announce their arrival came down the steps, accompanied by a servant, and together the three carefully drew the casket from the van.

Vernet's quick eye detected the fact that it was heavy, and his quicker brain caught at an opportunity. Stepping to the side of the man who seemed to hold the heaviest weight, he proffered his assistance. It was promptly accepted, and, together, the four lifted the splendid casket, and carried it into the wide hall.

What is it that causes Van Vernet's eyes to gleam, and his lips to twitch with some new, strange excitement, as they put the casket down? His gaze rests upon it as if fascinated.

Archibald Warburton, the man in the black and scarlet domino, the man who had employed him to watch the movements of Leslie Warburton, was six-foot tall. And this

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casket—it was made for a much shorter, a much smaller man!

If *this* were intended for Archibald Warburton, who, then, was the six-foot masker?

With eyes aglow, and firmly-compressed lips, Van Vernet cast a last glance at the casket and the name, Archibald Warburton, on the plate. Then turning away, he followed the two undertakers from the house.

At the foot of the steps he paused, and looked up at the closed windows with the face of a man who saw long-looked-for daylight through a cloud of mist.

"Ah, Alan Warburton," he muttered, "*I have you now!*"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL.

In every city where splendor abounds and wealth rolls in carriages, can be found, also, squalor and wretchedness. If the rich have their avenues, and the good and virtuous their sanctuaries, so have the poor their by-ways and alleys, and the vicious their haunts. In a great city there is room for all, and a place for everything.

Papa and Mamma Francoise had left their abiding-place in the slums for a refuge even more secure.

Van Vernet had followed the two women to a narrow street, long since left behind by the march of progress; a street where the huts and tumble-down frame buildings had once been reputable dwellings and stores, scattered promiscuously along on either side of a thoroughfare that had once been

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clean, and inhabited by modest industry. But that was many years ago: it had long been given over to dirt and disorder without, and to rags, poverty, rats and filth within. Here dwelt many foreigners, and the sound of numerous tongues speaking in many languages, might always be heard.

On this street, in the upper rooms of a rickety two-story house, Papa and Mamma Francoise had set up their household gods after their flight from the scene of Josef Siebel's murder; the lower floor being inhabited by a family of Italians, who possessed an unlimited number of children and a limited knowledge of English.

It is evening, the evening of the day that has witnessed Van Vernet's most recent discovery, and Papa and Mamma are at home.

The room is even more squalid than that recently occupied by them, for, besides a three-legged table, two rickety chairs, a horribly-dilapidated stove and two dirty, ragged pallets at opposite sides of the room, furniture there is none.

Perched upon one of the two rickety chairs, his thin legs extended underneath the table and his elbows resting upon it, sits Papa Francoise, lost in the contemplation of a broken glass containing a small quantity of the worst whiskey; and near him, Mamma squats upon the floor before the rusty stove, in which a brisk fire is burning, stirring vigorously at a strong-smelling decoction which is simmering over the coals.

"Come, old woman," growls Papa, with a self-assertion probably borrowed from the broken glass under his eye, "get that stuff brewed before the gal comes in. And then try and answer my question: what's to be done with her?"

Mamma Francoise stirs the liquid more vigorously, and takes a careful sip from the iron spoon.

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"Ah," she murmurs, "that's the stuff. It's a pity to spoil it."

She rises slowly, and drawing a bottle from her pocket, pours into the basin a few drops of brown liquid, stirs it again, and then removing the decoction from the fire, pours it into a battered cup, which she sets upon the floor at a distance from the stove.

If one may judge from Mamma's abstinence, the liquor *has* been spoiled, for she does not taste it again.

Having thus completed her task, she turns toward one of the pallets, and seating herself thereon lifts her eyes toward Papa.

"What's to be done with the girl?" she repeats. "That's the question I've asked *you* often enough, and I never got an answer yet."

Papa withdraws his gaze from her face, and fixes it once more upon the broken tumbler.

"She ain't no good to us," resumes Mamma, "and we can't have her tied to us always."

"Nor we can't turn her adrift," says Papa, significantly.

