

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

Thomas Preskett Prest

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VOLUME III

Chapter CXXXII. THE EXPLANATION, AND THE PROPOSAL. -- A TETE--A--TETE.

A week or more had passed away since the visit of the attorney to Mrs. Meredith, and yet the latter saw not a sufficient reason why she should send for her friend. Things were not ripe yet; the colonel had, it was true, been melting gradually; but then to progress ever so little, was a great point in anything -- no matter what it is -- something gained.

Mrs. Meredith, however, by no means lost sight of her object; she had that steadily in view, and worked for it every day; and her daughter was no less assiduous -- she was attentive and humble, waited upon Colonel Deverill with the affectionate assiduity of a daughter; while, on his part, he sighed and said, what a happy man he must be, who should have her for a wife.

It was arranged one day, when he appeared to be more than usually tender, that the mother should be out that evening, and see some of her friends, and break the news a little to some of them; a pardonable vanity in the lady, for it was not in accordance with her position in society that her daughter could expect such an offer as the one she daily expected.

The lady did as she had agreed, and left the house, while Margaret went to the colonel's sitting-room when his bell rang, and hoped he'd excuse the absence of her mother, as she had gone out to see some friends whom she had not seen for some time.

"I am happy i having you attend to me, Miss Margaret. I cannot be attended to better. I am afraid, as it is, I am a terrible annoyance to you."

"Annoyance, colonel! far from it -- very far from it; and I do hope you do not mean what you say, else I shall fear I have unwillingly given you some cause for your opinion, which I shall the more regret, as you are yourself so kind. I assure you it gives me great pleasure when I know I can do aught to alleviate the misfortunes, or satisfy the wishes of any of my friends."

"And do you reckon me one, Miss Margaret?"

"I hope Colonel Deverill will not consider me too presumptuous in looking upon him as something more than a mere casual friend or acquaintance."

"Casual acquaintance, Miss Margaret -- casual acquaintance!"

"Well, friendship, if you allow me to say so."

"Friendship!" repeated the colonel, with a deep drawn sigh; "I would I could claim a yet warmer title than a friend. I could then hope for some of those pleasures which are denied a solitary man like me -- I should then have those whom I loved to soothe my death-bed, and whom I could benefit by worldly wealth, could I, Margaret, think I could claim a feeling stronger than that of friendship."

"Oh! Colonel Deverill, how can you talk in this strain? Indeed, you -- you are too good -- dear me, I do not know what I was about to say."

"Miss Meredith," said the colonel, taking her hand with gentleness, and tenderly pressing it, "I am seen to a great disadvantage; I have been many years fighting for my country, and I have not had time to cultivate those sweet and tender emotions such as I feel at this moment."

"Yes, you must have suffered much," said Margaret.

"And now, when I return again, I am somewhat the worse in appearance; but my heart is as warm as ever it was, and I am more than ever alive to the charm of female society. It is that unreserved interchange of thought and good offices which attaches me to life, and makes me live even with hope. Do not dispel this day-dream of mine, Margaret."

The colonel paused and pressed her hand to his lips, while she appeared confused and irresolute, and was unable to withdraw her hand from his, but at length she sank trembling into a chair.

"My charming creature, may I suppose this emotion is caused by excess of feeling -- that -- that -- in short, I am not wholly indifferent to you?"

"Oh, colonel! I'm really unable to speak!"

"My beloved girl, I am loved; yes, I see it -- oh, happiness!"

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Midst these broken sentences, the colonel contrived to slip his hand round the young lady's waist, and he pressed her close to him. For a moment she forgot his proximity, and remained passive; but suddenly and quietly disengaging herself, she said, —

"Pardon, me, Colonel Deverill; I had forgotton — I was unconscious — a weakness came over me, and — "

"You love me!"

"If you have become acquainted with that which was a secret, sir, you must use it as such; but you must not talk in this strain to me; promise me, colonel, and — and — I will see about the tea immediately."

"May I speak to your mother?"

"Colonel Deverill can do as he pleases. I have no secrets from my dear mamma."

"I will — I will, and Heaven bless you for saying so much. I may say you are not averse to me, and that, with her consent, I shall not despair."

"We will say no more, Colonel Deverill," said the cautious maiden.

"You shall command me — you are the arbitress of my fate," said the colonel, who had become warmer and eulogistic to a degree.

Much more, however, passed between them; the ice was broken, and they conversed more freely; for when they began the tea, much was said that did not partake of so warm a character as that which had already passed; but it, nevertheless, partook of the same purpose.

"When I am married," said the colonel, "I should like a carriage. I have no use for one now, as I could but very seldom ride; but when I had a wife, then I should wish for her accommodation as well as my own; but which do you prefer, country or town life?"

"There is much of comfort and quiet in a country life,": said Margaret; "and yet I am not entirely wedded to country life — there is much of pleasure in London."

"So there is; and where you have no resources of your own, or in your own house, it is preferable; but when such is the case, London loses all its charms, or a great part of them."

"So it does," said Margaret.

"However, I am partial to both. I should like a partial town and country life."

"That, indeed, would be the very greatest delight one could experience; to live sometimes in one place, and sometimes in another."

"So it would."

"By the way, if we kept a carriage, which I would do," said the colonel, after a pause, "it would be a very excellent thing to enable us to travel about in."

"Perhaps you have been to some parts, and like them better than others."

"Yes, I have been to a good many parts; but I cannot at this moment speak of them; but we would look out for some place that would be more agreeable than others."

"Perhaps you have some place of your own you would like to live in?"

"No, — not exactly; these things are not of one's own choice, and not empty; and, therefore, are useless as residences."

"Certainly. Besides, you must be near enough to come to town for business purposes."

"Yes, I must, but that needn't be often," replied the colonel; "but where there is plenty of means, there is no fear of not getting what we want."

"No, indeed, there is not."

"And one thing alone would repay me for the hardships I have endured, the misery I have suffered, and the misfortunes I have experienced in all my marchings and counter-marchings; my sleeping in the open air by night, and scorched by the sun by day."

"And what may that be, colonel?"

"Why, the power it gives me of conferring happiness and wealth upon you; for, in the natural course of events, you will outlive me."

"Oh, for mercy's sake, don't talk of that, sir."

"But it is a matter that I can think of calmly enough; and, as a soldier, I have ample occasion, I can assure you."

"Indeed! I dare say you must have."

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"I can remember, on one occasion, especially, which I will relate to you, if I do not weary," said Colonel Deverill.

"On, no — no! I cannot be weary," said Margaret.

"Then I will tell you. I was ordered to march some troops to attack the stockade of Puttythempoor, a very strong place."

"Was it a town?"

"No, merely a place of strength, where the enemy had gathered together in great numbers; and here we were determined to attack them. The stockade was a very strong place; and there were strong and high timber fences, with large mounds of earth and bags of sand, all tending to make the place one of great strength," said the colonel.

"What a place it must have been!"

"Yes; it was very strong. Well, my party did not amount to more than fifteen hundred men strong, while the enemy, with the advantages of the defence, were more than three thousand, giving them a vast superiority over us; but we were not to be daunted by that; we were determined to make a dash, and, from the character of the men I commanded, I had no fear of the result. We were sure to make our way among them, and then we were sure of the result."

"How dreadful!"

"Well, the men were divided into three bodies — five hundred each — and these into divisions of one hundred each, the one to support the other. We had no guns, and were therefore compelled to depend entirely upon our luck in the assault."

"Goodness me! I wonder how you could think of it with anything like ease or comfort. It would make me all of a freeze!"

"Oh, Margaret! when the soldier is in the field of battle, he must get the better of all feelings, save those of honour."

"It is too true!" said Margaret, with a sigh.

"And then," said Colonel Deverill, "we, having arranged our plans, and settled who was to take the command, if I had the mischance to fall — "

"Good Heavens!"

"Well, I say, having done all this, we were resolved to make a dash at the point, and take the place by assault. To do this the more effectually, we were resolved to make the attempt in three different places at once, so as to divert the enemy's attention, and to place them in a cross fire, and thus take them the more easily.

"This plan was carried out to the letter, and we made the attack; but the enemy defended their stockade so vigorously, and what with the strength of the place, and the determination of the enemy, we were for some time repulsed — at least, held at bay.

"This would never do, I thought. I must mount the breach myself; for, if my division was held at bay, I had fears of the rest; they might meet repulses also, which would occasion the loss of our whole party, which would have been sure destruction; not defeat alone, but imprisonment, and possibly death from ill-usage, or from malignant disorders."

"What fearful scenes!"

"I ordered my men to keep close and follow me. We made a dash at the stockade three abreast, and up we went. By Jove, it was fine work — a brave sight — a sight I can never forget while I have remembrance left me. We got up the stockade Heaven knows how, and were over it in the space of a minute; but the impetuosity of those who came first was not seconded by those who came after; it was easy enough to get down among the Indians, but it was very hard to get up; and while our friends were getting up, we were exposed to the strength of hundreds — only four men to as many hundreds for several minutes."

"Goodness, how dreadful! Were you not all killed?"

"Except for myself, they were all killed. Each received a dozen wounds, and I should have met with the same fate, but for an Indian officer, who, seeing me surrounded and thrown down, saved my life from the fury of his men; but, in a minute after, I was free — my own men came down by dozens, and the blacks were swept off by the hundred.

"At that moment, too, there were our other parties just appearing over the other parts of the stockade, so we had now plenty of assistance.

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"The blacks now on all sides fell in numbers before the fire, and the place was our own; and a hearty cheer was given that made the woods re-echo again."

"Were you not glad the danger was over?"

"The danger was not over, though we thought it was; for suddenly the earth heaved up with a tremendous explosion, and many of our poor fellows were blown up into the air, and I myself was completely knocked over and smothered in dirt; however, it was dry, and we were soon put to rights again. I was picked up, and nothing more happened."

"What was the cause of your disaster?"

"Oh, a mine the scamps had sprung as they were retiring, hoping to do us more mischief than they did; however, we beat them off, and they lost many men on that occasion, and did not show themselves again, but made the best of their way through the woods and jungle by some paths that we did not know, and hence we did not follow them further."

"It must have been dreadfully dangerous."

"Yes, life was the game we played for, and it was won and lost often enough, during that war; but we must expect it should be so."

"But you are now safe."

"Yes, I am now safe, and, I may say, happy. I have had some knocks, and am none the better for them bodily; but then I have had them well paid for, so I must not complain. I have now but one object to attain before I die."

"And what may that be, colonel, if it be no secret?"

"It is not to you, Miss Meredith," said the colonel; "it is an early day -- a day on which I may claim you as my own; then, indeed, I shall have lived and accomplished something; an object worth living for, and, may I say so, worth dying for."

"Ah, I hope you may live many years yet, colonel -- many years of life and happiness, to enjoy the fortune you have so gallantly won. Indeed, I think no fortune ought to give so much joy as the soldier's."

"And why, Miss Meredith?"

"Because there is none so arduously won; won often with bloodshed, and even life; it ought, indeed, to give great and lasting happiness."

"If I obtain my wishes, I shall be the happiest man in the universe; and I would go through all I have gone through over -- aye, twice over, and that is no little -- to have such a reward as the one I now seek -- it is the crowning happiness of my life."

"You are very kind to say all this -- "

"Aye, but I mean it. It is no common compliment," said the colonel; "I mean what I say, most earnestly. Do you believe what I say? I am not used to the pretty speeches of young men who make love -- perhaps I ought; but I am an old soldier, and am but little used to these ways; however, I have spoken my mind, and I hope you will not allow any one else to injure my cause."

"Anything you have said, Colonel Deverill, has been of too serious a nature for me to think of anything save the object itself. Your conduct has been that of a gentleman, and I should be wanting in respect to myself, and courtesy to you, to think otherwise than seriously of it," was the wily reply of Margaret.

"You have my own thoughts," said the colonel.

"There is my ma'," said Margaret, as the knocker and bell sounded.

"You will do your utmost with Mrs. Meredith for me, and I will beseech her myself," said the colonel; "I hope she will take things in a favourable light."

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Chapter CXXXIII. MRS. MEREDITH'S CONSULTATION WITH MR. TWISSEL, AND HER RESOLVE.

Mrs. Meredith's arrival was very opportune, for it broke off the interview; and Margaret descended to the parlour, where her mother she knew would repair the moment she had freed herself from her dress. Margaret was now left alone for a few moments. She felt all the exultation of success in a strategy, and all the exhilaration of spirits that such a prospect of wealth and riches floating before her eyes, and all the natural consequents upon such possessions would give rise to.

"I shall be rich," she thought. "Aye, I shall not only be rich, but very rich — I know I shall. Well, he is old — no matter; better be an old man's darling, than a young man's slave. Yes; I shall know how to use wealth. I shall be able to spend a little of his countless hoards, and he will not thwart me, I am sure. He will be too fond — too doating, by far. I shall be indulged like a spoiled child, I am sure."

Margaret smiled at the thought of what length the colonel might not be induced to carry his fondness for her.

"He will not set any value upon what will give me pleasure. I am sure he will give me all I ask. I have but to ask him for what I want, and he must comply. I am sure he is too easy — too quiet and generous to make a moment's hesitation."

The colonel, too, was left to his reflections, but as to what they were we know not. He sat long, silently gazing at the fire.

Mrs. Meredith now entered the apartment, and, looking at her daughter, she said, —

"Eh! something been said, Margaret? I can see by your eye that the colonel has said something to you. Am I not right, my dear?"

"Yes, ma'; you are right."

"Well, my love, and what did he say? I am dying with curiosity."

"It will be quite impossible to do that; but he has been quite explicit enough, without any hesitation at all, or any reserve — quite candid and open."

"He has offered?"

"Yes; he wishes for your consent; for I told him I could not possibly decide without your consent and countenance. He did not disapprove of that, only he wished to propitiate you in his favour, and begged me to let him have the satisfaction of knowing that he had my good wishes, and that I could look upon him in a warmer light than a mere friend."

"Which I hope you did?"

"Yes, ma'. I let him imagine that I was not indifferent to his good opinion; but, at the same time, I would not commit myself, but left him to infer a good deal. I think I know, ma', how to manage such an affair well — I may say, very well."

"Exactly, my love. I was sure you would."

"Yes, ma'; I should think I did. For when I found he had proceeded a certain distance, I was resolved that he should speak out plump at once; and when I found he paused, I paused too, and he was compelled to explain; but he betrayed no unwillingness, or anything like hesitation at all, but he has fairly proposed himself to me."

"And you have not committed yourself?"

"Not in the least."

"Very well. I must be cautious, too not to do so; because I must have some conversation with Mr. Twissel, so that we may proceed in a safe manner, and not commit ourselves in any way as we shall repent of afterwards."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, child, you would not marry the colonel if he was not a rich man."

"Not exactly; though I must admit, ma', he is a very nice man — a very nice man, and I should be entitled to a widow's pension, if nothing more, and that I might not have under some circumstances; even you yourself have been left worse off, you see."

"Yes, my child; but circumstances alter cases. I had a better prospect when I first married, else I would not have done so, you may depend upon it. However, we can always retrace our steps, and he cannot. But I will get

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Mr. Twissel to come and see into matters a bit for us."

"Well, ma', you shall do as you think fit — only, take care not to throw away a good chance because you have greater hopes."

"Has he said anything about his property?"

"Not a word, except it was to intimate it was large, and he had won it very hardly, with great danger; but he did not say what it consisted of. Of course I could not ask."

"Oh, dear, no."

"But he intimated he would keep a carriage, and a country house, as well as a town house, besides several other matters, which makes it plain enough he has been used to plenty; besides, as he spoke to me in describing some scenes in India, he appeared so much animated that I am sure he must be what he appears to be, and what he says he is."

"Ah, well, I think myself it is all quite right, and that we shall have nothing to repent there; but we will let all go on but the naming of the day — that must not be named, for, if we do, we shall not be able to retract."

"Oh, no, we shall not have any occasion to do that, I think; but I dare say he will speak to you to-night, as there is time at supper especially."

"No doubt. You may as well retire early, so that you may be absent, and that will give us greater liberty to talk than if you were present, my dear. I wish Mr. Twissel were here; but it can't be helped; and when he does come, I must have some conversation with him, and I must, in the meantime, learn what I can for him to inquire about afterwards."

Thus resolved, Margaret went to bed early, leaving her mother to attend upon the colonel, who sat looking at the fire without any change of posture since the last time he was seen by the girl; but Mrs. Meredith caused him to break the steady gaze and deep thought he was indulging in.

"I hope you have been quite well, colonel, since I left?"

"Yes, quite well, Mrs. Meredith."

"What would you choose for supper?"

"Margaret — "

"Eh?" said Mrs. Meredith, amazed.

"I beg your pardon; I did not know you were near — at least, I did not know I spoke at the moment; but, pray, what did you desire to know?"

"What you would have for supper, sir?"

"Oh, whatever you have at hand; some of what we had for dinner — I think I should like it as soon as you feel disposed to have it. I am ready — quite ready."

"Then it shall be had at once, sir," said Mrs. Meredith; "I will order it up immediately, for it is later than I intended to have stopped out; but the hours so soon ran away, and there were so many motives to forget the time that was flying so fast."

The supper was soon laid, and the colonel and Mrs. Meredith alone sat down to it, at his earnest request. Indeed, they used to have meals much in common; for the colonel professed to be very fond of female company, and was desirous of their company, which they translated into a desire for the presence of Margaret herself.

The supper was laid and over before the colonel said anything; but appeared to be absorbed in deep thought, from which it was difficult to arouse himself. But at length, after looking around once or twice, and not seeing Margaret at table, he said to Mrs. Meredith, —

"I hope I have not driven your daughter away."

"Oh, no, sir; she complains of headache, and has gone to bed somewhat earlier than usual."

"I fear I must lay the blame on myself."

"She did not say you were the cause," replied Mrs. Meredith, "of her ailment; and, therefore, I think you must be free from blame; for she would have said so, if it had so happened. She generally speaks the truth in such matters, at least, and, I believe, in every other."

"No doubt; but I have been speaking upon a subject that concerns my own happiness to her, and perhaps the excitement may have caused her some evil of that sort. She would not, perhaps, name it to you, Mrs. Meredith; but I will. You have been a wife yourself, and know that a few candid words are better, and more to the purpose, than a long desultory courtship."

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"Yes, sir; it certainly is so."

"There is some difference, too, in our ages," said the colonel. "I have not overlooked that matter, at all events; but I hope that will be no cause of impediment or objection."

"It cannot be, sir, in such a case as your own, for instance."

"Well, then, I have proposed for her husband. I wish to make her my wife. I am yet hale and hearty, and have some few years yet which I could wish to pass in happiness, and which I will use to make her happy. And if I die early, I have ample means of providing for her — of leaving her a most handsome and ample fortune. Not more than she deserves; but possibly more than she might have thought of seeking."

"Certainly, sir."

"Then I wish for your consent to our future happiness."

"You may have my good wishes," said Mrs. Meredith.

"You are very good," said the colonel; "and I trust your daughter will live long to make you happy by making her own apparent to you."