"No; we can't turn her adrift," replies Mamma. "We can't afford to keep her, and we can't afford to let her go."

"Consequently—" says Papa.

And then they look at one another in silence.

"We may have to get out of this place at a minute's warning," resumes Mamma, after a time, "and how can we expect to dodge the cops with that gal tied to us? You and I can alter our looks, but we can't alter hers."

"No," says Papa, shaking his head, "we can't alter hers—not now."

"And if we could, we can't alter her actions."

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"No; we can't alter her actions," agrees Papa, with a cunning leer, "except to make 'em worse."

And he casts a suggestive glance toward the tin cup on the floor.

"It won't do," said Mamma, noting the direction of his glance; "it won't do to increase the drams. If she got worse, we couldn't manage her at all. It won't do to give her any more."

"And won't do to give her any less. Old woman, we've just got back to the place we started from."

Mamma Francoise rests her chin in her ample palm and ponders.

"I think I can see a way," she begins. Then, at the sound of an uncertain footstep on the rickety stairs, she stops to listen. "That's her," she says, a frown darkening her face. "She's got to be kept off the street."

She goes to the door, opens it with an angry movement, and peers out into the dark hall.

"Nance, you torment!"

But the head that appears above the stair-railing is not the head of a female, and it is a masculine voice that says, in an undertone:

"Sh-h! Old woman, let me in, and don't make a fuss."

The woman starts back and is about to close the door, when something in the appearance of the man arrests her attention.

As he halts at the top of the stairway, the light from the door reveals to her a shock of close-curling, carroty-red hair.

In another moment he stands with a hand on either door-post.

"How are ye' old uns?" he says, with a grin. "Governor, how are ye?" And then, with a leer, and a lurch which be-

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"How are ye, old uns? Governor, how are ye?—page 194.

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trays the fact that he is half intoxicated, he adds, in a voice indicative of stupid astonishment: "Why, I'm blowed, the blessed old fakers don't know their own young un!"

"Franzy!" Mamma Francoise starts forward, a look of mingled doubt and anxiety upon her face. "Franzy! No, it can't be Franzy!"

"Why can't it be? Ain't ten years in limbo enough? Or ain't I growed as handsome as ye expected to see me?" Then coming into the room, and peering closely into the faces of the two: "I'm blessed if I don't resemble the rest of the family, anyhow."

The two Francoises drew close together, and scrutinized the new-comer keenly, doubtfully, with suspicion.

Ten years ago, their son, Franzy, then a beardless boy of seventeen, and a worthy child of his parents, had reluctantly turned his back upon the outer world and assumed a prison garb, to serve out a twenty years' sentence for the crime of manslaughter.

Ten years had elapsed and this man, just such a man as their boy must have become, stands before them and claims them for his parents.

There is little trace of the old Franz, save the carroty hair, the color of the eyes, the devil-may-care manner, and the reckless speech. And after a prolonged gaze, Papa says, still hesitatingly:

"Franzy! is it really Franzy?"

The new claimant to parental affection flings out his hand with a fierce gesture, and a horrible oath breaks from his lips.

"Is it *really* Franzy?" he cries, derisively. "Who else do ye think would be likely to claim *yer* kinship? I've put in

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ten years in the stripes, an' I'm about as proud of ye as I was of my ball and chain. I've taken the trouble ter hunt ye up, with the police hot on my trail; maybe ye don't want ter own the son as might a-been a decent man but for yer teachin'. Well, I ain't partikeler; I'll take myself out of yer quarters."

He turns about with a firm, resentful movement, and Mamma Francoise springs forward with a look of conviction on her hard face.

"Anybody'd know ye after *that* blow out," she says with a grin. "Ye're the same old sixpence, Franzy; let's have a look at ye."

She lays a hand upon his arm, and he turns back half reluctantly.

"Wot's struck ye?" he asks, resentfully. "Maybe it's occurred to ye that I may have got a bit o' money about me. If that's yer lay, ye're left. An' I may as well tell ye that if ye can't help a fellow to a little of the necessary, there's no good o' my stoppin' here."