"Of course," said Mrs. Meredith, "this is rather a sudden affair; you will not think of hurrying it to a conclusion, but permit her to become acquainted with you, and to know her own mind."

"Certainly, I do wish it pushed on to a conclusion; but not so much so as to cause any dissatisfaction. I am anxious to call her wife. My feelings are those of an ardent lover."

"I do not dispute it."

"Still you and she must be the best judges of all this. You will not, I hope, punish me by compelling me to a longer probation than you are compelled to put me to. I am not like a young man who has a fortune, or rather a living to earn; but I have one ready, a handsome one, and my wife will be a lady of fortune when I die."

"Do not think of dying at such a moment, sir."

"Why, it is not desirable," said the colonel, who did not deem it necessary to carry the conversation on any further that night; thinking, possibly, enough had been said for the first occasion of revealing his passion, and he, no doubt, considered his success signal.

The supper then passed off in the usual style, and Mrs. Meredith left the colonel, and wished him good night, with feelings somewhat akin to triumph, and returned to her own daughter's room, there to cogitate and sleep upon what had that evening taken place. * * * * *

The next day she determined to send to Mr. Twissel, and arrange the meeting she desired; and, at the same time, she resolved that she would not push matters to the extremity, of making a point of knowing what his property were, for she might lose all; she was convinced that the colonel must be a man of large property; how could such a man live if he were not.

That was a speculation she could not help indulging in. She knew that a man in Colonel Deverill's line of life was quite able to support himself; besides, the jewels he had about him were worth a large sum of money; putting all things together, she considered it was not worth while to lose so good, so excellent an opportunity as the present for making a brilliant, at least, an excellent settlement for her daughter, and a home for herself.

"There can be no fear," she muttered; "there can be no fear; her widow's pension will be a better support to her than the livelihood of some."

Mr. Twissel was sent for; and, the papers she desired to find for him, she was fortunate enough to discover, and laid them by at once. The attorney came willingly enough, and was well pleased when he was informed of the success of the search after the papers, and produced the bond, by which she agreed to give him one hundred pounds for his assistance in the marriage affair.

However, he did not seem to agree with her, that she should not be over particular about the colonel's property; he thought that there must be some inquiries made respecting it, to ascertain if there were any or none.

"But," suggested Mrs. Meredith, "the colonel is a kind, but a proud man, and he would, probably, take great and deep offence at any inquiry being made into his pecuniary affairs."

"Hardly, my dear madam; don't you see, love would be strong enough to counter-balance that; he would make some allowance for paternal anxiety and love."

"There is much reason in all that; yet I have heard so much of these nabobs, that one is afraid to lose a good chance by inadvertently touching their weak points; for, the kind of society and company they have, their's is so different to what they find here."

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"Yes, that is very true; but we should like to know that it is true. What service has he been in — I think, though, you said in the East India Service?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, I will make some inquiries at the house; they will answer my inquiries, and no one will even be the wiser for it; they will, at least, tell me if there is such a person in the service, and, perhaps, I can learn something more."

"Very well, that may be done. Will you come round with me to tea this evening, as I will contrive to bring you in the presence of Colonel Deverill, whom you will then see and converse with? I am not sure of it, but I will try to do so."

"I will be here," said the attorney; and, in the mean time, I will make the necessary inquiries."

They parted upon this mutual good understanding; and the attorney, in high spirits, for the papers were of great value to him, and the promised reward was a stimulous to a greater exertion on behalf of Mrs. Meredith and her daughter, for he thought he could do business for the Colonel, after this affair was settled — such an opportunity of increasing his connection did not offer every day.

Mrs. Meredith redoubled her assiduity about the person of Colonel Deverill; and, at the same time, lost no opportunity of putting her daughter forward; nor was that daughter a bit disinclined to take such opportunity as was offered her, of making the most of herself on this occasion, to appear amiable, and in some new and languishing position, or to perform some new service for the colonel.

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Chapter CXXIV. THE INTRODUCTION. -- THE ATTORNEY'S FIRST FEELER.

When the attorney had left the house he proceeded upon some business of his own, and then he proceeded to the India House for the purpose of making inquiries after the colonel, for his friend Mrs. Meredith. In the course of the day he did go to the India House, and, upon making some inquiries, he was sent to a particular department of the house where he saw two gentlemen.

"Pray, sir," said one, "what do you want?"

"I wish to make some inquiries concerning a Colonel Deverill, who is employed, or was serving, in the Honourable East India service."

"In what part was he serving?"

"In India," said the attorney.

"But, to what presidency did he belong?"

"That I do not even know. He has been many years away from England, I understand, and some of his friends have not heard from him for many years, and they are desirous of finding out whether he is dead or alive; and if so, where he is."

"There is a Colonel Deverill returned this year from India."

"Indeed! Do you know anything of him?"

"Nothing more than he has retired from the service on his half pay, some time before he came home, on account of his wounds."

"Is he rich?"

"I can answer no such question."

"I am a solicitor, and do not ask the question from an improper motive."

"You may not, sir, but we cannot answer such a question. We have no inquisitorial knowledge of the private circumstances of those gentlemen who have served in the company's army; but, you put it to your own sagacity to consider how far it would be probable for a man so placed, as regards rank and opportunity, in India, without making money."

"I see; certainly -- he must."

"And yet, you know, there are means of getting rid of money."

"To be sure. I see."

"Not that I have any idea that such can be the case; indeed, I should be disposed to believe the contrary, seeing the colonel must have been wounded long since, for the last engagement must have been some few years since."

"Thank you. I will report what I have learned. You do not know where he can be found at this time?"

"No, indeed; we have no information."

This being all he could learn, he left the India House, and as it was now about time to return to Mrs. Meredith, he at once went back, and having seen all his business transacted, he had now leisure to go there, and in a short time he arrived, and at once related to her all that he had heard respecting the colonel, from the first to the last word of it.

"Well," said Mrs. Meredith, "that, at all events, is very satisfactory."

"Yes, it is something," said the attorney, "to know your man; but, as the clerk said, he might have spent it, that is to say, dissipated it."

"Oh, it's impossible; he's been an invalid a long while now."

"Ah! there's no knowing what might be done in these cases. Who knows what he may have done -- gambled and dived it away, and entered into extravagant speculations, which may have turned out ruinous bubbles."

"Well, well, Mr. Twissell, we won't say much about what might be," said Mrs. Meredith; "we won't care about them; but I am very much obliged to you for this trouble. It is, however, a very satisfactory thing to know he is what he represented himself to be."

"Yes, that is a very great point gained."

"His veracity having been found unimpeachable in one point, may be presumed to be so in another," said Margaret. "It appeared to me to be extremely probable, if not quite certain, he is what he appears to be, I am glad

that all is so far good."

"Be that as it may, it will be more satisfactory to know what his property really consists of, and how much there is about it."

"No doubt; but it would not be worth while to risk anything on that account; he might imagine we were mercenary, and that would disgust him altogether."

"That's what I am fearful of," said the mother.

"We may not yet have occasion to ask him any question, or to make any inquiries of him at all, for we may be able to worm it all out of him."

"That is true," said Mrs. Meredith. "Dear me, there is the bell. Go, Margaret, and say we have an old friend come to tea; perhaps he will excuse you --- he may give the invitation we desire."

Margaret at once departed, and proceeded to the colonel's room, and began to wait upon him as usual; but he saw there was but one cup placed.

"Are you not going to take tea with me, Margaret?" he said. "Am I to be a prisoner, and put in solitary confinement for the evening?"

"Why, colonel, Mr. Twissel has called to take tea with my mother, and as he was a very old and particular acquaintance of my father's, I do not like to put a slight upon him."

"He is a gentleman, I presume?"

"Oh, yes, colonel, he is a member of the profession of the law."

"Oh! Well, will you ask him to tea with me? As we shall be both united, I hope your friends will soon be mine; there can be no great objection to our acquaintance beginning earlier. I am not fond of being entirely alone."

"If we shall not be intruding upon you, sir," said Margaret, "I dare say my mother will. I will tell her of your kindness immediately."

In a few moments Margaret returned to her mother and the attorney, to whom she related the invitation she had received from the colonel, and instantly clutched at the idea of going to the colonel to tea, the thing, of all others, she most desired to do, and, at the same time, she had calculated upon it; for the colonel appeared to be wholly dependant upon them for society, which he appeared to be passionately fond of there, especially Margaret.

"That is just fortunate. Now, Mr. Twissel," said Mrs. Meredith, "you will be cautious, and do not make any open attempt to discover what may be the peculiar species of property he holds; it may do much mischief, you know."

"I am at your mercy," said the lawyer; "if you say so, I will not make any attempt, though I must tell you, Mrs. Meredith, that you will be to blame if you allow your daughter to marry without some inquiry being made; and if he mean well, he will take no offence."

"You may do what you can without broaching the subject to him. Still I think we have heard enough to set all doubts at rest."

"I'm a professional man, my dear madam, and know what the world is, and have had much experience in these matters; however, as I think there is much probability in all he says, why, you shall see I will not do anything that will offend the nicest delicacy."

"That will be all we want, Mr. Twissel; and now come up stairs."

"Mr. Twissel, Colonel Deverill --- Colonel Deverill, Mr. Twissel, an old and dear friend of my late husband, sir, who has called to visit us."

"I am very happy to see the gentleman," said the colonel, but with the air of a man who is conscious of his own superiority, and that he is committing a condescending act. "Will you please to be seated. Excuse my rising, sir; I am an invalid, and am lame; but you are welcome."

"I am much obliged," returned the attorney, bowing. "My good friend Mrs. Meredith has made me intrude upon you, else I had not done so."

"You are welcome, sir," again repeated Colonel Deverill. "Pray be seated; I have seen but little company, and am glad now and then to converse with any one. Will you oblige me, Mrs. Meredith, with making tea for us? Your services are really invaluable."

"Ah, Colonel! you are really too good."

"Not at all. I'm afraid I'm too much in the rear of the march of courtesy since I left England, as our habits and manners in the East are very different to what they are here."

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"Ah! I dare say they live in a style of regal magnificence and splendor," said the attorney.

"Yes; more so than you may at first imagine, and more so than in appearance; so much so that it is difficult for the law at all times to take its course. It becomes a mere dead letter, and the matter usually ends in some indignity being offered to its servants."

"Indeed, sir! that was dangerous."

"Not at all. It was an attorney, who having deputed some one to serve a process, and finding that he could not, imagined that it was the fault of the process server, and he determined to make the attempt himself, being well assured that he could succeed. However, he found himself mistaken, for, after several disasters, that he was led into purposely, he was well pumped upon by some slaves, and thought himself lucky in escaping with life."

"That would never have been permitted here," said the attorney.

"No, possibly not; but there are not the distinctions between classes here that there are there, and things are not on the same scale, either living or attendance."

"And yet, people who have passed their lives there, come to this country at last, they do not like it well enough to remain there. They come back to the land of their birth, where none of these things exist to fascinate them."

"Yes; they many live and die there — very many; but, at the same time, those who do return, do so because it is the land of their birth — because they love the country, and because they go there merely to make fortunes to come here and spend them."

"They don't like the kind of investments, perhaps?"

"They usually do so, and it fetches a high price — a very high price, and is considered equal to the stocks of the Bank of England."

"That is first-rate stock, and on dividend days the place is usually surrounded with strangers, who come to town for the purpose of receiving their incomes; indeed, it is quite an interesting sight to strangers. Have you ever witnessed it? It is well worth the while to go and see it."

"I never trouble myself anything about it," said the colonel; "but I must be going there, by the way, to-morrow. I must have a coach."

"Do you know the routine of the banking business? It is confusing to one not used to it."

"I know enough for my own purpose."

"Didn't you find London much altered," inquired Margaret, anxious to give a turn to the conversation, as she thought this attorney's conversation would appear as if it were much too pointed — "when you first returned to England, and came to live here again?"

"I cannot say much about that," said the colonel; "because I was not in a condition to twist about like many men; I am lame."

"Exactly; that must have deprived you of much of the pleasure one feels in surveying old places and well remembered spots."

"It was," replied the colonel; "but in a place like London, alterations and additions are not so extensive as to cause any alteration in general features, so as to make it perceivable at once. It is only when you come to examine localities that you notice it. You improve and alter parts, but the town is the same, and there is no doubt this appears the work of steady growth, and not any one of sudden effort; indeed, the very additions to it have a character which stamp it as being London."

"There is much truth about that," said the attorney.

"It is the same all over the world, and only in those places where the extent is but small, than any great alteration makes a conspicuous and general change, and gives a new character to the place."

As this conversation passed between them, the attorney making one or two delicate allusions to property, and asking his advice respecting some purchases he wished to make. To all which the colonel made but short and direct answers, and of such character, that it was difficult to carry on the conversation upon that topic, at least, and both mother and daughter looked beseechingly at him, so that he was compelled to resist, and found himself completely baffled by what appeared the colonel's pride. * * * * *

"Well, Mrs. Meredith," said Mr. Twissel; "I have done my utmost with this Colonel Deverill, and I can make nothing of him — nothing at all, I assure you."

"You cannot form a bad opinion of him?"

"No — no. He is at one moment one of the most agreeable men to converse with, and the next moment he is

frigid and severe; perhaps pain, or perhaps contempt for any one else, may induce the alteration in his manner, and no allusion to himself does he make."

"Don't you think he is quite the gentleman, and a man used to good society?"

"Yes, I cannot doubt -- he has the air of all that he says; but he is going to the bank to-morrow; now, I wonder if it is to receive dividends."

"I dare say it is," said Mrs. Meredith; "I have very little doubt of that, and yet I should very much like to know; it would settle one's mind -- not that I would run any risk about the matter. I would not have him offended for the world; it would be wilfully destroying a chance that is so good, that we never can expect it to again occur, therefore we must not lose it."

"Certainly not; I will undertake the matter myself," said the attorney, "so that there shall not be any risk in a miscarriage, whatever. I will take care that nothing shall be done that will be at all likely to reach his ears, or that will be displeasing to him."

"We will trust to your prudence, Mr. Twissel."

"You may do so safely, and depend upon my caution in this matter. Now I will be at hand in the morning. If I am not here before he goes out, send for me, and let me know the hour; if there is not time to reach here send me the number of the coach; I will post off to the bank and there await until I see him come there."

"I will send to you, then," said Mrs. Meredith; "I think that a very good plan."

"But what will it do for you if you do see him enter the bank, that will tell you nothing, and I cannot see the utility of it," said Margaret; "many people go into the Bank of England, who do not go there to receive any money for themselves; so that would be inconclusive."

"It would," said the attorney; "but you must remember, I can enter too, and ascertain to what portion of the building he goes, and I can learn how much he received, if any -- but I must bid you good-by; for the present; do not forget to send to me at the first blush of the affair, and then much subsequent trouble may be saved."

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**Chapter CXXV. MR. TWISSEL'S MISADVENTURES. -- THE
CONSEQUENCES OF BEING FOUND IN THE BANK WITHOUT GIVING A
SATISFACTORY ACCOUNT OF YOUR BUSINESS THERE. -- AN
UNPLEASANT DILEMMA.**

The peculiar position of Mrs. Meredith and her daughter Margaret, in some measure, and to a great degree, tied their hands, and caused a corresponding desire to know more than was told them; at the same time, they were fearful of giving any offence to their new and wealthy lodger. They were both avaricious and designing. To make a good settlement was the grand object of their lives, and to that object they would sacrifice themselves -- at least, sacrifice Margaret, who, by-the-bye, would consider it no sacrifice at all, but a great stroke of good luck.

However, they could do nothing of themselves; they saw there was a great, and glorious chance for the future; they felt they had entangled the colonel; they felt he had become a victim to their snares, and they were unwilling that they should run any risk of a failure of their plans.

"If we offend him, he may consider us avaricious and designing," they argued; "and that might prove too strong an antidote to even an old man's love, and the prize might be snatched out of our hands, and we might not only lose a rich husband, but a good lodger also."

These considerations induced them to act more warily and cautious than the attorney, Mr. Twissel, who was anxious at once to seize the bull by the horns, and come to an explanation, and thus save himself much labour and time, for the sooner there was an explanation the better; and he did not apprehend the result that they did; he believed it would only appear proper caution on the part of a mother.

They had different opinions; and, between the two, there was an indecisive policy adopted, which occasioned delay and uncertainty.

There was no doubt but the colonel meant matrimony; his infirmities were of no consequence. It was not the man, but the money, that was wanted, and which was sought with perseverance and constancy. They appeared negligent of money matters before the colonel; and, when he paid them, which he did regularly, he always appeared to have money about him, which, of course, increased their respect, and gave them increased confidence in him.

"It is all very well, ma," said Margaret, "but Mr. Twissel must not offend Colonel Deverill; he is evidently a man much above him; his actions and manner are such, that at once stamp him immeasurably his superior; now, as regards this property, there can be no doubt but he must have enough."

"I think so, too, my dear; but it would be a dreadful thing if it should turn out otherwise in the end; it would really be very dreadful; I should never survive it."

"Nor I mother."

"What is to be done? -- I declare I am at my wits' end."

"There is no fear, ma; do you not remember that Mr. Twissel himself has found out that he is Colonel Deverill, and that he has retired from the army of the Company?"

"Indeed, my dear, that is correct; I had forgotten that -- quite forgotten it; but it may so happen he has no money at all; he may have spent it."

"He does not appear to be extravagant," said Margaret; "he has retired upon his half-pay, which you know must be a very good living, and I am sure of a widow's pension, if nothing more; and, besides, I am sure, from what he has said, there must be money."

"Well, I think so, too, my dear," said Mrs. Meredith; "and I think it will be better that things should go on as the colonel desires; to lose him would be horribly aggravating."

"So it will, ma, because I am sure he will do justice. It is not like as if we had money, too, and were as willing to have our affairs investigated, as we are to investigate his."

"That is very true, my dear, very true; and Mr. Twissel does not seem to know that; that I will tell him when I see him; by the way, I must send to him, to tell him the colonel is going out in about an hour. If he can find out anything, without compromising us in the affair, why, he may do so, and welcome; for, you must acknowledge, it will be all the more satisfactory."

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"Yes, yes, I admit that; but I would not wilfully lose a good opportunity."

"I must now send off to him. Mary must go, and that, too, as quickly as she can; for I shall want her back again very soon, so she must run."

"Then, the sooner she goes the better," said Margaret.

Mary was sent to Mr. Twissel, who happened to be at home at the time, and judging that Mary had been a good time on the road, that there would be no time to go to Mrs. Meredith's house, and then follow the coach, so he determined to go to the bank at once, so that he would be there in time to see the colonel descend and enter the bank, into which he would follow him.

He sent word back to Mrs. Meredith that he would go on, and see her as soon after as he could; and then he made the best of his way towards the bank, where he arrived in good time -- indeed, half-an-hour before the colonel, who did not set out so soon as he intended.

"Now," thought Twissel, "if he were to turn out all right, why, I shall be in good fortune; but if bad, it would be laid upon my shoulders. They shall not say that I have not given them attention enough for their money; and if I don't do something, they will say I haven't earned my money; and though I can enforce payment of the bond, yet it may hurt my future prospects with regard to my future connection with the family, which I hope to make a profitable one in the long run."