And shaking her hand from his arm, this affectionate Prodigal strides past her, and peers eagerly into the broken glass upon the table.

"Empty, of course," he mutters; "I might a-known it."

Then his eyes fix upon the tin cup containing Mamma's choice brew. Striding forward, he seizes it, smells its contents, and with a grunt of satisfaction raises it to his lips.

In an instant Mamma Francoise springs forward, and seizing the cup with both hands, holds it away from his mouth.

"Stop, Franz! you mustn't drink that."

A string of oaths rolls from his lips, and he wrests the cup from her hand, spilling half its contents in the act.

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"Stop, Franzy!" calls Papa, excitedly; "that stuff won't be good for you."

And hurrying to one of the pallets he draws from under it a bottle, which, together with the broken tumbler, he presents to the angry young man.

"Here, Franzy, drink this."

But the Prodigal shakes off his father's persuasive touch, and again seizes upon the cup of warm liquor.

"Franzy!" cries Papa, in a tremor of fear, "drop that; *it's doctored.*"

The Prodigal moves a step backward, and slowly lowers the cup.

"Oh!" he ejaculates, musingly, "it's doctored! Wot are ye up to, old uns? If it's a doctored dose, I don't want it—not yet. Come, sit down and let's talk matters over."

Taking the bottle from the old man's hand, he goes back to the table, seats himself on the chair recently occupied by the elder Francoise, motioning that worthy to occupy the only remaining chair. And courtesy being an unknown quality among the Francoises, the three are soon grouped about the table, Mamma accommodating herself as best she can.

"Franzy," says Mamma, after refreshing herself from the bottle, which goes from hand to hand; "before you worry any more about that medicine, an' who it's for, tell us how came yer out?"

"How came I out? Easy enough. There was three of us; we worked for it five months ahead, and one of us had a pal outside. Pass up the bottle, old top, while I explain."

Having refreshed himself from the bottle, he begins his story, interluding it with innumerable oaths, and allotting to

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himself a full share of the daring and dangerous feats accompanying the escape.

"It's plain that ye ain't read the papers," he concludes. "Ye'd know all about it, if ye had."

CHAPTER XXVII.

FRANZY FRANCOISE'S GALLANTRY.

While this reunited family, warmed to cordiality by the contents of the aforementioned bottle, exchanged confidences, the evening wore on.

Franz had related the story of his escape and his subsequent adventures, and finished by telling them how, by the merest accident, he had espied Mamma and Nance upon their return from the Warburton mansion; and how, at the risk of being detained by a too-zealous "cop," he had followed them, and so discovered their present abode.

In exchange for this interesting story, Papa had briefly sketched the outline of the career run by himself and Mamma during the ten years of their son's absence, up to the time of their retreat from the scene of the Siebel tragedy.

"We were doing a good business," sighed Papa, dolefully, "a very good business, in that house. But one night there were two or three there with—goods, and while the old woman and I were attending to business, the others got into a fuss—ah. We had no hand in it, the old woman and me, but there was a man killed, and it wasn't safe to stay there. Franzy."

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"Umph!" muttered the hopeful son; "who did the killin'?"

Papa glanced uneasily at the old woman, and then replied:

"We don't know, Franzy. The fight began when we were out of the room, and—we don't know."

"That's a pity; wasn't there any reward?"

"Yes, boy," said Mamma, eagerly; "a big reward. An' if we could tell who did the thing, we would be rich."

"Somebody got arrested, of course?"

"N—no, Franzy; nobody's been arrested—not yet."

"Oh, they're a-lookin' fer somebody on suspicion? I say, old top, if nobody knows who struck the blow, seems to me ye're runnin' a little risk yerself. S'pose they should run yer to earth, eh?"

"We've been careful, Franzy."

"S'pose ye have—look here, old un, don't ye see yer chance?"

"How, Franzy?"

"How! If I was you, I'd clear my own skirts, and git that reward."

"How? how?"

"*I'd know who did the killin'.*"

And he leaned forward, took the bottle from Mamma's reluctant hand, and drained it to the last drop, while Papa and Mamma looked into each other's eyes, some new thought sending a flush of excitement to the face of each.

"Ah, Franzy," murmured Mamma, casting upon him a look of pride, such as a tiger might bestow upon her cub, "ye'll be a blessin' to yer old mother yet!"

Then she turns her head and listens, while Franz, casting a wistful look at the now empty bottle, rises to his feet the

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movement betraying the fact that he is physically intoxicated, although his head as yet seems so clear.

Again footsteps approach, and Mamma hastens to the door, listens a moment, opens it cautiously, and peers out.

"It's that gal," she mutters, setting the door wide open. "Come in, you Nance! Where have you been, making yourself a nuisance?"

Then she falls back a pace, staring stupidly at the strangely-assorted couple who stand in the doorway.

A girl, a woman, young or old you can hardly tell which; with a face scarcely human, so bleared are the eyes, so sodden, besotted and maudlin the entire countenance; clad in foul rags and smeared with dirt, she reels as she advances, and clings to the supporting arm of a black-robed Sister of Mercy, who towers above her tall and slender, and who looks upon them all with sweet, brave eyes, and speaks with sorrowful dignity:

"My duty called me into your street, madam, and I found this poor creature surrounded by boisterous children, and striving to free herself from them. They tell me that this is her home; is she your daughter?"

A look of anger gleams in Mamma's eyes, but she suppresses her wrath and answers:

"No; she's not our daughter, but she's a fine trouble to us, just the same. Nance, let go the lady, and git out of the way."

With a whine of fear, the girl drops the arm of the Sister, and turns away. But her new-found friend restrains her, and with a hand resting upon her arm, again addresses Mamma:

"They tell me that this girl's mind has been destroyed by liquor, and that still you permit her to drink. This cannot

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be overlooked. She is not your child, you say; may I not take her to our hospital?"

These are charitable words, but they bring Papa Francoise suddenly to his feet, and cause Mamma's true nature to assert itself.

Springing forward with a cry of rage, she seizes the arm of the girl, Nance, drags her from the Sister's side, and pushes her toward the nearest pallet with such violence that the reeling girl falls to the floor, where she lies trembling with fear and whimpering piteously.

"This comes of letting you wander around, eh?" hisses Mamma, with a fierce glance at the prostrate girl. Then turning to the Sister of Mercy, she cries: "That gal is *my* charge, and I'm able to take care of her. Your hospital prayers wouldn't do her any good."

As she speaks, Papa moves stealthily forward and touches her elbow.

"Hold your tongue, you old fool," he whispers sharply.

Then to the Sister he says, with fawning obsequiousness:

"You see, lady, the poor girl is my wife's niece, and she was born with a drunkard's appetite. We have to give her drink, but we couldn't hear of sending the poor child to a hospital; oh, no!"

Since the entrance of the Sister and Nance, Franz has apparently been engaged in steadying both his legs and his intellect. He now comes forward with a lurch, and inquires with tipsy gravity:

"Wot's the row? Anythin' as I kin help out?"

"Only a little word about our Nance, my boy," replies Mamma, who has mastered, outwardly, her fit of rage. "**The charitable lady wants our Nance.**"

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"The lady is very kind," chimes in Papa; "but we can't spare Nance, poor girl."

"Can't we?" queries Franz, aggressively, turning to look at the prostrate girl. "Now, why can't we spare her? I kin spare her; who's she, anyhow? Here you, Nance, git up."

"Now, Franzy,"—begins Mamma.

"S'h–h, my boy,"—whispers Papa, appealingly.

But he roughly repulses Mamma's extended hand.

"Let up, old woman," he says, coarsely; and then, pushing her aside, he addresses the Sister:

"I say, what—er—ye want—er—her for, any'ow?"

The Sister turns away, and addresses herself once more to Mamma.

"I cannot understand why that girl may not have proper care," she says, sternly. "If her intellect has been shattered by the use of liquor, this is not the place for her," pointing her remark by a glance at Franz and the empty bottle. "Body and soul will both be sacrificed here. I shall not let this matter rest, and if I find that you have no legal authority—"

But again fury overmasters prudence. Mamma springs toward her with a yell of rage.