Filled with these thoughts, he determined to watch with due caution for the arrival of the colonel, on the other side of the way.

It was some time before the coach drove up, which it did after a considerable lapse of time, and then Mr. Twissel crossed over, and placed himself in a position by the lamp-post where he could obtain a good view of any one passing in and out of the coach.

"'Tis he," he muttered, as he saw the colonel step out of the carriage, and walk into the bank very leisurely and quietly, leaning upon his stick, and walking lame. He watched him into the bank -- he saw him go some distance down the passage, and then he muttered, --

"Now, I will follow him up closely."

And, after a moment's pause to permit some one to pass him, he then darted down the passage into a kind of yard; but no, he could not see him; he was not there; and yet he was so lame, he could not have got out of sight so soon as all that.

"He's gone to the dividend-office," he muttered; "I shall find him there," and away he posted to that department; but he could not find him, he was -- he was not there. Then what could have become of him? That was a point he could not solve.

"Well, this is very odd," he muttered; "very odd."

He paused to think over the matter; but that did not aid him. He was in the dark but thought it was no use in waiting in any one place, so wandered about from office to office, until he came to the body of the place, when he waited until some one came up to him, and touched him on the shoulder. He turned round, and at once perceived it was an officer.

"What do you want with me?" inquired Twissel.

"What is your business here?" returned the officer, by way of reply.

"I am here upon my own business. I am at a loss to understand what you mean by asking me such a question in a public place. What can you mean by it? I was never asked such a question before, and cannot see why you should do so now."

"Excuse me, sir, I have ample warrant for what I am doing."

"Have you? Then state it."

"Easily. I have followed you about this last half-hour, and you have been wandering about the place for some time, and looking about you in a manner that has excited a good deal of suspicion, to say the least of it; and I must have some satisfactory explanation."

"You can have that," replied Mr. Twissel, very much annoyed; "you can have any explanation you can require. I am very sure I came here on my own affairs; what other explanation can you require?"

"Your affairs may be ours also, and the explanation you have given will be just enough to justify my taking you into custody -- so if you have no more to say, I must request the favour of your company; that's my card of invitation; do you hear, sir?"

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"Yes, I do; I am an attorney—at-law, and you may depend upon it I will not be content without punishing you for this indignity — I came in here because I saw a friend call, to whom I wanted to speak."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know," said Twissel; "I have missed him."

"Very likely, and your friend will miss you for a short time; for you must come with me; — you have been found here without being able to give any account of yourself."

"I tell you I came in here to see Colonel Deverill."

"Well, what do we know of Colonel Deverill? We don't know anything about him, nor you either; you must come with me. We are obligated to be very particular when we see strangers walking about with no object whatever in view — it is very suspicious."

"But I tell you I am a respectable attorney — a professional man. I had no bad object in view."

"That may be as you say; but you must come with me."

Seeing there no help for it, Mr. Twissel resigned himself into the officer's hands, and followed him to the station-house, where he was examined by the inspector, at the place where he was taken.

"Well, sir," said the inspector, "this may be all very true, but we must have some proof of what you assert; then we can let you go."

"I'll have a complaint against you."

"You may; but you must prove not only that what you say is true, but that there was no cause for suspicion, and that you were not loitering about the bank, as the officer asserts you were."

The attorney thought that it would be quite unnecessary to get into the public prints, because it would not do for him to make use of Colonel Deverill's name; and that he had already done. What was he to do? he had got into a very disagreeable scrape, out of which he must now get in the best manner possible, and which he could not see his way clear to do.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Give us some proof that you are the person whom you represent yourself to be," he replied, "and then we can let you go at once."

"Then I will give you my card," said Twissel, producing his card-case.

"That is no proof," said the constable. "A man might have robbed you of your card-case, and you would have some one passing himself off for yourself."

"What shall I do, then?" inquired Twissel.

"Send for some one who knows you, or send for your own clerk — that will do."

"That I can do at once," replied Twissel; and he at once wrote a note to his clerk, and gave it unsealed into the hands of the constable, and asked if there was any one who would go with it.

"You can send a messenger; there are many who will do that if you pay them for it," replied the constable; and in another minute, for the sum of half-a-crown, a messenger agreed to take the letter to his office, and deliver it to his clerk, and wait for him.

This was done, and until that time he was locked up in a cell, where he had a light certainly, but in which he had no other comfort at all; but in about an hour and a half there was the prospect of a relief; for he saw his clerk come into the station-house, and with him the messenger, who came to the constable and said that was Mr. Twissel's clerk.

"Do you know Mr. Twissel?" inquired the constable.

"Yes, I do; he is my employer."

"Then point him out," said the constable.

At that moment, Mr. Twissel was brought in, and he at once pointed him out to the satisfaction of the constable, who, with an admonition, consented to the enlargement of Mr. Twissel, and in answer to his threat of future investigation, said to him, —

"You see, sir, the bank is such a place, that we are compelled to keep all persons out who have no business there, and it must not be a place where people meet who have no particular bank business to transact; do not wait about, then, for the future, sir, else you may run the same danger."

Mr. Twissel left the station-house with a feeling very much akin to anger, and he walked home with a very disagreeable feeling. He felt that he had been baffled, and had been also much ill-used, and very much affronted.

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"Where could he have got to?" he murmured. "He must have turned in some of the offices -- confound him! I wish he had taken it into his head to tumble. I am sure he ain't no good; if he were, I should not have been placed in such an unpleasant position."

Suddenly he recollected that there was no necessity for his going home, unless there had been anything happened since his departure; and upon being informed that such was not the case, he determined to alter his course, and proceed to Mrs. Meredith, and relate the misfortunes that had befallen him.

"And if that don't satisfy her I have her interest at heart, why, nothing will."

And he left his clerk, after giving him some directions, and then turned off towards Bloomsbury-square, where he arrived just before tea time.

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Chapter CXXVI. AN EVENING WITH COLONEL DEVERILL. -- THE STRATAGEM OF MRS. MEREDITH.

Mr. Twissel seated himself by Mrs. Meredith's fire, not at all pleased with what he had anticipated and expected on that day, and yet well pleased that there was an end to it; but, at the same time, he had conceived a dislike for the colonel, of which the reader can easily guess the reason. The colonel had received him rather haughtily, and he was annoyed at it, and he was resolved that he would do him no service; and now, the indignity he had received was so vexing, that he knew not on whom to wreak his anger -- at all events, it gave him a great dislike to the colonel, which would require a considerable time to overcome.

He sat there, waiting for Mrs. Meredith, who was then engaged somewhere else; but it was not long before she entered the apartment in which Mr. Twissel sat meditating upon his misadventure, and considering in his own mind what would be the best course to pursue.

"Oh, Mr. Twissel!" she said, "I hope you have not been waiting long for me."

"Not long, ma'am."

"And how have you got on to-day, Mr. Twissel?"

"Rather indifferently indeed," said Twissel, with a groan; "I may say very indifferently indeed. I have had plenty of incident -- I may say of adventure -- I ought to say misadventure, which appears to have dogged me step by step in this affair."

"Indeed! I am amazed at that," said Mrs. Meredith.

"You would be more so if you knew all."

"Tell me what has happened, Mr. Twissel," said Mrs. Meredith. "I am anxious to hear to hear what can have happened to you of this character. I hope it did not happen in consequence of your doing anything in this affair of Colonel Deverill's."

"Indeed it did, Mrs. Meredith," said the attorney, solemnly. "I have been sedulously engaged in this affair, and I have been seriously inconvenienced by it."

"I regret it very much."

"But you could not have helped it, Mrs. Meredith," said Twissel. "You could not have helped it at all. I know that very well, there fore there is no blame attached to you. You are free; but I have suffered, nevertheless. I have suffered."

"Dear me, how sorry I am, to be sure."

"Yes, ma'am, but it can't be helped. I was taken into custody as a suspicious person, and had some difficulty in getting my release from custody."

Mrs. Meredith lifted her hands and her eyes to express the amount of astonishment she felt.

"Yes, Mrs. Meredith. I followed the colonel into the Bank of England, and there I saw him enter, but by some wonderful means he suddenly disappeared. I missed him, and could not again obtain the slightest clue to him. I did not again set eye upon him, and while endeavouring to regain the track, I was taken into custody for loitering about."

"Indeed. Then you have learned nothing about the colonel?"

"Nothing at all. I missed him. I saw him going into the bank, and that was all."

"Well, he has come back, and appears to have received money. I should think there could be doubt as to where he got it from."

"It is a mystery."

"Indeed. I should hardly think it possible, as you saw him go in. What would he go there for but for money matters? It seems clear enough to me. I have no doubt in my own mind -- everything appears to be straightforward and plain."

"Indeed," muttered the attorney; "there is much truth in that. I have had a straightforward intimation that I have been considered a suspicious person."

"I regret it very much; but here's Margaret."

At that moment Margaret entered the apartment in which her mother and Mr. Twissel were seated. There was

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an air of triumph in her eye when she entered, and her mother at once divined the cause; but she said nothing, and waited until Margaret spoke.

"Ma," she said, "it is tea-time, and the colonel expects you up stairs; and if you had any friends, he hoped you would not deprive him of your company on that account, but bring them up stairs to tea. He is particularly good-humoured to night."

"Curse him," involuntarily exclaimed the attorney, as he heard of the good-humour the colonel was in, and he had so much cause to be vexed himself.

"Will you come with us, Mr. Twissel?"

"I will, thank you, ma'am. I am very tired," said Twissel, as he thought it would afford him some opportunity of discovering something that would enable him to be revenged, and at the same time do a seeming service to the other party.

"At all events," he muttered, "it will give me a change of making a more intimate and useful acquaintance with him. I must do something or other, and I may as well make a good thing of it as well as a bad one. That wouldn't be bad policy."

"Then you had better come up at once," said Margaret, "for the tea is waiting."

Thus urged, Mrs. Meredith and Mr. Twissel followed Margaret, and walked up to the drawing-room, where the colonel was, as before, seated in an easy chair, with the green shade still over one eye, and his arm carried in a sling, though he did not appear to have lost the entire use of it, and by his side was his stick, a valuable Malacca cane, with which he walked, and his lame foot was supported by an ottoman.

"Well, sir," said the colonel, "I have the extreme felicity of meeting you again; be seated. It is a very charming day, the most comfortable that I recollect since I have returned to England."

"It is remarkably fine,—" said the attorney, shrugging his shoulders, and giving a suspicious glance towards the colonel, as if he thought there was a latent smile lurking upon the colonel's countenance; but he could not detect it, and yet he felt very much aggravated.

"There is, even in this climate," continued the colonel, "some decent weather; but then, when matters go on happily and cheerfully, then the climate appears more genial and kind."

"Strange that it should be so," said Mr. Twissel; "but I can't help thinking he looks more provoking than ever I saw in my life."

As he muttered, the colonel said, —

"What did you say, sir?"

"I merely said that we, who are used to it, look upon it in some other light than that of a merely negative character; that is, we look upon some of it as positively good — nay, we are apt to call it beautiful, especially when it continues fine."

"Continues fine!" said the colonel; "does it really continue fine in this climate?"

"Why, one would think, colonel, you have never been in this country before, to hear you talk; and yet you are a native of this country."

"Yes, I am; that is, I believe so; but I have spent so many years in Asia, that I am more a native of India than this country. However, I believe what you say to be correct; but, you see, the slightest change of weather affects my wounds, when you could not believe any change that had taken place; or, at all events, the change would be so slight as to cause no difference to you, and yet, even before that comes, I feel the approaching change."

"I day say you do, sir; but it must be unpleasant in the extreme."

"It certainly is; and I have found it so. Mrs. Meredith, I hope you enjoyed your walk; did you go far?"

"No, Colonel, I did not; else I had not been back so soon. By the way, how do you feel after your walk, or, rather, ride? I had not time to ask you before."

"Oh, I am very well; I enjoyed it much; but I must take another the day after tomorrow," said the colonel. "That is, another ride; for I cannot walk far."

"Do you intend going far?"

"To the South Sea House," replied the colonel.

"To the South Sea house," repeated the attorney to himself, as he sipped his tea; "he has some of the stock on his hands. Well, I dare say that is likely; people belonging to these companies generally prefer them to any other stock. However, I will follow him there, and see if I can't do better. I will tread upon his heels but what I will find

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out something this time, at all events."

"Are you acquainted with that stock?" he inquired, after a pause.

"What the South Sea Stock?" inquired the colonel.

"Yes."

"Not much; but I believe it to be a good, steady stock -- a very good investment; it will pay you a better interest than the funds."

"But is it as secure?"

"Well, that is a very difficult thing to answer," said the colonel; "but I think is safe enough. I have that opinion of it that I do not object to hold it."

"That, of course, is the best answer one can have to its presumed security."

"Yes, I have a good opinion of it, and do not object holding it, as I said before; and that is the best opinion that can well be offered. Have you any?"

"None, sir; but I have a friend, who wanted to purchase stock of some kind, or to place money out to advantage, and I wished to learn a little more concerning it."

"I do not mean to say there is no better; but when you have once invested your money, you do not like to change the stock."

"Certainly not; it is unadvisable," said the attorney, "unless you have some specific reason for so doing at the best of times. You are the loser by the expenses."

"Well," said Mrs. Meredith, "I am very glad to see you are so well after your journey."

"Journey, do you call it? Why ma'am, I cannot call anything less than some few hundred miles a journey; anything less is a mere bagatelle."

"Dear me, colonel; what journeys you must have travelled."

"Indeed I have, madam; some of hem beautiful and romantic, and some of them dreary, and some terrible, from the obstacles that opposed us, and others, from the nature of the ground that we had to go over, and the dangers attendant from fatigue, climate, and the enemy."

"It must be a terrible thing; females in those parts are out of the question."

"Oh! dear, no; there are ladies, and English ladies, too, who live there for years, and who follow their husbands; movements with the camp, and who undergo all the dangers and fatigues merrily and cheerfully, and even put some of the best of us to the blush for fortitude."

"Well, I am glad we have a good character, even so far off as India."

"It cannot but be expected but the mothers of such men can bear fatigue and hardship, else; their sons could never be what they are. However, we have many examples of heroism in India, not of men only, but women also."

"Then there are many interesting points for us to hear explanation about India," said Margaret; "I love to hear such things, especially from those who have been there, and mixed up among the people who live here, and who have had much experience with them."

"I hope we shall have ample time to talk over many such matters," returned the colonel, "for to me it is pleasant to speak of the past, and relate all I have seen, known, and taken part in, in a place so distant from us all, as our Eastern empire."

"Indeed, I love to hear them," said Margaret.

"I am afraid she will keep you pretty constantly employed in relating all that you have ever seen, colonel," said Mrs. Meredith; "she's a strange girl, and has many fancies that way; she fond of the wild, irregular life that you describe; she would have made an excellent soldier's wife, I am sure; she's so fond of that kind of thing."

"I hope she will do so now, madam: and that she will have less of the fatigue and danger that fall to the lot of a good many, for I candidly tell you it is one thing to hear these things talked of, and another to bear with them. Plains of burning sand, and want of water, mountainous regions covered with snow, and no means to obtain warmth and shelter, -- these are things exciting enough in a narrative, and yet heartbreaking to experience."

"Oh!" said the attorney; "there can be no doubt it's much better in perspective, than it is to experience. I can easily imagine when you hear of battles and sieges, how they wish they had been there; and how much would have been done by our individual exertions. But, dear me, that's as different from being shot in the beginning, and so seeing none of the fun that was to follow. Lord bless my heart, being put out of the way in that manner, positively makes me nervous, I do believe. I could be hanged before I marched up to the breach."

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"Fortunately, all men are not of that opinion, else we might all of us be murdered in our beds, and no one to protect us," said Margaret, contemptuously.

"It is necessary," said the colonel, "that some men should be born for one purpose, and some another. Some are poltroons from their birth, and require better men to take care of them, while others win honour and profit on the field of death and danger, and snatch triumph from the hands of death."

"Exactly," said the attorney; "half a loaf is better than no bread; and half a man is better than no man at all; and I believe that many of them leave the field of battle, leave it in a very little better state. Now, I should not care for life upon such terms; it must be such as is worth living for, and such I do not consider life, when one is rendered a cripple all one's life."

"Well," said the colonel, "we all have out different ideas upon that subject; but I rather think the state would be nothing without the profession of arms, and the lawyers would grace the lamp-posts, if I might judge from popular opinion."

"Popular opinion is nothing in this country upon such matters," said Twissel, contemptuously.

"It amounts to something," retorted the colonel; "and you would say so, I imagine, if you felt it clinging to your throat in the shape of a halter, administered by the canaille."

"Why," said Mrs. Meredith, "I dare say it isn't always expressed so forcibly, and Mr. Twissel does not hold it of any importance, so long as it is not expressed so loudly as that."

"Certainly, Mrs. Meredith; that is my meaning; for an illegal act committed by a contemptible portion of the population becomes of importance."

"So it does," said the colonel; "that is easily verified."

"But still we may be thankful to those who bravely fight and die, that we may be here in ease and quiet, and free from danger, and able to enjoy our lives and homes in peace."

"That is true," said the attorney; "the one part of a nation cannot do without another; all are necessary, and produce a powerful kingdom, and not only powerful, but rich and intelligent."

"No doubt of that," said the colonel.

Tea was now cleared away, and some wine was placed upon the table, and the colonel took a few glasses of some rare wine, of which he offered the attorney to drink, and the latter willingly accepted, and found it some of the best he had tasted; and he continued to taste it until he got quite talkative, and, to the pain and mortification of Mrs. Meredith, began to talk in a strain that would in a short time have done them much discredit and mischief.

Mrs. Meredith, however, always full of expedient, soon devised on that had the effect of putting an end to a scene she feared would come to an unpleasant act, if continued in; and therefore, left the room for a few minutes, and then when she returned, she said, —

"Mr. Twissel, you have been sent for; you are wanted immediately."

"I — I sent for?"

"Yes, sir, you are wanted."

"Nobody knew I was here. Oh, yes, I told my clerk as I came along, confound him! Just as I was so comfortable, too."

"We can finish this another time," said the colonel, pointing to the bottle.

"Yes, thank you. Good night, Colonel Deverill."

"Good evening, Mr. Twissel."

Mr. Twissel quitted the drawing-room, vowing vengeance to himself against the brute of a clerk of his, who should dare to come and interrupt such an agreeable evening. It was most horribly provoking. He could have called down the vengeance of the universe upon the head of the offending mortal who had come for him, and in this mood of mind he entered the parlour.

"Where is he — where is he?"

"Where is who?" inquired Mrs. Meredith.

"My clerk — the man who came for me."

"Listen, Mr. Twissel," said Mrs. Meredith; "I have called you out. No one has been for you; but I had no other means of calling you out, as I wanted to speak to you."

"Well," said Mr. Twissel, half surprised and half vexed, "what do you want to say to me now I am here."

"I want to impress upon you the fact, that the habits of the colonel lead him to retire about this time, and I

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feared you, not knowing this, might stop beyond the proper moment, and so took this method of telling you what I am sure you would like to know."