"Ah, you cat-o'-the-world," she cries, "go home with yer pious cant! The gal's—"

The words die away in a gurgle; the hand of Franz, roughly pressed against her mouth, has stopped her utterance.

"Oh, get out, old woman!" he exclaims, pushing her away and steadying himself after the effort. "Ye're gittin' too familiar, ye air."

Then seeing that the Sister, convinced of her inability to reason with the unreasonable, had turned to go, he cried out:

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"Hold on, mum; if ye want that gal, ye kin have her *I'm* runnin' this."

"I shall not forget that poor creature," says the Sister, still addressing Mamma and ignoring Franz; "and if I find that she is not—"

She leaves the sentence unfinished, for Mamma darts toward her with extended clutches, and is only restrained by Papa's stoutest efforts, aided by the hand of Franz, which once more comes forcibly in contact with the virago's mouth, just as it opens to pour forth fresh imprecations.

To linger is worse than folly, and the Sister, casting a pitying glance toward the girl, who is now slowly struggling up, turns away and goes sadly out from the horrible place.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FRANZ FRANCOISE BELLIGERENT.

After the departure of the Sister of Mercy, an unnatural silence brooded over the room; a silence, not a stillness, for Mamma Francoise, uttering no word, dragged the unfortunate Nance to one of the pallets, forced the remainder of the warm liquor down her throat, and then pushed her back upon the pallet, where she lay a dirty, moveless, stupid heap of wretched humanity.

Then Mamma seated herself upon the one unoccupied stool, and glared alternately at the two men.

Papa Francoise was evidently both disturbed and alarmed at this visit from the Sister of Mercy, and he seemed intent

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upon solving some new problem propounded to him by the scene just ended.

Franz leered and lounged, with seeming indifference to all his surroundings. His recent potations were evidently taking effect, for after a few moments, during which he made very visible efforts to look alert, and interested in the discussion which, as he seemed vaguely to realize, was impending, he brought himself unsteadily to his feet, staggered across the room, and flinging himself upon the unoccupied pallet, muttered some incoherent words and subsided into stillness and slumber.

The eyes of the old woman followed his movements with anxious interest, and when he seemed at last lost to all ordinary sound, she arose and carried her stool across to where Papa, leaning against the table, still meditated.

"Sit down," she said, in low, peremptory tones, and pushing the stool lately vacated by Franz toward her spouse; "sit down. We're in a pretty mess, ain't we?"

Papa seated himself and favored her with a vacant stare.

"Eh!" he said, absently; "what's to be done?"

Mamma cast a quick look toward her recumbent Prodigal, and leaned forward until her lips touched the old man's ear,

"Mind this," she hissed; "*he* ain't to know too much. He's got the devil in him; it won't do to put ourselves under his thumb."

"Don't you worry," retorted Papa, in the same sharp whisper, "I ain't anxious to be rode by the two of ye: Franzy's too much like his ma. It won't do to let him know everything."

Mamma gave a derisive sniff, a sort of acknowledgment

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of the compliment—one of the only kind ever paid her by her worser half,—and then said:

"Franzy'll be a big help to us, if we can keep him away from the cops. But you an' me has planned too long to let him step in now an' take things out of our hands. He's too reckless; we wouldn't move fast enough to suit him, an'—he'd make us trouble."

"Yes," assented the old man, "he'd have things his own way, or he'd make us trouble; he always did."

Mamma arose, stirred the smouldering fire, and resuming her seat, began afresh:

"Now, then, we've got to decide about that gal. She can't go to no hospital?"

"No; she can't."

"And she can't stay with us. It was a big risk before; now that Franzy is back, it's a bigger risk."

"That's so." Papa wrinkled his brows for a moment and then said: "See here, old woman, Franz 'll be bound ter know something about that gal when he gits his head clear."

"I s'pose so."

"Well, s'pose we tell him about her."

"What for?"

"Ter satisfy him, an' ter git his help."

"His help?" muttered Mamma. "That might do."

Suddenly Papa lifted a warning finger. "Hush," he whispered; "there's somebody outside o' that door."

A low, firm knock put a period to his sentence. Mamma made a sign which meant caution, and then creeping noiselessly to the door, listened. No sound could be heard from without, and after another moment of waiting she called sharply:

"Who's there?"

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"Open de do'; I's got a message fo' yo'."

The voice, and the unmistakable African dialect, reassured the pair, whose only dread was the police; and to barricade their doors against chance visitors was no part of the Francoise policy.

Mamma glided toward the pallet where lay her returned Prodigal, and bent above him.

His face was turned outward toward the door, and putting two strong hands beneath his shoulders, she applied her strength to the task of rolling him over, drew a ragged blanket well up about him, and left him lying thus, his face to the wall and completely hidden from whoever might enter.

Then she went boldly to the door, and opening it wide, stood face to face with a tall African, black as ebony, and wearing a fine suit of broadcloth, poorly concealed underneath a shabby outer garment. He bowed to Mamma as obsequiously as if she were a duchess, and this garret her drawing-room, and stepping inside, closed the door behind him.

"You will excuse me," he said, politely, "but my business is private, and some one might come up the stairs."

"What do you want?"

The incautious words were uttered by Papa Francoise, who, noting the entire absence of his negro accent, arose hastily, his face full of alarm.

The African smiled blandly.

"I assumed my accent in order to reassure you, sir," he said, coolly. "You might not have admitted me if you had thought me a white man, and I am sent by your patron."

"By our patron!" Mamma echoed his words in skeptical surprise.

"Yes; I am his servant."

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Papa and Mamma gazed at each other blankly and drew nearer together.

"He has sent you this note," pursued the nonchalant fellow, keeping his eyes fixed upon Mamma's face while he drew from his pocket a folded paper. "And I am to take your answer."

Papa took the proffered note reluctantly, glanced at the superscription, and suddenly changed his manner.

"That is not directed to me," he cried, sharply. "You have made a mistake."

"It is directed to Papa Francoise."

Papa peered closer at the superscription. "Yes; I think that's it. It's not my name; it's not for me."

"My dear sir, I know you too well. You need not fear me; I am Mr. Warburton's body servant."

"Oh!" Mamma uttered the syllable sharply, then suddenly restrained herself, and coming toward the messenger with cat-like tread, she said, coaxingly: "And who may this Mr. War—war, this master of yours be?"

The man looked from one to the other, and then turned his gaze upon the occupants of the two pallets. "Who are these?" he asked, briefly.

Mamma's answer came very promptly.

"Only two poor people we knew in another part of the city. They have been turned out by their landlord, poor things, and last night they slept in the street."

A smile crossed the face of the wily African, and he turned toward Papa.

"Read my master's note, if you please," he said. "It was written to *you*."

Slowly Papa unfolded the note, and his eyes seemed bursting from their sockets as he read.

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Name your price, but keep your whereabouts from the police. If you are called upon to identify me, *you do not know me.*

While Papa reads, the slumbering Franz begins to move and to mutter.

"Give me the file, Jim," he says, in a low, cautious tone. "Curse the darbies—I—"

The sudden overturning of a stool, caused by a quick backward movement on the part of Mamma, drowns the rest of this muttered speech.

But the words have caught the ear of the colored gentleman, who moves a pace nearer the sleeper, and seems anxious to hear more.

While Papa still stares at the note in his hand, Mamma stoops and restores the stool to its upright position, making even more noise than in the overturning. And Franz turns, yawns, stretches, and slowly brings himself to a sitting posture.

Something like a frown crosses the dark face of Papa Francoise's visitor. To bring himself face to face with Papa, and to satisfy himself on certain doubtful points, he has paused for neither food nor rest, but has followed up his discovery of the morning, by an evening's visit to the new lurking-place of the Francoises,—for the sable gentleman, who would fain win the confidence of Papa in the character of body servant to Alan Warburton, is none other than Van Vernet.