Mr. Twissel could not object; there was something reasonable in it, and yet he was at heart vexed, and could not help saying, --

"I should have thought the colonel would not have been so pleasant and so talkative; if he had not been comfortable, he would have said so."

"Oh, dear, no, he would not have done that, even if you had remained till daylight; he has too much courtesy towards a stranger to do so."

"Very well," said Twissel, "I will be gone. However, I will take care and not forget the South Sea House the day after to-morrow. You must make the best of it you can, and let me know when he is likely to go, so that I may not lose any chance."

"Certainly not. I'll do as I did before," said the lady.

"Do so."

"And I hope you will meet with better luck than you met with before."

"I hope so too," said the attorney, gravely. "However, here I am, and I'll do all that I can do for you. Good by, Mrs. Meredith -- good day -- good night."

"Good night," said Mrs. Meredith, and the attorney left the house, to their inexpressible relief, for he was growing very talkative and very troublesome too, for the misfortune was, he more than once touched upon forbidden topics.

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Chapter CXXVII. THE DIFFICULTIES TO BE ENCOUNTERED IN THE CHOICE OF A BRIDESMAID.

"Well, Margaret," said Mrs. Meredith, when they were alone in their own apartment — "well, and how have you got on with the colonel?"

"Oh, very well indeed, ma'."

"I am glad of it. Has he proposed anything new to you, my dear, or has he said anything more to you of a particular character? Has he said anything respecting property? That is what we want to know pretty well, and that is the only point that can be more than usually interesting to us."

"No, ma', nothing about property. I could not expect he would say anything to me, and I hardly expect he would to any one at all. You see, he is no doubt a rich man."

"Well, and he would not consider it at all necessary to say anything about it to any one; that it is so peculiarly private, and has nothing to do with any one; and he does not imagine that we require anything of the kind. I am sure if the thought entered his mind, he would at once satisfy us upon the subject. I cannot speak to him about it, because, having none, I am really not entitled to do so. That's my opinion upon the subject, though Mr. Twissel, I dare say, has a different one to me; indeed, he generally has one of his own."

"Yes, you may depend upon that; but I have been thinking the matter over, and I am sure he is what he says he is. But what did he say, my dear?"

"Why, he insists that I shall name an early day."

"Insists! my child. What does he mean?"

"Merely in a good-natured, though urgent manner. Indeed, he wishes me to make up my mind and have him at once. If I'll consent to have him, he'll obtain a special licence to solemnize the marriage here in this house, or at church, which I like best. Which shall I consent to, ma'?"

"Well, my dear, I think you may as well be married at home; it will be so much more fashionable than going to church."

"It will be much more trouble, and will hardly seem like a marriage, I think, if it is not done at a church. What do you think?"

"It will make more noise," said Mrs. Meredith, "if it is done at home; and yet nobody can say a word about it if it takes place at church."

"So I think, now; so I think."

"Well, what did you decide?"

"I did not decide upon anything," said Margaret; "I declined to do so upon the moment, but said I would think about it, and after a few words, I promised I would let him know the next time he spoke to me about it, which should not be before tomorrow afternoon."

"Very well, my dear. A becoming reluctance will never hurt your cause; you have done quite right, and I have no doubt but he will feel more pleased with you than if you had at once consented upon his first asking."

"So I thought, ma'," said Margaret.

"But you must not carry that too far, or it may defeat its own object, when next he asked you, you must affect a great deal of emotion — trembling and blushing, and all that kind of thing, which you can do very well; or if you should distrust yourself, you can practice it a bit before a glass. I did it when I was your age, and I did it well."

"Yes, ma', I can manage all that well enough; but what time shall I name?"

"Well, that must in some measure depend upon the humour you find him in. If he be very pressing, you may shorten the period; if he appear distant, lengthen it; but if there is any danger, take him at his word at once, and have no delay. It will not do to lose a chance; he must not be allowed to get off in that manner; and you must declare your confusion to be so great that you hardly know what you say, but, as he is so very pressing, you will give in to his wishes, and you may name any day you like best; and then he is caught, you see."

"I understand that clearly; but what time would you, as a medium time, give, which I out to lengthen or shorten as occasion may seem to require?"

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"Well, my dear, about a fortnight."

"Ah, that was on my own tongue, too. Well, then, I should not have done wrong in naming three weeks or a month, which I felt disposed to say at first."

"No, no, but you need not make it more than three weeks, unless you see any fitting occasion, or any necessity for so doing," said Mrs. Meredith. * * * *

After an amiable council the mother and daughter held, having for its object the entanglement and speedy marrying of the unfortunate East Indian colonel, they both indulged in balmy sleep, and slept till morn. The colonel himself said no more about the object of the previous day's conversation, when the amiable mother left the daughter alone with the colonel, who appeared as if actuated by clock-work; when the hour of his forbearance had passed, he again spoke of the matter.

"Miss Meredith," he said, "my impatience will, I hope, be excused, on the score that my love is ardent; and I have already waited as long as I promised. You know to what I allude."

"I am afraid I must say I do, Colonel Deverill," said Margaret; "but will you not grant me more time to consider this matter over? Remember, it is a serious matter."

"Of that there is no doubt," said the colonel; "but I do not feel the same doubts you do, for I only feel how much I can do for your happiness, and how willingly I will do it."

"Of that I can have no fear."

"Then why not consent at once? Consent to have the man who loves you who dotes upon you, and who will do all that an ample fortune can enable him to do for your welfare, and your future prosperity and comfort. Consider all that."

"I have considered much; I don't know that I need consider more than my present happiness; the future will take care of itself; at all events, we can do no more than to deserve to do well, and to succeed in all our undertakings — to deserve to be happy."

"And do more you cannot; and who is there that can do as much?"

"We all endeavour to do so."

"I hope we do so, though I am sure there are many who might do better; but, to return to my hopes, when will you consent to become mine — say the day on which I am to be made happy; and, if you really love me, make it as short as you can."

Margaret appeared to hesitate, and hung her head, trembled, and the blushes mounted her cheek; the colonel caught her in his arms — and pressing her to his bosom, he said, —

"Come, come, my own Margaret say when shall I be made happy."

"Oh! Deverill," she sighed, as she hid her face; "what shall I say — you are so urgent; shall I say a — a fortnight; and yet that is, — too — too, soon."

"No — no, not at all — not at all; thank you, dear Margaret, thank you."

"I — I — I fear I have said too much; forgive me — —"

"Nay, nay, no more about it; I will be content; to-morrow I will go to the city, and then I will purchase the wedding-ring. I will obtain a licence, and then we shall be ready against any contingencies; and on our wedding morning, I will have some jewels ready for you. I have given them some orders, but they take a long while in getting ready."

"Oh, you are too good."

"Not a bit — only just," said the colonel; and he appeared as though he were quite satisfied with his conquest, and looked very well pleased with the success he had met with in the prosecution of his suit. It was a settled thing now, and he was, or professed to be in extacies. * * * *

"Mother," said Margaret as she entered the room, "it is all settled at last; I have given my consent, and the day is named."

"Indeed! I am glad of it. When will the day arrive — what day is it?"

"This day fortnight."

"This day fortnight! well — well, that will be a very good time — very good time, indeed; we shall have a very busy time of it, for we must make the most of our arrangements between this and then; for we must get you in a fit out; but if you have a dress to appear in, that is as much as I shall be able to afford you, for my means are so short."

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"I know all that; but he has promised me jewels, which he has ordered, but which will take some time in making; but he expects them to be ready by our wedding-day. Come, now, this seems to me to be a very handsome provision."

"Very, my dear; very fortunate, too, because you see the furniture was becoming somewhat less new and fine that it was; that would have compelled me to lessen my terms; so we should have gone gradually back, and, perhaps, been obliged to seek some other mode of living."

"But you have some money by you?"

"That was reserved in case of extreme misfortunes, and I cannot realize that immediately; however, it would only put off the evil day; but we are saved that, now — we have caught a rare good fish — we have only to land him, that is, get some little to be done before we pull him ashore. We must keep up the farce; but, I tell you, we must not be guided by Mr. Twissel, though he is of great use."

"No, ma', we must not; I have thought on that."

"And yet I do not like to give up the idea of finding out first what he may have in the shape of property, though I am sure it would do no good; yet, to have one's curiosity satisfied is something gained. Still, I am not so curious that I must be satisfied at the expense of our prospects."

"No, ma'; I am sure I want badly enough to know all about it, but I will restrain my curiosity until I find out by means and at a time when no offence can be taken; or, if it be, why it's of no consequence, and I don't care anything about it, because I shall have a right to speak for myself."

"Certainly, my dear, that is a very proper spirit — a very proper spirit, indeed; but then he won't interfere with you much, except it is to want you to be always at his elbow."

"Ah, I won't mind that, because, you see, he may make a will; but I'll take pretty good care that nobody comes in between him and me."

"Exactly; you have no relatives on his side to tease you, or give you any trouble; therefore you have all plain sailing before you."

"I have; and now, I suppose, it will not be too much to speak to one's bridesmaids?"

"Ah! my dear," said Mrs. Meredith, with a shake of the head.

"What's the matter, ma'?"

"Ah! my dear, there is the difficulty; you know how easy the colonel has fallen in love with you; how sudden that has all come about, and how short a time the courtship has continued."

"So much the better, ma'."

"Certainly, my love; but it should make you cautious — very cautious, how you act with bridesmaids, because you don't know what may happen with such old people as the colonel — they are dreadful, sometimes and you don't know what they will do. They will fall in love with anybody; it is quite shocking to think of it; but it don't so much matter, only you see he may take a violent fancy to some one, and then you may lose by the whole affair."

"How so, ma'?"

"Why, suppose he takes a fancy to one of the bridesmaids? — you don't know what may pass between them."

"Certainly not."

"Very well; then he may make a will to reward her, as he would call it, and then you lose so much, which is a clear robbery, as I call it."

"So it would be, ma'; and yet, after all's said and done, I cannot tell what else we are to do; some female friends we must have; and the only precaution we can take will be to get some one as ugly as I can, and then keep her away as much as possible."

"The latter is the only effectual method, for ugliness is not always a safeguard, for men have got such tastes, and what we think extremely plain, they, by a perversity of taste, will persist in believing to be interesting, at least, if not pretty. I have known so many instances; besides, I do know that even ugliness itself is no safeguard."

"Indeed, ma'!"

"No; I had an instance of that — I may say two — even with your father, who took a fancy to two of the servants, one after the other. I am sure there was nothing in the hussies to attract any attention; but then men will be men, and you can't help it."

"We must get rid of them."

"Yes, that is all you can do; but whom did you think of having?"

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"There are the two Miss Stewards— — "

"They are called pretty. I heard a gentleman say so at the last party we went to, so that I think decidedly bad policy. I know the men's taste very well, my dear, but it is different to what we call taste; I don't know why, but it is so."

"Well, ma', if the Misses Steward won't do, what do you say to the Misses Brown? They are anything but even passable; besides, they are pitted with the small-pox, and very light hair, almost carrotty — they are anything but fascinating."

"That may be all very true, my dear, but you know the Misses Brown sing, they are called good figures, and dashing young women, and they are very bold, which might tempt many people, especially when they are looking about for sweethearts."

"Yes, that is very true; then there are the Misses Smith — they are very young — much too young to be at all likely to cause men to have any fancy for them."

"There, my dear innocent girl, you are entirely wrong — most entirely wrong."

"Indeed, ma'?"

"Yes, my dear, you are innocence itself, because you have been brought up at home; but, look here, men are the nastiest creatures alive — why, some of them would fall in love with a girl sixteen or seventeen years old. Aye, more than that, — I have seen some of them married at that age."

"Oh! I am shocked," said Margaret, as she lifted up her hands in amazement at this description of the vices of men. "Ah! well they may say at church, 'And there is no good in us.'"

"Indeed, my dear, you are quite right, and so is the Prayer-book — but it is as I tell you; beside, men never forget these things; they will remember faces they have seen for a year or two, and then they will begin their games."

"Dear me, ma', what shall I do?"

"That is the difficulty, my dear. I would not have unfolded this book of vice before you, had it not been necessary for your happiness."

"Oh! fiddle de dee ma' — it's the money that I care for; it ain't the colonel, poor old cripple. He may do as he pleases, as long as I get the gold."

"Well, my dear," said the careful mother, who felt the sedative effects of this speech, "well, my dear, but you know they do waste their means in these affairs, and that most outrageously, sometimes, to cause a ruinous effect upon their home."

"Oh! but he's too much of an invalid."

"Do you know, Margaret, I think the colonel is more of an invalid from habit than reality. Sometimes, when nobody's looking, he can walk and use both feet alike, and even use his left hand without any trouble at all."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes, but I don't mean to say it is all sham. Oh, dear, no, but long habit, and the laziness of these rich Indians is so great, that there is no knowing its extent. I don't believe they would eat, if it wasn't for their being hungry."

"What is to be done?"

"I will tell you, my dear. Have Miss Twissel and her friend."

"Miss Twissel and Martha Briggs," exclaimed Miss Meredith with a giggle. "What a fright!"

"So much the better, my dear — so much the better. It is just what you want — the very thing above all others. Have a fool and a fright, and you can drop their acquaintance whenever you like, and I think there can be no danger of the colonel's falling in love with them. At least," added Mrs. Meredith, with emphasis, — "at least, upon such an occasion."

"Very well, ma'. Let it be Miss Twissel and Martha Briggs. Goodness me, how I shall be attended upon this occasion — it will be quite laughable. I mustn't let the colonel see them before the morning arrives, else he will be sure to laugh at them."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed both mother and daughter at the idea of the two frights, as they called them, being bridesmaids; and in high good humour they both retired to rest for the night, to dream of the forthcoming occasion.

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Chapter CXXVIII. MR. TWISSEL'S MISFORTUNES, AND HIS RESOLUTION NEVER TO GIVE IN.

The next day after that on which the conversation respecting the choice of a bridesmaid took place, was the day on which the colonel was to visit the South Sea House.

Early that morning he ordered a coach to be in attendance, and left the house, saying that he would be back in time for tea; that he had to make several purchases, and transact some necessary business that would occupy him until that time. He kissed Margaret, and whispered in her ear that he should call and see about the jewels, and urge the jeweller to get them ready.

"These people are so dilatory," he said, "that, unless I worry them, they will disappoint me of them; and I would not be without them on the occasion of our marriage for a trifle."

"We must not set our happiness upon such things," said Margaret.

"Ah, what self-denial you can exert!" said the colonel, playfully.

"No; my happiness is not fixed upon such objects as those, and, therefore, it is no trouble to renounce them when it is necessary to do so."

"I hope there will be no need. I believe there will be none; but good bye till teatime, and then we shall pass a pleasant evening together."

The colonel left the house, and no sooner had he done so, than Mrs. Meredith wrote a short note to Mr. Twissel, informing him of the colonel's departure at a much earlier hour than she had anticipated.

"Here, Mary," she said to the drudge.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the domestic.

"Just run as fast as you can to Mr. Twissel with this note, and don't let the grass grow under your feet. Do you hear?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Away went the drudge as fast as she could to the man of law, and arrived there out of breath; and having gone there fast, according to orders, she thought herself at liberty to take her own time in going back, which she performed to perfection.

Mr. Twissel cursed himself for this unexpected departure; but there was no time for deliberation. He crushed on his hat, took a coach, and drove as hard as the mysteriously-kept-up cattle could carry it, and was fortunate enough to see the colonel go by in another. He jumped out, paid the jarvey, and then made a rush after the colonel, whom he saw going up the steps.

Determined that he would not be outdone this time, he rushed through a crowd of men who were near at hand, and jostled them so, that they gave him more oaths than was consistent with courtesy, and one of them desired to know if he were running after himself or anybody else.

Heedless of this, he pushed on, and trod upon a bricklayer's foot so hard, that the man gave a great shout, and, by way of retaliation, brought his heavy hand down so hard upon the attorney's hat, that the article of wearing apparel was forced below his chin, much to the detriment of his vision, which was totally eclipsed.

In an instant he was struggling with his hat, and yet was unable to release himself from the duration in which his head was held; but he found this was not all he had to contend with, for he felt himself pushed and hustled about in a strange manner, till he was thrown on a door step, and then he was suddenly left to himself, with no soul near him.

"Upon my word, this must be done on purpose, I do verily believe," said Mr. Twissel, as he at length succeeded in wrenching his hat off his head, after many violent efforts; but even then it was at the expense of the lining and skin off his nose, which was a very disagreeable affair, after all.

Mr. Twissel, for a moment or two, stared round him, and wondered where he was, until, at length, upon some examination, he found himself round the corner.

"Oh, I must have got hustled round the corner — yes, yes, I see how it is; it's a down-right conspiracy of theirs — there can't be two minds."

But then, again, he thought what conspiracy could there be necessary to marry a girl without money? If she

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had money, he could have understood it, but not as the matter stood — that was quite impossible. It was an impenetrable mystery.

As these thoughts passed through his mind, he was sitting on the step of a door, and, seeing the blood trickle off his nose in vermilion drops upon the pavement, he felt for his handkerchief to wipe the injured feature, and stop the bleeding.

But, alas! it was not in this pocket, nor in that; it was not in his hat — he never carried it there; if he had, his head would never have reached the crown of his hat — that was quite certain; it would have been better had he done so.

But, as it was not about him, where could it be? He knew that he had had it before he left home on this errand; the truth, however, was not long before it came across his mind like a flash of light. He had got among a gang of London thieves, who had hustled and robbed him of his handkerchief.

This was suggestive of other matters, and he, in consequence, put his hand to his watch-fob, but also that was gone, too. He gasped — felt his breeches pocket, and then he sank back, for he found his garments had been slit open by some sharp instrument, and his purse had fled.

"D — —n!" said the attorney, in a fury; but this subsided in a moment. The loss he had felt, and the pushing about he had experienced, was too much; he felt weakened and disheartened, and paused to think upon what he should do, and which way he should go.

"It's no use giving in," he muttered; "no use at all. I must go on. And yet, I had better go and see if the coach is gone, for if it is still there — and it can't have gone away yet — I'll yet go in and see if I can find him."

He walked round the corner, much shaken with what he had received in the way of knocks and kicks, but when he did get round, he saw the coach was gone. There was, however, a ticket-porter at hand, and he determined to go and ask him a few questions.

"My friend," he said, feeling in his pocket; "do you know a Colonel Deverill?"

"No," said the man; "never heard of him — where does he live?"

"He came in here just now."

"Ah, did he?" replied the man, kicking a piece of orange peel off the pavement; "I don't know him."

"Do you recollect a hackney-coach coming up to the door just now, with a lame gentleman, who got out?"

"Yes; with a green shade over his eye."

"Yes — that was the man."

"Oh, well, I never seed him afore — I don't know him — he didn't stop a minute."

"Oh!" said Mr. Twissel, and then he turned away, and walked towards his own house. However, he felt in his pocket for some money; a small sum in silver was loose in his pockets, and this he had saved, and he determined to treat himself to some brandy-and-water, for he was really much knocked about, and terrified and nervous, so he went into the first public-house he came to.