Fertile in construction, daring in execution, he has hoped by a bold stroke to make a most important discovery. Viewing the events of the morning from a perfectly natural standpoint, he has rapidly reached the following conclusion:

If the fugitive Sailor and Alan Warburton are one and the

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same, then, undoubtedly, the message left by Mamma at the door of the Warburtons was intended for Alan. What was the purport of that message, he may find it difficult to discover,—but may he not be able to surprise from Papa an acknowledgment of his connection with the aristocrat of Warburton place?

To arrest the Francoises was, at present, no part of his plan. This would be to alarm Alan Warburton, and to lessen his own chances for making discoveries. He had found Papa Francoise, and it would be strange if he again escaped from his surveillance.

He had not counted upon the presence of a third, and even a fourth party, in paying his visit to the Francoises. And now, as the recumbent Franz began to move and to mutter, Van Vernet turned toward the pallet a keen and suspicious glance.

But never was there a more manifest combination of drowsiness and drunken stupidity than that displayed upon the face of Franz, as he raised himself upon the pallet and stared stupidly at the ebonied stranger.

Then a look of abject terror crept into his face, and he seemed making a powerful effort to rouse his drunken faculties. Slowly he rose from the pallet, and staggered to his feet, muttering some unintelligible words. Then, after a stealthy glance about the room, he turned and reeled toward the door.

As he approached, Van Vernet, still gazing steadfastly into his face, stepped aside, and at the instant Franz made a lurch in the same direction.

In another moment,—neither Papa nor Mamma could have told how it came about,—the two were upon the floor. Franz

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Francoise uppermost, his knees upon the breast of his antagonist!

As Van Vernet, who had fallen with one arm underneath him, made his first movement in self-defence, his ears were greeted by a warning hiss, and he felt the pressure of a keen-edged knife against his throat!

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN DURANCE VILE.

This onslaught, so swift and unexpected, took Papa and Mamma completely by surprise, and, for the moment, threw even Vernet off his guard.

"Scoundrel!" he exclaimed, while the menacing knife pressed against his throat; "what does this mean?"

For answer, Franz shot a glance toward the two elder Francoises, and said in a hoarse, unnatural whisper:

"Deek the cove;* he's no dark lantern!"

"Eh!" from Papa, in a frightened gasp.

"Done!" from Mamma, in an angry hiss.

And then, as the two started forward, Vernet, realizing that this shrewd ruffian had somehow penetrated his disguise, gathered all his strength and began a fierce struggle for liberty.

As they writhed together upon the floor, Franz shot out another sentence, this time without turning his head.

"A dead act," he hissed; "we're copped to rights!"

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* Look at him.

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Which, being rendered into English, meant: "Combine the attack; we are in danger of arrest."

And then the struggle became a question of three to one.

Vernet fought valiantly, but he lay at last captive under the combined clutch of Papa and Franz, and menaced by the knife which Mamma, having snatched it from the hand of her hopeful son, held above his head.

Instinctively the two elder outlaws obeyed the few words of command that fell from the lips of their returned Prodigal; and in spite of his splendid resistance, Van Vernet was bound hand and foot, a prisoner in the power of the Francoises.

His clothing was torn and disarranged; his wig was all awry; and large patches of his sable complexion had transferred themselves from his countenance to the hands and garments of his captors.

"No dark lantern," indeed. The natural white shone in spots through its ebony coating, and three people less fiercely in earnest than the Francoises would have gone wild with merriment, so ludicrous was the plight of the hapless detective.

"Now then," began Franz, in a low gutteral that caused Mamma to start, and Papa to favor him with a stare of surprise; "now then, no tricks, my cornered cop. You may talk, but—" and he glanced significantly from the knife in Mamma's hand to the pistol now in his own,—"be careful about raising yer voice; you've got pals in the street, maybe. You *may* pipe to them, but,—" with a click of the pistol,—"*ye're* a dead man before they can lift a hoof!"

Vernet's eyes blazed with wrath, but he maintained a scornful silence.

The three Francoises, without withdrawing their gaze from their prisoner, consulted in harsh whispers. It was a brief

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