This was a low house, the parlour of which was situated a long way back, and he walked in and threw himself into a seat.

"Well, well; here I am. This is disaster the second. Well, who would have believed I should have met with such misadventures as those I have just gone through? There's a fate in it. I am sure this is an unlucky business altogether — of that I am certain. I got into the watchhouse on the first occasion, but now I am worse than that; I have been knocked about and robbed of money and goods — fifteen pounds in my purse — confound Colonel Deverill, I say."

"What will you take, sir?"

"Eh?" inquired the bewildered attorney, who forgot that he had entered a public-house, and the waiter was desiring to know what he wished to have.

"What will you like to take, sir?" inquired the waiter, again.

"A glass of brandy-and-water, and a biscuit."

The man left the room, and Twissel retired within himself to contemplate the evils he had suffered, and those he was likely to endure.

"Well, I never thought I was in such a thing as this. Who would ever have believed it? None, I am sure — no one could. Confound them! I'll give it up as a bad job, and a bad job it has been for me, I am quite confident of that."

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"Brandy—and—water, and a biscuit," said the waiter, laying down the articles enumerated, and Twissel gave the necessary cash, accompanied by the customary gratuity, which ranges from ten to twenty—five per cent upon the money paid for the articles purchased.

We have often thought this a most exorbitant tax upon those who require accomodation. If people cannot pay their own servants, they ought not to keep them; to be sure, you are told you need not pay anything — it is entirely voluntary, and that they do not wish it; but you only obtain a flippant answer, so as to attract every one's eyes in the place, and the end of it is, if there is much business, you don't get any attention at all.

"Well, I won't give in," said Mr. Twissel, with a thump on the table; but he had drank nearly two—thirds of the brandy—and—water.

"No, I won't give in."

He swallowed down the remainder, finished the biscuit, and leaned back in his seat, and then he began to talk to himself.

"I will not give in; after all that has passed, it would be a shame to be done, robbed, beaten, and kicked; and then give in — nonsense! I will go through the whole affair, and that shall repay me in the end. I'll lay it on the thicker for this."

This was a comfortable resolution on the part of Mr. Twissel, and which appeared to please him well, for he smiled quietly, and then rose much refreshed and left the house.

This last allusion of Twissel's was consolatory, and had an intimate connection with certain imaginary charges he would make to the Deverill family when he got the business; but as that was a matter buried in the womb of futurity, we will not follow him in his speculations.

"I won't give in," he said, as he walked on, and thrust his hand into the slit that had been cut in his trousers to extract his purse; but this only confirmed him in his resolution, and he uttered again and again, "I won't give in."

"I won't give in," he murmured, as he sought the knocker of Mrs. Meredith's door. "I won't give in — I'm not a man whose resolution is easily shaken. Oh, dear, no; I'll tell my good friend, Mrs. Meredith, all my troubles, and then ask her what she thinks of me — if I ain't an indefatigable friend, one who will never sink under difficulties.

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Chapter CXXIX. MRS. MEREDITH HAS A CONVERSATION WITH MR. TWISSEL. -- THE ANNOUNCEMENT, AND THE INVITATION.

When the servant answered the knock, Mr. Twissel learned, to his severe disappointment, that Mrs. Meredith was from home; and he was about to turn from the door, after leaving his name, when the girl said that her mistress had left a message, the purport of which was, that if he, Mr. Twissel, was to call, she would feel obliged by his awaiting her return, as her absence would be but short, and the subject upon which she wished to see him was one of particular importance.

Mr. Twissel was shown into the parlour much about the same as usual; but he himself was somewhat of a different state. He himself was considerably disgusted with his share of the business; but, as we have before stated, he was resolved never to give in; no, he was resolved to carry it on to the end.

"It must come to a wind-up somehow or other, and at some time or other; but, at the same time, as I have taken so much interest in that I am resolved to see it out, I won't lose all I have lost for nothing; it shall be with me a neck or nothing affair; and, however aggravating it may be, you will have a greater chance in the long run of coming off victorious."

Several minutes passed away, and still Mrs. Meredith came not. At length the attorney began to grow somewhat impatient, and he looke around the apartment, as if to find some object to pass away the time until her arrival. On a table in the centre of the room lay several books, and he opened one or two of them for the purpose of ascertaining the nature of the contents. The title of one of them attracted his attention; it consisted of a collection of tales of the supernatural, and he opened it upon a legend called "The Dead Not Dead." It possessed considerable interest, and Twissel was soon lost in its details. It ran as follows: --

The moon, with her train of glittering satellites following with silent grandeur in her wake, is sailing, in lustrous glory, through the heavens, and shedding such a flood of light over the face of nature, that the mountains and trees look as if some mighty hand had tinted them with silver.

Our scene is a rocky pass amidst the stupendous Appenines -- one of the wildest, and yet most beautiful of that romantic region.

At the foot of a tree, and on a spot on which the rays of the moon fall with all their power, sits a young man, who is evidently watching over what appears to be a dead body that lies prostrate at his feet. His head is resting on his hand, and he is regarding the form before him with mingled fear and determination.

Hark! he speaks! What are his words?

"For full an hour have the rays of yonder luminary poured their radiance upon the ghastly features of my dead master, and yet there is no effect visible. Surely he must have been labouring under some fearful delusion of mind, and the dreadful compact of which he has spoken had existence but in his imagination. I certainly had some little faith in the existence of those scourges to mankind -- vampyres, but now, I am inclined to think, my faith will be terribly shaken. In God's name, I hope it may."

The moon rose higher and higher, until, as she reached her zenith, everything was so bathed in her gentle light, that scarcely a shadow was thrown around, save by the tall pines that were scattered here and there upon the face of the rocks.

Suddenly there was a movement in the form of the dead man -- a spasmodic jerk of the whole muscles of the frame, as if a galvanic battery had been applied to it; and then the eyes slowly opened, though at first there was but little or no expression in them.

The young man started to his feet with an exclamation of horror, and stood glaring upon the form with fixed and protruding eyes, his limbs trembling, and every feature distorted with mental agony.

"Holy mother of God!" he murmured, in a low tone, "he moves! he moves! The terrible compact is too true."

At this moment, though there was not the slightest appearance of a cloud in the whole heavens, mutterings of thunder were heard, and the lightning was seen playing around the tree-tops with a pale and sickly glare. The young man, so intensely was his attention fixed upon the corpse at the foot of the tree, did not notice this phenomena; and he was at length horrified at beholding a ball of blue fire dart from the air, and glide inot the ground immediately at the head of him whom he had named as his master. Then there was a loud explosion, and a

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glare of light so broad and strong that the watcher of the dead was obliged to veil his eyes with his hands, and he could scarcely tell for some moments whether he were deprived of his sight or not.

When he opened his eyes again, it was with a start of surprise, for, before him, with his arms folded on his breast, and regarding him with a calm and untroubled countenance, stood his master; while the moonlight streamed out upon the landscape, and as great a silence as when he lay in death upon the ground reigned around.

"Oh, signor," he at length stammered, in broken tones — "my vigil has been one of the most terrible — "

"Silence, Spalatro," said the resuscitated one, in a deep and hollow voice — "silence. Not a word, now or henceforth, must pass your lips respecting what you have seen to night. Breathe but a syllable of what I am to a human being, and naught on earth shall hide you from my vengeance."

Spalatro bowed before his master in obedience, while his frame gave a shudder of horror, as he regarded the deathly appearance that still lingered in the signor's features.

"Spalatro," resumed the signor, after a slight pause, "you have rendered me great and faithful service, and your reward has been proportionate; but there is yet another service which I would seek at your hands. The Lady Oriana, for the possession of whom the Signor Fracati and I have fought, and for whose sake I received the wound which deprived me for a time of life, is at Florence, and at present ignorant of the mishap that befel me. The Signor Fracati and yourself are the only persons who are aware of it. He will carry to Florence the news of my death; and, on my re-appearance before the Lady Oriana, what tale can I invent to satisfy her? No, no — he must not reach Florence — he must never look upon the Lady Oriana again. You, Spalatro, wear a poniard, you have a powerful hand — and you know well where to strike. Rid me of this hated rival, and wealth shall be yours."

Spalatro stood rooted to the spot while the signor spoke, and an expression of mingled horror and disgust crossed his countenance as the latter proceeded. When the signor had concluded, he stepped a pace or two back, and in a tone full of indignation, said, —

"Signor Waldeberg, I am no assassin; my poniard is yet guiltless of shedding human blood. I saw you receive what was thought to be a mortal wound in honourable combat with the Signor Fracati, and in these arms I beheld you sink in death. You had extorted from me a promise that after a certain lapse of time I would convey your body to this vast solitude, and lay it where the moonbeams should fall upon it; for that then life should once more revisit you. All this I have done, and faithfully; I feared to fail in my promise, for I knew the penalty you would pay if you failed to fulfil the conditions of your compact. But, signor, I am now no longer bound to you; you have commenced a fresh existence, which you would baptise with blood; you have passed the portals of death, and I will no longer serve you. I will seek another service and another master, who will require less at my hands, though his pay may be lighter. Farewell, signor, and better thoughts to you."

Spalatro turned upon his heel as he spoke, and with a hasty wave of his hand was leaving the spot, when the signor drew a pistol from a belt that was fastened round his waist, and, exclaiming, "He knows too much respecting me to be suffered to live," fired it full at the head of the young man. The latter uttered a yell of agony which echoed loudly amid the awful silence, and fell lifeless on the earth. When the smoke from the pistol had cleared away, that lonely spot was deserted save by the body of Spalatro, whose blood, streaming upon the ground, reflected the moonbeams with a dull red glare. * * * *

When the morning sun broke over the mountain tops, its rays fell upon the form of the still insensible Spalatro. It was but seldom that any footsteps, save those of the wolf or the goat, left their impress on those rocks, and it was almost a miracle that the body of the unfortunate man was not left a prey to the former.

About an hour after daybreak, the bells of a string of mules were heard in the distance, accompanied by the cheerful song of the muleteer. A short time sufficed to bring the cavalcade to the spot, where lay the body of Spalatro, and the muleteer, with a cry of alarm, brought his train to a stop. Finding that life still remained, the humane mountaineer raised him from the ground, placed him across one of the mules, and then hastened forward to the next inn, which, however, was at some miles distance.

On arriving there, he found that the only apartment was occupied by a signor and his daughter, who, however, when the condition of the wounded man was made known to them, instantly relinquished it to him, and, after seeing his wounds looked to, ascertained that no mortal result was to be feared, and giving orders that he should want for no attention that money could procure, they pursued their journey.

It was many weeks before Spalatro recovered, and when he did regain his strength, he learned, with a feeling of deep gratitude, that the lady who had been so instrumental in his recovery was no other than the Signora

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Oriana. In an instant a vow was upon his lips that he would save her from the power of the fearful monster, whose only mission now on earth, seemed but to destroy the most beautiful of nature's creation. With this purpose fixed in his mind, he one morning bid adieu to the residents of the little inn, and set off on his self-imposed errand. * * * * *

Some days after the scene we have described as occurring on that lonely mountain pass, a report reached Florence, where the Signora Oriana was then staying with her father, that the Signor Fracati had met his death at the hands of a bravo, and that his body had been discovered stabbed in innumerable places. The grief of Oriana was intense, for she held the signor in great estimation, and she would have had but little hesitation in bestowing upon him her hand, if her father's consent could but have been gained to the union. Signor Vivaldi, however, had been captivated by the great wealth, personal appearance, and captivating manners of the Signor Waldeberg, and he had fixed his mind upon him becoming the husband of his daughter.

Weeks passed away, and the memory of the murdered Fracati was gradually fading from the mind of Oriana. The respectful yet warm attentions of Waldeberg won upon a young and innocent heart that had always felt a slight esteem for him, and as she knew that her father's happiness in a great measure depended upon her consent to the union, it was at length given with a freedom that brought joy to the old man's heart.

It was arranged that the ceremony should take place at a chateau belonging to Waldeberg, in the neighbourhood of Lucca, whither it was resolved at once to proceed; and for this purpose Signor Vivaldi and his daughter, accompanied by Waldeberg, left Florence for that city.

As they were passing through the gates, a monk, with his cowl drawing carefully over his face, stepped hastily up to the carriage window, and, thrusting a letter into the hands of Oriana, as hastily disappeared.

With some surprise, she opened it and read it, and then a paleness overspread her countenance, and she sank back in her seat almost insensible. Her father snatched the paper from her trembling hand, and hastily glancing over its contents, with a look of anger, handed it to the Signor Waldeberg.

"See, signor, what some meddling fool, envious of your happiness, has done to alarm my daughter's fears. Does he deem us so grossly superstitious as to believe in such children's tales?"

The signor took the paper, which he found to run thus: —

"SIGNORA, — A grateful heart warns you. Wed not the murderer of Fracati — wed not him who, once returned from death to life, seeks but your hand to provide a victim for the purpose of prolonging a hateful existence. If you despise this warning, at any rate, postpone the ceremony but for seven days from hence, and then his power of injuring you will have departed from him."

"Do you know the writer, signor?" asked Vivaldi.

"It is evidently the handwriting of a servant of mine, whom I dismissed for insolence some few weeks since," returned Waldeberg, a shade of vexation evidently passing across his brow; "and he now takes this means of endeavouring to obtain his revenge. But I will take means of having him punished."

They now endeavoured to soothe the agitation of Oriana, but the incident seemed to have taken a firm hold upon her imagination, and, in spite of all their efforts, she found it impossible to shake off the effect it had upon her.

The chateau, the place of their destination, was at length reached; preparations were instantly commenced for the celebration of the marriage, which was to take place, by the Signor Waldeberg's express desire, on the sixth day from that on which they had left Florence. As the day drew near, the spirits of Oriana grew gradually depressed, and a slight feeling of dread seemed to steal over her, whenever she found herself in the presence of her lover. Her father questioned her as to its cause, and then she confessed that the mysterious warning she had received preyed deeply on her mind. It might be a superstitious weakness, but she could not repress it; and she requested her father, however reluctant he might be, to consent to put it off for at least another day.

The entreaties of his daughter, though he laughed at her fears, prevailed upon the old man, and he gave his consent to her request; but when he mentioned the alteration in the time to Waldeberg, the countenance of the latter underwent a complete change to the hue of death. No prayer, however, could prevail upon the old man to recal his consent to his daughter's wish, and the signor departed evidently in a state of the greatest despair.

That night the Signora Oriana was missing from her chamber, and though the strictest search was made for her, not the least trace of her presence could be found. The grief of the father and the lover knew no bounds, and there seemed to be no hope of consolation for them. * * * * *

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It is the night of the sixth day — that day against which Oriana had been so mysteriously warned. In a large vault, far beneath the chateau, and lighted by innumerable torches, that threw a red and smoky glare around, stood the beautiful Oriana and the Signor Waldeberg. The former was pale as marble, and an expression of the most intense despair was upon her countenance.

The signor, resolved that she should become his wife before the expiration of the six days, had torn her from her chamber, and immured her in that fearful place, with the hope of forcing her to become his bride; but Oriana revolted at such usage, and feeling more convinced than ever that the warning she had received had its foundation in truth, had resisted alike his persuasions and his threats.

The hour of midnight was fast approaching, and before an altar that stood at one end of the vault, was an old and venerable priest, with an open book in his hand. Waldeberg drew Oriana towards him, and forced her to kneel at the foot of the altar. She entreated — she supplicated — she appealed to the priest; his only answer was a solemn shake of the head, and then he proceeded to read the marriage ceremony. Waldeberg took her hand — but she suddenly flung it from her, and uttered the most piercing screams that echoed fearfully amidst those cavernous places. Still the priest read on, and despite her emotion and her agony of terror, Waldeberg regarded her with a cold and determined gaze.

"Faster! faster!" he muttered to the priest, "or all will be lost!" and he glanced anxiously around the vault.

At the moment, striking fearfully on the silence, came the sound of the turret clock telling the hour of midnight. On the first stroke, the most fearful sounds the human ear ever listened to filled the place — strange indefinite shadows flitted around, filling the air with a rushing sound, as if of mighty wings — the altar changed to a heap of human bones — the priest to a ghastly skeleton. Then came darkness, terrible and distinct; and Oriana swooned upon the damp floor.

When she recovered, she found the day had broken, and the sunlight was streaming upon her face; while her father and the young man whom she had seen wounded at the inn on the mountains were stooping over her in alarm.

The inhabitants of the chateau had been alarmed in the dead of the night by a terrific storm, which had thrown into ruins a part of the castle, and a vast chasm had been made in the foundations, disclosing the vaults, the existence of which had been until then unknown.

Beneath the rich vestments of Waldeberg, and lying in a heap on the ground, were the remains of a human skeleton — all that was now left of the guilty being who had thus paid the penalty for failing in complying with the conditions of the fearful compact into which he had entered with the unholy powers of darkness.

It was many months before the mind of Oriana recovered its strength, and when it did, she entered a convent of Ursuline nuns, and endeavoured to forget, in the consolations of religion, the fearful trial she had undergone. *
* * *

Twissel laid down the book which he had been reading, and fell into a strange kind of musing, in which the vampyre, Waldeberg, and the East India colonel were strangely mixed up together. From this reverie he was awakened by a rap at the street-door, and then, in a few minutes afterwards, Mrs. Meredith entered the room, exclaiming, —

"Well, Mr. Twissel, you always come in luck's way."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Twissel, involuntarily thinking of what he had that morning undergone, as well as what he went through a day or two before; and, for the life of him, he saw not what might be called luck, unless it was that species known as ill-luck.

"Yes, Mr. Twissel, you are; you've just come in time to hear the news."

"What news, ma'am — what news? If you'll be pleased to enlighten me upon that subject, I shall be better able to understand what you allude to."

"Why, you see, the colonel has been so pressing, that my daughter has been induced to name the day. Yes, Mr. Twissel, she has named the day — not a distant day either. He begged and entreated you don't know how hard, which, at least, shows how much he meant it."

"Well, truly, it is news, Mrs. Meredith," said the attorney; "but, at the same time, it is what I expected, though not just at this juncture. The fact is, there is but little can be said against Colonel Deverill; but, at the same time, there will be but little said for him. I am by no means sure that there will be any property found. If he were a man of money, he would not hesitate to lay his circumstances open."

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"He is too proud a man for that."

"Well, it may be all very well to attribute it to that cause. However that may be, there can be no doubt you have a right to do as you please, and I bow to your decision; but, still, I do so, having expressed my opinion to the contrary, being very suspicious of him. But, as I said before, you are entitled to do what you please in the affair; I have no right to do more."

"My daughter and I have been considering the matter over and over again, and we have come to the conclusion that it should take place, and she has consented that it should take place in about ten days' time, when we shall expect to have your company, Mr. Twissel."

"I am obliged to you, and assure you my opinions upon this matter are not at all personal. I will meet the colonel, and I will be present with you all on that happy occasion with much pleasure; and I hope it will be a fortunate and happy marriage."

"I hope so, too," said Mrs. Meredith; "and I have every reason to believe so."

"That is good," said the attorney.

"And now, Mr. Twissel," said Mrs. Meredith, "what did you do this morning at the South Sea House? I could not send to you so early as I could have wished, as I did not know he was going till the coach was ordered, and he went away almost immediately. I then sent Mary to you; I don't know at what time she came to you, but at all events she was not back here until late."

"She must have got to my place in good time, if she only started after the colonel had left this house," said the attorney.

"I am very glad of that, at all events; but what success did you have?"

"Success, indeed," said Mr. Twissel, with a shrug of mortification. "I have only succeeded in getting myself into a very serious difficulty, and the colonel has eluded me again. I can't understand it all. I don't know what to think; but I am sure of this, that I have been in a series of disasters ever since I undertook to follow him about, and I have discovered nothing concerning him."

"What has happened to you to-day, then?" inquired Mrs. Meredith.

"Oh! as for that, what seems to be but natural in itself; and, therefore, it may be said not to be connected with him; indeed, though that were really the case, yet there is so much concurrent action, I cannot divest myself of the idea that it is a fatal affair, as far as regards looking after him."

"Then don't do so any more, Mr. Twissel."

"I'll never give in," said Twissel.

"Well, but what need you trouble yourself more about the affair? I assure you we're all well satisfied that Colonel Deverill is Colonel Deverill, and that he had property; that being the case, I am sure you have nothing to trouble yourself about, or to blame yourself for."

"I am conscious of that," said the attorney, rubbing his knee. "I have done all I can; and I have given my advice -- I hope I have done my part."

"Yes, you have," said Mrs. Meredith. "I am quite satisfied; but what has happened to you?"

"I will tell you, my dear madam -- I will tell you. I have been assaulted, knocked about, robbed, and my faculties all confused, and no use to me. I have lost my handkerchief, watch, and purse; and I have had my trowsers ripped open; and I can't tell what besides. I am safe, however."

"Well, that is right, at all events; but it is most annoying to me that you should be subject to those terrible accidents. I can't understand the meaning of it."

"I can't," said the attorney.

"But why should you, more than any one else, be subject to these misfortunes? I can't understand it at all, Mr. Twissel. Perhaps you do something or other unusual on such occasions, which had been the cause of such terrible trouble."

"Not that I am aware of," said Twissel; "but the fact is, I don't know of anything peculiar in my appearance or behaviour, that should cause this disaster. But I am sure of this, that there is nothing more singular about me, than what there usually is; and why it should only attract notice on these occasions and no other, I cannot tell."

"Nor I. Well, I suppose it must have been there was some other circumstance, independent alike of him and you, that had caused this disagreeable affair."

"Perhaps there might be."

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"Well, now, Mr. Twissel, there's another affair I wish to speak to you about; or, rather, it's a thing my daughter Margaret should speak to your daughter Elizabeth and Miss Martha about. You see, as they are not very often together, I thought it right to speak to you first."

"Yes, ma'am -- go on, pray."

"Well, my Margaret is to be married in a few days. Now, we don't want relatives at all; and I was advising her to beg your permission to have the two young ladies whom I have named, as bridesmaids, and who will be of essential service to my daughter."

"I have no doubt but they will feel very much gratified with the proposal; and one could not have been better devised than this one to please them."

"Then, will you invite them to come here, and spend the evening with Margaret and yourself, Mr. Twissel, the first evening you find leisure and inclination?"

"Well, I have destroyed to-day, so far as a business day, by drinking brandy--and--water early, and I may as well finish it in an agreeable manner."

"That is very good; we shall expect you to tea this evening."

"You may," said Mr. Twissel; "if you are not otherwise engaged. I may as well do all that is necessary, so as to have as little to do, by--and--bye, as possible. Has the colonel come home?"

"No, not yet; I did not expect him to come home so soon as this, but he will be back in a very short time, now, I dare say."

"Then I will bid you good bye, for it will be unnecessary to meet him in this plight; indeed, he might think I paid him no respect to do so; and besides it will be better, altogether, that he should not see me so soon, lest he should have caught sight of me in the city; which, indeed, I think wholly impossible, for I only had a distant glimpse of him."

"Then, good bye, sir; I shall see you and the young ladies."

"Both -- my daughter, and her young friend, Martha."

Mr. Twissel arose, and left the house to return to his own house, and get his daughter prepared for the visit, and her friend also, while Mrs. Meredith and her daughter, Margaret, consulted together, as to what would be the best method of doing honour to the occasion of the forthcoming marriage.

"You see, my dear," said Mrs. Meredith, "we cannot very well invite our own friends, because they are such a greedy, rapacious set; they would sooner spoil a good chance for us than let us have it unmolested; they are by far too greedy -- no, no, they must not come -- they will think themselves injured if they cannot share the harvest."

"And all will be lost."

"To be sure; and, moreover, we could not shake them off when we wanted, and which we must do very soon, for the colonel will never abide them."

"No, ma' I think not, indeed -- they are decidedly low people, who are genteel only of a Sunday; it will never do to have such people about us."

"Oh, dear, no."

"Here is the colonel come back; see if that girl has got the water hot, he will like his tea early; I am quite sure she hasn't got it ready -- what a provoking girl that is, to be sure. She does nothing all day; I must get rid of her."

"Yes; but she is very ugly."

"That is one great recommendation in her favour," said Mrs. Meredith; "one very great recommendation; it ensures domestic peace, to say the least of it, and there's not so many followers usually. Now, however, we must do the best until we have more; but here he is."

At that moment the colonel entered the house, and proceeded at once to the drawing-room, having first divested himself of his hat and cloak in the passage. Up stairs was a good fire and an easy chair, with ottomans for his feet, and a comfortable well furnished apartment it was.

Mrs. Meredith followed him up and entered the room after him, to inquire what he would like done next; and with her assistance, he took his boots off and put on a pair of splendid slippers, and reposed with a groan of satisfaction on the chair.

"I think, Mrs. Meredith," he said, "that the best thing I can have will be some tea. Where is Margaret? when she is at liberty, I wish to see and speak to her."

"She will be here in a few moments, colonel," said Mrs. Meredith; "I will send her to you."

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"No hurry for a few moments," said the colonel.

"Something about the jewels, I'll be sworn," said Mrs. Meredith, to herself; "I wonder what he has in that parcel; a present, I dare say."

Mrs. Meredith sought Margaret, and related what the colonel said, with his desire to see her, and that young lady at once proceeded to the drawing-room.

"Oh, my dear Margaret," said Colonel Deverill, "I see you are pleased to see I have returned; your very eyes tell me so. Come here to me, dearest."

"Ah, my looks, I am afraid, say too much."

"Not at all — not at all," said the colonel; "I love to see them, especially when I know they are sincere, when they come from the heart, you know; I love to see innocent and heartfelt satisfaction beaming from such a face as yours."

"Oh, colonel, you are really too complimentary; not that I think you don't mean what you say, but your partiality is too great to allow you to judge as a stranger would."

"I do not desire to judge as a stranger would; it does not give me any satisfaction. To look upon you with the eyes of a lover, is a privilege I most desire, and very soon with those of a husband; then my happiness will be complete. How I long for the days and the hours to fly by — they cannot go too fast now; by and bye they may pass as slowly as you please — that done, then I am quite content, because I shall pass them happily, rapturously."

"Ah, you are so kind-hearted, so good, that I can never repay you."

"Do not seek to do so, you will only make me the heavier in debt; but come, there is a small parcel, with a few trinkets I have purchased; the jewels I spoke of are in hand, and they will be ready in time for our marriage."

"Nay, do not think about them — not to disturb yourself, colonel; I am quite content if I am dressed as befits the occasion; but I am really obliged to you for your present, whatever it may be; and I may as well tell you I have thought — indeed, I have said as much — I should like to have a couple of female friends to visit me on that occasion."

"Yes, my dear, you may depend upon it, I shall be the more happy when I know you are so too; but no matter, ask whom you please; as far as I am able, I will make them welcome and happy. I suppose, however, you are alluding to your bridesmaids."

"I am," said Margaret.

"I shall be most happy to see them, or any friend you may desire," added the colonel.

"And will you have no one on the occasion?" inquired Margaret; "won't you have somebody to keep you in countenance upon the occasion?"

"No," said the colonel, "I shall not; I have no friends with whom I am intimate enough, that I know of, at this present moment; there may be people in London, with whom I have been, in India, intimate with, but I do not know for certain; but time and accident will turn up old friends, and I have not the desire to seek for them; but if we must have some one, I do not know whether Mr. Twissel would not do quite as well, if he would come, and your mother had no objection."

"I am sure she would not. Mr. Twissel was an old friend of my father's, and, consequently, he would be no stranger at all to the family; besides, it is daughter, and her friend, Martha, that I have invited upon this occasion; have I done wrong?"

"Not at all, it could not have happened better; I am sure they must be very worthy people, and any one whom you please, or they know, that you feel disposed to invite, do so, with the confidence that whatever pleases you on the occasion, will please me."

At that moment there was an alarming rapping at the door, which caused them to pause a few moments; then they continued their conversation until the servant announced to Miss Meredith, that Miss Twissel, her papa, and her friend, Martha, were come.

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Chapter CXXX. A PLEASANT EVENING. -- THE BRIDESMAIDS.

"I know how that is," said Margaret, before she left the drawing-room; "that was through my ma'. I dare say she has invited them to take tea with her to-night. I should not at all wonder about that. I have not seen them for some time. They keep a great deal at home, and visit but little. They are playful, homely girls, but good-hearted, and that is why I prefer them to more fashionable friends, whose goodness of heart I cannot rely upon. They are insincere."

"You are very right; but you will, I hope, let me see your friends, and unless you have family matters to speak of, perhaps you will take tea up here with me. I shall be all alone if you do not; so, you see, I am speaking from selfish motives; but do not think I shall be at all hurt if you do not see fit to accept the invitation for them."

"I will accept it for them cheerfully, and shall be much surprised if they do not do so too," said Margaret, as she walked towards the door, and then left the apartment, to proceed first to her own room, and there to examine her present, before she sought the visitors to give them their invitation.

The parcel contained some handsome laces and other matters, beautiful and expensive, such things as she could wear, and excite the envy of others; which was, of all things, and usually is of women in general, the most enchanting thing in all the world, and gives intense gratification.

After admiring for a moment or two the beauties of the laces, she could not help involuntarily exclaiming, — "This will be beautiful, so very becoming, and so much above anything else that can be brought by my bridesmaids. I shall be a queen amongst them; indeed, they will but set me off to the utmost advantage. I shall be the glory of the occasion."

Having secured her new acquisition from inquisitive eyes, by locking it up in her drawers, she returned down stairs, and then entered the parlour, where, truly enough, as she had imagined, there was Mr. Twissel, Miss Twissel, and Miss Martha, all of whom were dressed out for the occasion.

There was some truth in what Margaret had said to her mother, that the two intended bridesmaids were not likely to induce any one to fall in love with them. They were oddities of the first water. Miss Twissel had light brown hair, bushy eyebrows, a straight masculine nose, a mouth that turned up on one side, and one of her eyes had a gentle inclination to gaze at her nose, while her complexion was increased by a vast quantity of sun freckles.

Then, as for Miss Martha, she was another beauty of a similar class; hooked nose, with one eye paying undue attention to the auricular organ, while the other was somewhat injured by a blank appearance; her hair was red, and she was pitted by the small-pox to a fearful extent.

Such were the two friends whom Miss Meredith had chosen for bridesmaids, with the laudable view of putting no temptation in the way of the colonel, which Mrs. Meredith, her mother, most strenuously advised, as she had experience of the men.

"My dear Miss Twissel, and you, Martha!"

"Ah! Margaret, God bless me, who could have imagined, above all things, what I have come about. What can you be thinking and doing? here you've no friends to help you. I see you have done it all yourself. What can you think of people? you have no mercy."

"Aye," said Martha, "there's no doing anything while you are about. No one else has a chance, but you must tell us all about it."

"Yes, yes, I will tell you all about it; and more than that, you shall see the colonel if you please."

"That is what we should like, above all things."

"Oh! it is a colonel, then — a rich Indian colonel. Upon my word, you will have to be presented at court next."

"He! he! you are joking me now. Well, never mind, I shall joke you some of these days. You may depend upon that; my turn will come next, and then I won't forget you. But seriously, there are more unlikely things may come to pass than that."

"Well, now; I dare say. Who would have thought of that, now? But then you are so lucky, you see; only think what might have been the case if the colonel had been a young man! why he might become as great a man as the

Marquis of Granby. Why, you'd have been a marchioness then. Well, bless my heart, how things do come about!"

"Well, you had better come up to the drawing-room," said Margaret, "and see the colonel, who is waiting tea for us all. Come, ma'."

"Yes, my dear, I am ready. Mr. Twissel, will you come?"

"If you please," said Mr. Twissel, "if you please. We shall now soon have the pleasure of seeing an end to this affair; for, as it is to come off, why, when it is over, it will be all the better. Expectation is always a time of uncertainty and anxiety — at least, to most people."

"So it is, Mr. Twissel, so it is; and I am not without my share of it; for, in the first place, human life is short, and circumstances may alter cases; so I am anxious to see it over, and offer no impediment in the way of the completion of the marriage."

"Certainly, you are quite right; having made up your mind to permit the marriage to take place, why, the sooner the better."

They were all now introduced to the colonel, who was very polite and courtly, which in some degree embarrassed the young ladies, who were compelled to put on, as they expressed it, their best behaviour, and so did not become quite so familiar. However, that did not spoil the harmony of the meeting, for the young ladies considered there was more respect paid to them, and the less they were able to appreciate the politeness with which they were treated, the more they believed themselves honoured.

They were well enough pleased, and the conversation turned upon various matters, while Mr. Twissel was uncommonly attentive to the colonel; indeed, he watched him most narrowly, every turn and every expression, as if he were resolved to ascertain, by constant surveillance, whether there was any foundation for his half-inspired doubts respecting him; and also as to whether it were possible that he could have had any hand in the disasters which he had on two several occasions suffered.

But yet he could see nothing — nothing at all that gave him the slightest pretext for persisting in his suspicion. He appeared the same easy, careless individual, who would not trouble himself to consider whether he was watched or not, or whether his actions were the subject of other people's thoughts, or whether they were unnoticed, it mattered nothing to him.

"It is singular," he muttered to himself, "very singular, how it could all happen by accident, and only at moments when I was watching him. I can't tell; and yet the occurrences were of that character, to another they would seem wholly unconnected, and I am unable to connect them, save by fancy; but he looks not a very old man, but rather like one who has the full use of his faculties. He is singularly pale, to be sure, and yet, at times, he does not appear so old, nor does his arm and leg seem quite so bad as others; perhaps it varies, according to circumstance, weather, the moon, or unforeseen changes."

He remained cogitating very quietly by himself; he was thoughtful, and could by no means divest himself of the idea that there was something more than common about the colonel.

"He don't seem so blind with that eye as he might be," he muttered; "but there is no use calculating about an Indian; they have got such luxurious habits and fancies, that if he fancies one of his eyes is in any degree weak, he will wear a shade for its preservation. Well, he is entitled to do so, but he ain't so old as they imagine. And that will be no detriment to him or to them; so much the better, unless they reckon upon the colonel's death, which would hardly be an object to them, seeing that it could bring them no more; indeed, it would diminish their income. But he is a tall man now, and, if he did not stoop so much, would yet be a fine man."

These thoughts passed through his mind, time after time, during the whole evening; while the colonel himself was at times conversing in the most refined and courtly language, and doing much towards amusing them with anecdotes of the places he had seen, and the battles he had fought.

"You would be surprised," he said, "to hear that, in India, there are places so cold that they more resemble the Polar regions than central Asia, of which we only used to think of as being one of the hottest regions in the world, filled with wild animals and numerous serpents."

"Certainly, we hear more of that than anything else — the yellow fever, the cholera, and all these kinds of things, caused by exposure to the heat."

"So they are; but it is only in the plains, and not on the high table lands and mountains, where you gradually meet with more temperate climates, many of which equal northern Europe for salubrity; and, further up, you come to frozen regions."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

"Indeed! that is a phenomenon."

"Oh, dear, no; the altitude of the plain, and the exposure, make the sole difference. I remember once, I was sent with some other regiments to chastise some of the hill tribes."

"Under whom was that?" inquired the attorney.

"General Walker," returned the colonel; "he was a very able general, and we performed some extraordinary marches under him, as well as some service."

"Oh, indeed!" said the attorney; "what might have taken place?"

"I will tell you an incident that did take place; and not relate more scenes of carnage that we passed through in the execution of our duty than shall be actually necessary. We had, on one occasion, to storm a city; on another, a fortified town; it was strong, and well protected by nature and art.

Well, we arrived there, and the gates were closed against us; guns were brought to bear, and men appeared on the walls. We expected, of course, a sharp time of it, and being only the advance guard, we halted for the main body to come up with us; and, after having summoned the garrison to surrender, we put posts and watchers for the night, not expecting to do anything upon that occasion; nor did we expect the main body up with us till the middle of the next day, they having sent word on to me that they would not be up in cosequence of some accident to some part of the train, which would have to be repaired; but a portion of the troops would advance a stage nearer to me, in case of an accident, upon which I could retire for support, or send to them to come up as the exigencies of the moment should most require; but they did not anticipate any movement at all. Nor did we; the fact was, we had made a forced march of it; and had got over more ground than we had expected, and our main body did not think we should have been so near the scene of action as we were.

However, a counsel of war was held amongst the officers; and it was resolved that we should attempt nothing without the assistance of our comrades, as the place was very strong, as I have before told you.

Well, sir, half the night was over, and we lay fast asleep, having had a hard — very hard day's work of it, — so hard that we could sleep sound on the bare earth; we were all suddenly awakened by a loud explosion, which shook the very earth under us; and, upon starting up, and rushing out of our tents, we saw the earth and air illumined by the explosion of, as we afterwards learned, and guessed at the moment, one of the enemy's powder magazines.

In another minute we found there were plenty of falling missiles, with the debris of the magazine, and the mangled corpses of the men who were near it.

There was an instant order to muster the men; everybody knew what was meant. They were all ready in a few moments — indeed, we slept by our arms — fully accoutred, so it did not take long to be ready for action.

We were ordered to form in divisions and bodies, and as there was ample breach made by the explosion there, I was ordered to mount the breach, and enter the town for the purpose of assault.

We did this. We marched down upon the breach after some difficulties, and were fairly in it; but had our commanding officer known any of the difficulties; he would not have incurred the responsibility of ordering us to advance, for the ruins we had to scramble over were dreadful, and, had there been light, we could every one have been picked off by the enemy.

Darkness was our friend, and we got into the town with a comparatively trifling loss, and when our men got together they began to tell a tale, for their volleys were well directed upon the enemy, who were drawn up in masses, and whose fire directed ours. We were not completely exposed to their fire, for the same objects that exposed our men, as they were surmounted before reaching the enemy, protected them from immense volleys of musketry.

However, we carried the point, and at that moment another explosion took place in some other part of the town, which illumined all around for a moment or two, and then came masses of bricks, and stones, and timber, killing friend and foe. For a while we were staggered; we did not know what to think of this affair. We knew not whether we had an enemy to fight, or even where he was. We were completely at a standstill.

But this did not last long. The defenders fled, and left us masters of the field. We remained under arms all that night, till daylight.

Glad were we, indeed, when daylight came; we were fatigued, so much so that our men could scarcely stand in the ranks. Then parties were sent out to look after the wounded, who had been left in all imaginable situations. It was at such a moment that I was discovered; my leg was shattered by a musket bullet."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

"And you lay bleeding all night?"

"Yes. Not exactly bleeding, for I had sense left me to bind a ligature over the wound to stop the effusion of blood, which would have killed me in a very short time. However, there was no necessity to lose my leg, but it has made me permanently lame."

"I see you are so, sir," said Twissel; "but do you never feel it worse at some times than at others?"

"Yes, I do. There are times when I do not know that I have received a hurt at all; but sometimes I suffer a little, and am a little more lame in consequence."

"It was fortunate," said Twissel, "it was your leg, for it might have been your head, you know, and that would have been a death-blow to your fortune."

"Yes," said the colonel, mildly; "I might have been killed, as you observe; but at the same time I should have done my duty, which in these cases is all we looked to. I might have saved a better man, who had a wife and family — I had none."

Conversation now ran on the forthcoming event, and Mr. Twissel was invited by the colonel, and the whole party were well satisfied with each other, and parted very good friends, with the promise of meeting again before the propitious morning which was to unite the fates of Margaret Meredith and Colonel Deverill.

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Chapter CXXXI. A NEW CHARACTER. -- MISS TWISSEL'S VISITOR. -- THE INVITATIONS.

Nothing could exceed the smoothness and easiness of the course of things in the wooing of Margaret Meredith; all things appeared so well ordered. People were all of one mind; and it is needless to say that the young lady was elated. She was elated, and we might not be out of the way in saying she was elated overmuch, and knew not how to keep the exhibition of her joy within proper bounds; she could not help showing she was to be the lady of a colonel.

Mrs. Meredith, too, was well pleased. What could she do but feel proud at the change that was about to take place? She would go to watering places in the summer, and remain in town during the winter; they would lead a very fashionable life -- they would be of the elite, and all their acquaintances they would be compelled to cut, or, at the most, only speak to them when they were unseen by any others.

It is astonishing how a change of circumstances produces a change in our habits and feelings; how it happens that those who were considered respectable acquaintances suddenly become the objects of our aversion, and we begin to devise all sorts of methods for evading recognition, or of speaking to them when we can avoid it.

This arises merely from the change in one's circumstances, which causes us to look for something much beyond what we have been used to; but, unfortunately, it brings ingratitude often in the train of its consequents.

"My dear," said Mrs. Meredith to her daughter Margaret, "we really cannot know the people at the corner house over the way, who invited us to their parties."

"Oh, dear, no, we cannot think of it; but we must get rid of them the best way we can. You see they will not be quite the thing for us when we come to have our change of circumstances, you may depend upon it; it will become necessary to weed one's acquaintance."

"Yes, that must be done," said Mrs. Meredith.

"And the sooner we set about it the better; for the more intimate we continue now, the more trouble will there be of getting rid of them afterwards."

"Certainly; we need not accept of their invitation for to-night."

"Oh, dear, no; I have dismissed the whole affair from my mind, and there is no need even of thinking of it any more. I shall not even think of sending them an answer; the consequence will be, they will be angry, and expect we shall go and apologise, and when they find we don't, but that we try to get rid of them, they will be baffled, and the whole affair is settled."

"That is a very good plan, my dear. Then, you know, there are the Morgans; we must positively get rid of them. It will never do to have those young men hanging about; the colonel would do something dreadful, to say the least of it. Why, he would shoot them, and perhaps have a separation, who knows?"

"But then I should be entitled to a maintenance."

"You would, my dear; but unfortunately you well know you have no property, and that, added to an early separation, would put it in his power to offer you and compel your acceptance of a very small sum, which he may pay as he pleases -- weekly, monthly, or quarterly."

"I see, ma; but we will run no risk of that kind of thing. Moreover, there would be those girls, they would be a nuisance hanging about the colonel."

"No doubt, and the cause of unhappiness in the extreme. Better to leave all such people; you are a great deal better without them. Why, I tell you what, you will be at no loss of company or acquaintances, you will find they will be sure to spring up; property is sure to enable you to choose those whom you will have, and whom you will not -- the reason is obvious enough. Moreover, like loves like, you know, and people with means soon find out people who have none."

"Yes, ma, and those who have plenty; besides, a colonel, and a man of rank and standing -- and everybody knows that a colonel in the India service is a rich man -- and that would bring us all into the best of society. Only think of my going to Bath, Bristol, and Brighton, in their seasons. Of course we couldn't keep company with people who can't afford to go to some fashionable place at least once in a year."

"Oh, dear, no; certainly not, my dear; but there is no need of our troubling ourselves about that matter; we

shall only go when the colonel goes, and we shan't be seen without him, and he'll be a constraint upon them; and, therefore, where they find themselves uncomfortable, they will not come again."

"That will be a very good plan, for it will appear as their own faults; but, at the same time, I do not trust to that upon all occasions; it might fail, and then we should have to take some unpleasant steps to get rid of them, which is certainly easily done, but unpleasant."

Yes, yes, certainly," replied the mother; and then suddenly, as a knock and ring came upon the door, Margaret said, "Dear me, who is that? — I hope none of these people whom I have been speaking about — it will be a dreadful nuisance to all; especially when I am to be married in three days more."

"You needn't be seen, Margaret; I'll see them."

"Do, ma; and I'll go up stairs. But let's hear who it is first, who comes today."

At that moment she heard the door open, and her own name pronounced, and at once knew the speaker, and she said to her mother, —

"Oh, ma, 'tis Miss Twissel, my bridesmaid; what an infliction! but, then, I must see her. She has come, I suppose, to consult me about some new gown, or the way in which she and her friend will have their hair done up on the occasion — nothing more important, I dare say."

"Very well, my dear; they had better come in — send them in pray," she added to the servant. "Oh, Miss Twissel, how glad we are to see you."

"Now, really," said Miss Twissel; "how kind you are, for I am sure you speak the truth. Oh, Margaret, don't you feel all of a flutter?"

"I don't, indeed; I am very comfortable. I hope you are all quite well — don't put yourself out of the way on this occasion; you need not, I assure you."

"Oh, I have got my pa to give us new gowns, and some lace; but I did not mean to tell you that — I and Martha had agreed that that should be a secret between us; that we should not say anything about it to any one; but surprise you on your wedding morning."

"Ah, you have been at a great deal of trouble and expense about this affair, I am sure. You really must not think I wish you to do all this; I really don't know how to scold you enough, for I shall be dressed very plainly indeed."

"Oh, but then you are the bride — we ain't, you know, and that makes the difference; besides which, we have a visitor come up to London to see us."

"Indeed! some young gentleman, I suppose, whose heart you want to run away with, and so have another wedding, and upon your own account this time; and, perhaps, you are helping Miss Martha to a husband. What is he — a physician or a divine?"

"Neither — but, I will tell you, he is only an old man."

"An old man! What a sweetheart you have chosen, to be sure! but, I dare say you have your reason as well as other people. But have you know him long?"

"No, we haven't done so; but, the fact is, pa' and he have had some business together, and they are very much in each others company. He's a man, however, of great rank, though a very odd man to talk to, I assure you, but a man of rank and property."

"Indeed! Oh, tell me what he is — a lord?"

"Well, he is not much short of it; and he is higher than a great many lords, I assure you. Why, he's no less than an admiral — only, I wasn't to say anything about it."

"Oh, will he be with you when my marriage takes place?"

"Yes, he will; and I wanted to know, as he will be much with my father, and as a visitor, shall we be intruding to bring him here to grace your wedding?"

"Oh, yes; by all means," said Margaret, who thought the presence of an old man could in no way interfere with any of her schemes; besides, a man of rank, such as an admiral, would greatly increase the noise of her marriage. Indeed, here was probably a new acquaintance with whom she could be intimate; besides, it was some one of consequence on her side that the great man was to come, and would, she thought, add some lustre to herself.

"Well, then, I would not ask him until I had seen you, because it might turn out you would be displeased; and, as I have not done so, I cannot tell you whether he will come or not. He's a strange man, and I won't ask him until the night before."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

"Very well; we shall be quite happy to see him. I dare say he'll come, if you tell him who's going to be married. Indeed, if he's likely to come, I'll invite a few friends to meet him; but I won't say anything to anybody about it."

"No; let it be a surprise to them all; and let nobody know whom they are going to meet."

"That will be delightful, certainly — very delightful. What a surprise it will be to them to be introduced to colonel this and admiral that. I declare I long for the day on account of the confusion that some persons will be in."

"I must now bid your good bye; for I've got to call upon my dressmaker, to give her some orders."

"You will stop and take tea with us? Surely you won't run away."

"Oh, but I must," said Miss Twissel, and so said Miss Martha, and after much pressing and refusing, they parted, and left Margaret filled by other thoughts than those she had so recently held.

"Ma'," said she, after a long pause, "do you know what I have been thinking of?"

"No, my dear, I do not."

"Well, then, it is this, that after all, we may as well make a bit of a figure for the last time. That we will have some friends who will figure upon that occasion and no other."

"What makes you think so, my dear Margaret?"

"Why, you see, ma', we are likely to have a distinguished visitor, and we may as well have as many as we can; their number and dresses will look well, and as we shall leave town immediately, I don't see that we shall be at any future time annoyed by their visits. Indeed, it will be retiring from their society after giving them a feast."

"Well, to be sure, I never thought of that," said her mother — "I never thought of it. What shall we do now — how can we provide for so many?"

"Send an order to a pastry cook to provide breakfast for so many, whether they come or not, and then we need trouble ourselves very little about giving them time. If we tell them about the day before, they will have all in readiness for us."

"Well, well — and as for the expense, it will be of no consequence."

"None," said Margaret. "I shall be able to pay that and others, if we owe any. But now comes the job of inviting visitors, and we must only invite those who will make up a show, dress well, and pass off on the occasion for fashionable people."

"Oh, as for that, there are many people who never had a penny in their lives to call their own, may be very fashionable-looking people, and pass for men of a thousand a year, to say nothing of a lord looking like a workman, and the like, which is common enough."

"Then we'll settle it at that point, ma', and you had better superintend the invitations and the other affair — the breakfast, I mean."

"Very well, my dear; you know that I have no objection. I have seen such occasions before, and I well know what they ought to be; therefore you may safely rely upon my judgment in such an affair as that at least."

"And about the selection of friends — visitors, I mean."

"That you may also leave to me," said Mrs. Meredith; "and, depend upon it, I will not invite one party whom we shall have cause to say we are sorry they came; though, you know, every allowance would be made for them by the colonel or admiral, if he come. By the way, I would not tell the colonel a word about it, for sometimes the land service hates the sea service, and the latter often laugh at the former; so it will be safest to say nothing."

"No, ma, I won't — I didn't intend to do so."

Thus both mother and daughter had suddenly changed their views of what was to take place on the day of the intended marriage. They were now resolved they would have as many of their old friends as they could get together upon the occasion, to cause the affair to go off with all the eclat that it was possible; it would be the last ball of the season — that is, it would be the last she ever intended to give them, and that would be the last occasion upon which they would meet.

Her respect for Miss Twissel was augmented by the knowledge that she had an admiral for a friend or a visitor, it didn't matter which. Who could tell what might happen? Mightn't Miss Twissel marry an admiral, as ugly as she was, as well as she should a colonel? but there were many reasons why she should. She, too, might have had some means of entangling his heart; perhaps, after all, she only came there with him for the purpose of showing him off.

"At all events," said Margaret, to herself; "at all events, he is one that we can keep on terms with; and it will look well to be acquainted with some person of rank. I am, at all events, well pleased it has happened as it has." Mrs. Meredith, on the other hand, appeared to think her daughter's marriage with a colonel, ought to be celebrated by no common rejoicings; that, indeed, the marriage ought to go off with as much disturbance to the whole neighbourhood, as it was possible to make.

This could not bet better effected than in the manner we have referred to; namely, inviting a number of persons to come and be present at the ceremony, and to take a late breakfast, and to wish the bride joy, to see her depart, and then to lose sight of her, as she hoped, for ever.

This purpose Mrs. Meredith ably carried out, and she succeeded in inviting about two or three-and-twenty persons together; and any person who had a carriage and would come in it, was sure of an invitation — that was a passport to the marriage feast.

"Well," she muttered to herself, as she reckoned up the number of persons whom she expected to be present upon the occasion — "well, I don't think I have omitted any one who ought to be present, nor have I invited any one who ought not to be here. I shall have a busy day of it — very busy day; but the result is everything; so long as the marriage takes place, and we are really married to an East Indian colonel, why we shall do, there can be no doubt of it."

This was a consolatory reflection. There was but little else, indeed, that could be done — little, indeed. The cook had the orders for the entertainment the next day; they had but little to do in the household with that; indeed, they had extra hands, lest there should be any need of them, as she would not have anything go wrong upon such an occasion, for worlds.

But there was one thing that gave her some satisfaction, and that was, Mr. Twissel had not been to them lately to give any doubtful counsels; ever since she had announced her intention of permitting the marriage to take place, he had not been to express any doubts about the matter; but had been a mere spectator, doing all that was necessary. He had forgotten all objection, and never made one. He was perfectly quiescent; but would now and then look very hard at the colonel, but that was all; he never discovered anything, and all was smooth and pleasant.

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Chapter CXXXII. THE WEDDING MORNING. -- DISRUPTION OF HARMONY, AND THE NEW ACQUAINTANCE. -- THE CONCLUSION.

Accident, strange to say, had taken our old acquaintance, Admiral Bell, to the house of a lawyer, there to transact some business, as well as to lodge at his house. The fact was, the old admiral hearing that a brother officer was in trouble — one who had shared with him the dangers of the sea and the fight — he came to town to see, himself, what could be done; and finding the affair beyond his comprehension, or, at least beyond his power of personal interference; that, in fact, it required the aid of a third party, and that third person must, of necessity, be a lawyer, he determined to employ the man who happened to be conversant with the circumstances of the case, and this was no other than Mrs. Meredith's friend, Twissel.

However, the admiral's good will towards the race who follow the law, not being so great as his philanthropy, he determined to watch every stage of the proceedings, and to permit nothing to be done without his knowledge, and to see that nothing was neglected.

Hearing from Mr. Twissel the affair that was to take place, a sudden crotchet entered his head, that he should like to be present at the ceremony, and he broached it to Mr. Twissel, who turned to his daughter to ascertain if it were at all possible.

That young lady was desirous of shining among her acquaintances, as one who could introduce an admiral, and who did not like the idea of Margaret Meredith being so find a lady as she now attempted to make herself appear; indeed, she would have been willing to have assisted in raising her some species of mortification; she felt more than true pleasure in the disaster that would be the cause of such feelings. There was a very general dislike to Miss Margaret Meredith, and the truth was, she was much more than usually arrogant and proud, and took all imaginable methods of vexing and mortifying those around her.

But there is little to be said about that; the consent was brought back to the attorney, who felt somewhat elated at it, and communicated it to the admiral, with some remarks upon the kindness and condescension of the persons who had done him so much honour.

This, however, only had the effect of drawing from the admiral, the word, swab, and then he became silent and did not appear to be at all taken aback by the knowledge that an East India colonel was the bridegroom on the occasion, and one of very large property and singular behaviour.

The evening before the marriage was a busy one. The young ladies had to arrange and to re-arrange all their finery; and the bride herself had the task of seeing how she became her bridal dress, to do an infinity of other little matters, and to contemplate the change that was about to take place in so short a period. A few hours more, and she would become a wife.

The colonel, himself, did not in the least fall off in his ardour; he was particularly anxious it should, on no account, be delayed after the day fixed. A later day he appeared to have the utmost objection to; indeed, he declared he would do anything if it came but a day or two earlier.

However, this was considered impossible, and the young lady was permitted to have her way, though it was expressly stipulated that it should not be an hour after the appointed time, for he declared himself dying with impatience to call her his own.

"Now, ma," said Margaret, as she sat talking to her mother the night before; "now, ma, I hope you will not give any of these people countenance when I am gone, and throw off their acquaintance; you will be firm on this point for my sake."

"I will, my dear," said Mrs. Meredith, "I will."

"Then, when I come back, I shall know more of the colonel's mind about where we shall live, and how we shall live. He must let me have something handsome; I have no doubt but what he will; he does not appear to be a close-handed man, quite the reverse; and, all things considered, we shall be able to make a very agreeable living out of it."

"Why, yes, my dear, I cannot doubt it; he is, no doubt, a man of property and can well afford us enough, and some sum as pin-money; indeed, he is too liberal now to be otherwise by and bye; perhaps he will keep on this house, and pay for proper domestics, and keep a carriage. What a change it will be for us all, and how the

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neighbourhood will stare!"

"Yes, ma, they will; but suppose we were to reside out of town, we should have our carriage driving into town, as a matter of course, and now and then sleep in town when we made up a party, or went to the theatre."

"Yes, my dear. What time shall you see the colonel in the morning?"

"Not before I am ready to go."

"To church? Well, but you will have some breakfast with him?"

"No, he will be in his own room, I dare say, till late; he will scarce present himself before the time has come to start; you know his habits, he does not get up very early, and I do not expect to see much alteration. At eleven o'clock we are to be at church. We breakfast at nine, you know, so we shall have time."

"Oh, he is sure to be down to breakfast, ther can be no doubt about that; indeed, he must be called for the purpose; of course, there must be some deviation form a regular rule upon extraordinary occasions like the present."

"Well, well, there may be; but have you given all the invitations you intended to give? -- and have you got any answers to them so as to ensure their attendance?"

"Oh, yes, that is all safe and fixed; we shall have a good many here by half-past eight in the morning, at the latest; but you must contrive to let me have money very soon, or to send me some up, as I am getting very short, for I have laid out a great deal of money lately, and much more than I could, under other circumstances, spare or afford."

"Of course, ma, you will not lose anything by this; I shall take care of you; not a penny that you have laid out but what shall be repaid, and with a handsome return; but do not think about this, it grows late and I must to sleep."

"Do, my dear, and I'll wake you in time in the morning." * * * * *

The morning came, and some of them were about early. Mrs. Meredith was up, and so was Margaret. She could not lie so late as usual. She had done much, and yet she had so much to do still. It was really astonishing to see what there was to do -- no one would have believed it, and even Margaret became surprised.

The morning was now fairly come; the servants were about in the house, and the neighbours were up and about; she could hear her mother chiding and scolding; she could hear the sound of her voice, and she began to believe there was now no time to lose.

The hour of nine was now gone. The knocker and the guests had been heard for the last half hour at the door, and she could hear the voices of the guests below, some of whom spoke audibly enough; then they soon after descended to th breakfastroom, which, by the way, was the drawingroom, as there was not enough room below.

The colonel, at the same moment, entered the room, and a vast number of congratulations were given and received, form side to side, with the utmost urbanity and good will. The colonel, for the first time, had thrown on one side the green shade which he usually wore, but he looked remarkably pale, though he had still the looks of a hearty and healthy man.

The paleness, which seemed to be constitutional, was very extraordinary; but that was explained by the colonel saying, that he had been so ever since he had the yellow fever, which had had that effect upon his complexion.

There was much rejoicing at the occurrences that were now in progress; everybody praised the viands; everything was of the best and first-rate quality, and there were many attendants, which made it so much the better and the more comfortable, as everybody had an abundance of everything.

Mrs. Meredith now shone in the greatest triumph; there was none so great and grand. She patronized everybody, and appeared remarkably condescending, considering she was the mother of a daughter who was about to marry a retired East India service colonel. There were few who did not understand fully the nature of the condescension of the lady herself; besides, she was the presiding goddess of the feast.

Among those who had been invited was the Miss Smith and Mr. Smith. This was the young lady who had been so terrified at the attack that had been made upon her the first night that Colonel Deverill lodged there, and on that night he was so terribly vexed and disturbed.

Mrs. Meredith had invited them, because they were people of means, and Miss Smith could not now do any mischief, because the colonel was pledged to Margaret too far to retract; and as there were several young females, why, the more the better, because it would divert his attention.

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Miss Smith, however, came out of curiosity, and because it was a wedding party, which is the delight and admiration of all young females, and Miss Smith was no exception. Mr. Smith was civil and polite, and hid his internal dislike to the colonel, which he felt and could not account for it; neither did his daughter — she had a great aversion to him, but at the same time suppressed it.

The colonel was courtly and complimentary, and made civil speeches to such as spoke to him; indeed, he never for a moment lost his self-possession; he stood in a less stooping posture than usual, and he was considered a tall, handsome man — a fine man.

"Mr. Twissel," said the colonel, "I am happy to see you — especially gratified to see you — you will be witness of my happiness to-day — you will mark my progress in this affair, and learn what lesson it may teach. That is the way we should pass through life, Mr. Twissel, is it not? Gain knowledge by experience, and become, in old age, a wise man."

"Why, yes; oh, yes," said Twissel, who felt there was something in the remark that touched him to the quick, and he winced under the smart; but he thought it might have been accidentally given, and the colonel was quite ignorant of his disasters; and yet it was a very home thrust, without any previous introduction to it, that made it all the more uncomfortable, and he merely replied, —

"I am happy to see you, Colonel Deverill, and to see you so happy, and the young lady, who, I am sure, deserves to be happy; in fact, I think you both deserve happiness; I am sure, I wish you every imaginable joy, and it gives me great pleasure in seeing it."

"I am sure you do, sir; but you do not seem to eat and enjoy yourself."

"I am so occupied in witnessing the felicity of others, that I had forgotten it; moreover, I expect a friend to be present who happens to be late; he is quite a stranger to all present, and therefore I wished to countenance him as much as I could on that account."

"Then I will not press you now; perhaps you'll do me the favour of introducing your friend to me when he comes, yourself, and I shall be most happy to receive him."

"Thank you, colonel, you do me much honour; I will accept of your great kindness, and do myself the pleasure of presenting him to you, and to Miss Meredith, whom I hope to see soon changed in name."

"I hope the time will now be very short. What hour is it?"

"Half-past nine," said the attorney, consulting his watch.

"At eleven we must be at the church. Well, if we leave at half-past ten, then we shall be there in ample time; I would it were over and that we were on our journey."

"Ah! you are impatient, colonel," said Margaret, as she came up to him.

"My dear angel!" replied Deverill, bowing, "how could I be otherwise when you are the object of my affections? It is not impatience to leave this good company — quite the reverse. But it is because the change of scene, travelling, and change of air will do you much good, and is, I can see, quite necessary for you."

"I think it will do me no harm," said Margaret; "but here comes ma, who really looks tired."

"Well, my dear, I am a little fatigued, but you know I shall have ample time to recover myself. I shall have nothing to disturb my repose."

"Indeed, Mrs. Meredith!" said the colonel; "I am sure we must alter that; we must find some other kind of employment for you, and not suffer you to remain hidden at home. You have catered so well for us this morning, that I am sure you are a most valuable acquisition to a household; with such a superintendence as yours, we should have everything in the utmost plenty, and at the proper moment."

"Ah, colonel! you are flattering — you are."

"We shall soon show that we are not flattering, I hope," said the colonel. "My dear madam, you are the life and soul of the whole company. What should we have done without you? I hope all our friends here are happy and comfortable. I do not know them well enough to pay them all that attention and respect they deserve."

"Exactly, colonel; they all know that well enough, and are fully alive to the honour you do them in being present in the midst of them."

"Who is that young lady who was looking here just now?" inquired the colonel.

"Who? the young lady with the elderly gentleman by her side?"

"Yes; I should like to be introduced to her," said the colonel.

"Oh! certainly," said Mrs. Meredith, vexed in her own heart that she had invited her and her father, now, for

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she had no wish that any one present should be future acquaintances; but there was no help for it; she must introduce them, and accordingly she went up, with the best grace she could put on, to them both, to request they would be introduced to the colonel, who desired the honour of their acquaintance.

There was no hesitation, of course, and they at once advance to meet him, and were introduced to the colonel as Miss and Mr. Smith.

"I am most happy to see you, sir," said the colonel; "and the young lady here is your daughter, I can see, by the family likeness she bears to you."

Miss Smith, however, could not repress a convulsive shudder as she looked upon the colonel. It might have been his complexion, or it might have been that his features brought some terrible recollections to her mind; but she could not, for a moment or so, speak.

"The young lady is ill!" said the colonel, who noticed the emotion.

"What is the matter, Clara, my dear?" said Mr. Smith; "what's the matter --- you are ill?"

"No, no," said Miss Smith; "it was a --- a --- sudden --- sudden dizziness that came across me. I dare say I shall be better by and bye. I am sorry it should have come upon me now."

"Ah! my dear young lady," said Colonel Deverill, drawing himself up to his full height, and looking gravely, but speaking with the utmost courtesy, "you have nothing to regret respecting the occasion; the illness itself is a matter of regret to us all, I am sure; however, let us hope it will be but temporary, and that you will be able to wish me joy, and my beautiful bride."

"You see, Colonel Deverill, ever since the night she was disturbed by the strange attack of what she believes to have been a vampyre, or something that had the form of a man, and a taste for blood, she has been affected thus."

"Dear me!" said the colonel; "what a shocking thing --- a very shocking affair! I think perhaps, the young lady is subject to illness," and he touched his forehead, as much as to intimate an insinuation that the young lady might be somewhat affected in her intellects.

"No, sir; quite the reverse," said her father. "I myself saw a tall, gaunt figure gliding away, which felled me in an instant, and I lay half a minute stunned."

"God bless me!" said the colonel; "this affair is quite romantic! If a German writer had such material by him, what would he not make of it?"

There had been a loud knocking at the door, and some one announced; but nobody took any notice of it. Colonel Deverill did not hear it, but stood talking to Mr. Smith; while Admiral Bell was introduced by Mr. Twissel, who led him towards the group, explaining what had happened.

"By G--d!" said the admiral; "d'ye see how they are crowding about the poor girl? Why, they'd extinguish a fire --- if there was one! Why don't you give young woman air? If you don't stand on one side, I'll put a whole broadside into you, as I would into a Frenchman!"

This singular address produced an immediate sensation, and many moved away.

"Colonel Deverill," said Mr. Twissel, "allow me to introduce my friend Admiral Bell to you. Admiral Bell, this is Colonel Deverill. --- Eh? --- oh! --- eh?"

These latter exclamations were uttered in consequence of the extreme surprise depicted on the countenances of both parties. Admiral Bell's surprise was nothing out of the way; but that of Colonel Deverill was a matter of consternation to many of them. He stepped back a pace or two, and then his lips parted, as though he would speak, but he could not; he panted --- his eye glared, and his nostrils dilated.

"Shatter my mainmast --- upset the cabouse --- turn my state-cabin into a cockpit, and the quarter-deck to a gambling-booth to the whole ship's company!"

"What's all this about?" exclaimed Mrs. Meredith.

"Oh, that odious man! --- who is he? --- what is --- "

"Why, ma'am, I'm old Admiral Bell; very well known for having beaten the French, and the terror of all vampyres. Why, look at the swab --- but you ain't going to get off this time!"

"What is the matter, dear colonel?" said Margaret. "You are ill --- speak --- what is the matter?"

"Ah!" said the admiral; "let him speak, and he'll tell you he's no colonel, and his name ain't Deverill, or, if it be, it ain't his only name; he is Varney the vampyre!"

"A vampyre!" said Miss Smith, starting up with a shriek; "a vampyre! Good heavens! I was not mistaken,

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then; that must be the man!" and she sank back in her father's arms.

"What! has he been at any of his tricks again!" exclaimed the admiral, and he made a stride towards him; but Varney -- for it was he -- avoided him by stepping aside, and placing some other person between himself and the admiral, and then he said, --

"What this madman will say you will not listen to -- you -- -- ."

"Madman! well, I'm hanged; call me man!" said the admiral. "I wish I had my sword by my side, and I would teach you how a madman can fight; but you are not going; I have something to say to you first. If he's going to marry that young lady, all I can say is, she will be food for him -- she'll never live till to-morrow; her blood will made his pale face ruddy!"

Varney stood no longer; but seeing many around him who appeared to have an inclination to stop his passage, he suddenly made to the door, which he secured for a moment on the outside, and then in another he was clear of the house.

This was no sooner done, than all present, who were staring at each other in mute amazement, and unable to account for what had happened, looked at the new comer, the admiral, who immediately began to relate enough of Varney that made it apparent to all present that he was not what he represented himself to be. * * * * *

Amid the commiserations of their friends, and their jeers, Mrs. Meredith sold all her furniture, and, with her daughter, retired to some little place, where they opened a small shop, to eke out a living by such means. They were unable even to pay many debts they had contracted on account of this marriage, and they were, moreover, ashamed to be seen by their former acquaintance.

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Chapter CXXXIII. A SCENE IN WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL. -- THE CATHEDRAL ROBBERS. -- A STORM. -- THE VAULTS BENEATH THE AISLE. -- THE FLIGHT OF THE ROBBERS, AND THE RESUSCITATED CORPSE.

The sun had long deserted the horizon, and the good city of Winchester had been buried in darkness many hours; while the moon, though high in her course, was obscured by the hazy clouds that drifted from the south-west. The gusty winds whistled round the walls of the cathedral church, producing an unpleasant sensation, with a forboding of a coming storm.

The inhabitants of the quiet, orderly town, were steeped in repose, and a stranger who might by chance have wandered at such an untoward hour abroad, would not have found one single ray from any window; save, perhaps, at one or two hotels, which merely keep open till the London mail passed through, lest any passengers should make their stay at Winchester.

Save at these places, all were reposing peaceably in their beds; and the tower of the cathedral frowned majestically upon the tombstones below, and upon the surrounding buildings, which appeared to peep upon the limits of the grave-yard; while the fir trees that were yet standing bent beneath the blast, as it swept across the low walls, by which the cathedral on one side is bounded.

But the solitary churchyard was not without its occupants, living or dead; for its sanctity is invaded by the presence of three men, who emerge from the narrow streets and courts situated between it and the cross, and then crossing beneath the shade of some object, they stood beneath the low wall which surrounded the churchyard.

They paused for several moments, and gazed around them in every direction, and up at the houses that were nearest to them; but there was no sign of light or anything stirring in any of the houses adjacent.

"I think all is right to-night," said one of the men to his companions.

"Ay, right enough; there will be nobody near us to-night."

"No," replied a third; "and if the signs of the weather are good for anything, why, we shall have a rough night; and though that is unpleasant, yet it makes interruptions less likely, and success more certain."

"You are right, Josh; we shall have a good job this time."

"There, then, that will do until we are safe; it's no use talking here; if the old watchman comes round, we may have to book it, and then we may not have a chance."

"Ha, ha, ha! as for the old watchman, he is not the fool you take him to be, if you imagine him at all likely to disturb himself on such a night as this; he'll sleep in his box till he wakes and finds it is fine."

"Well, be that as it may," said the other, impatiently, "it is all right now."

"Yes, all right."

"Then just help me over, and I'll get down on the other side, while one of you can get up on the wall and hand the tools down to me."

"Can't you throw them over?"

"I could, but it is not worth while to make any noise, even though we felt sure that it will not be heard. There have been most strange things done in our time, you know, and there is no telling what may happen."

"Ah, the dead may come to life, Josh."

"So they might; and a pig might fly, but, as they say, it is a very unlikely bird."

"Well, then, up with you."

As he spoke, one of the men gave one of his companions a lift up, and with this aid he got on the wall, and then quietly slipping down into the burial-ground, he awaited his companions, one of whom immediately mounted the wall in the same manner, and who received a bag, which he handed down to his comrade, who was in the graveyard belonging to the cathedral.

"Well, is all right?" he said.

"Yes, all right; don't stay up there like a cat on a wall; come down, or you may by chance be seen."

The other two men immediately came over the wall, and they all three collected round a monument that stood up, and here a short consultation took place.

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"Now, how shall we proceed?"

"We must get into the vaults somehow or other, if we dig our way in, which I think is much the most easily done."

"What! undermine the building?"

"Scarcely so much as that."

"Well, but we can get into the body of the cathedral, and then into the vaults that way. There is a door."

"Yes, there is a door, but it is so close to the verger's door, that you are sure to awake him."

"I have opened more than one door in my time, and yet I never awoke anybody in doing so; he must sleep wonderfully light."

"Ay, so he may; but in this case the door is so strong that there is no chance of breaking it open, without great inconvenience and noise; there is no room to work in, and, moreover, the verger keeps a little cur always sleeping on the mat close to his door, so that no one can approach without his giving alarm."

"What a brute!"

"Yes; but there is a means of entering besides that."

"Where — and how?"

"In the back of the cathedral there is a large marble slab, on which is carved some letters, that I never could make out; but I'm told it says that somebody lies buried underneath that stone, but I know immediately below are the vaults."

"Well, but the marble you speak of would weigh fourteen or fifteen hundred weight, which would be no joke."

"No, by Jove," said his companion; "we had better by far dig our way in, since we shall have so much difficulty in getting in; we can soon dig out soil enough to let us get down into the vaults."

"Well, we had better set to work at once, lest we lose all chance. If we have a long job, we had better set to work early, as well as stop here, for if we are surprised we shall have to run."

"And the yard will be watched ever afterwards, as sure as we shall have a storm presently."

"So we shall. Work away, Josh; where are the tools?"

"Here they are," said the man, throwing the bag down and opening it; and then he pulled out some tools, consisting of pickaxe and shovels, and a crowbar or two, and several other little materials, which were useful upon such occasions.

"Well, now, where shall we commence?"

"Just at the side here; we are safe to get in somewhere where the wall is weakest, for I believe the vaults are all walled in."

"They must be, to have a secure foundation for such a weight as there must be about it; and, to my mind, we have got a decent job. It's very much like a fortress, and if it was easy to get in this way, we should hear of such things being done much oftener than they are, that is my opinion."

"And a very good opinion it is, too, until another is heard; but it is no use being faint-hearted; the harder the job, the harder we ought to set at it, that's all; but there are some few things not thought of by others, you know, and it is sometimes the hardest thing in the world to think of the most simple."

"There's some truth in that."

The men having found the spot they most desired, they set about digging and picking it up in good earnest; but it was difficult work, and the soil about the cathedral was very hard, owing to the quantity of rubbish that had been driven or trodden into the earth for centuries, either through accident or design, to harden and secure the permanency of the work around. There were many heavy and large stones, as well as small broken stones; also, flint in no small quantity, that every now and then resisted the blows of the pick.

"Well, I'm thinking we have all three worked half an hour, and have not got a foot deep yet."

"We have not got much deeper, certainly."

"Do you think we shall get in to-night?"

"To-night or never," said the third man.

"You are right, comrade; shoulder your picks and then we shall see what way we can make in another half hour. Who can tell? we may come to a softer soil below; this is only the filling up."

The men again set to work heartily, but they seemed to have no success — they could not make anything of it; it appeared to resist all their efforts; and the sparks often flew from the blows they made with their tools.

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The perspiration ran down their faces, and as they paused to wipe their foreheads, they gazed upwards at the clouds. It was heavy, and the wind was blowing fresh, and now and then a heavy spot of rain.

"By St. Peter," said one of them, "I expect we shall have a storm presently. I already feel the heavy drops that fall occasionally; and if one may judge by them of what we may expect, we shall have it heavily."

"So much the better; we shall have less interruption."

"Well, I don't know what you call interruption, but this is a complete stopper; I can't make any impression with the pick, it is as hard as rock; and then comes some of those old walls that are rather harder than granite — you may as well pick at a cart-load of pig iron."

As this was said, the clouds suddenly appeared to open, and such a deluge of rain descended, that the earth seemed to smoke. The drops appeared to be continuous small spouts of water — a shower is too mild a word — it was a deluging, as if some waterspout had burst.

The men stood a moment or two, but it was useless to work; they could not do it, and they rushed to a part of the wall which sheltered them from the fury of the storm that was raging.

"Well, I never saw anything like this before."

"Nor I. Hark at the thunder! There's a flash! Who would have expected that at this season of the year?"

"Not I."

"Nor any one else; but it seems to me as if we were to be defeated to-night. I am sorry we made the attempt, since we are sure to find the yard watched after this, for they will see what we have been up to."

"Yes, it is vexing, but we cannot help this; it is quite impossible to do anything in such weather as this. I do not care about a wet jacket, but I cannot see, and hardly breathe, with so much falling water about me."

"Nor I; but yet I am loth to give it up; Consider the jewellery and money he had about him — it will pay us handsomely."

"Well, it was a strange start of him, at all events. I wonder how he came to be buried in such a manner — how was it?"

"I don't know. All I know is, that the thing was kept secret because it was considered that it would be a temptation to disturb any grave when it was known that he was buried in his clothes and jewellery, and that his money was buried also with him. It was certainly a temptation I could not resist."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes; I will tell you, another time, how I came to know all about it; indeed, I saw him screwed down, and the consequence is, I know that he has the money and valuables about him."

"Then I am sure we had better get into the church itself; we can do more with your slab of marble than on the outside of the wall. And besides that, I do not think that this rain will give over; the hole we have already made is fast filling up with water, and we shall find it impossible to work."

"So we shall. What do you say to getting inside the cathedral?"

"Agreed, my lads; as quickly as you like; for, if we stay here much longer, we shall certainly be drowned. I'm wet through as it is."

"So am I; but never mind, my boys, bright gold and jewels will warm your hearts, and that will keep your outsides dry, or at least you will not feel it. I am sure that I should not if I can but get it."

"Ay, that is all I care about; but, if you get foiled, you may depend upon it you don't feel any the better — you are rather worse, and feel everything more; but what do you say to yon window?"

"That will do if we can reach it: that is my only difficulty."

"That is one that is easily overcome," said his companion, "for I know where the ladder is, and that is just over our heads; all you have to do is to put the point of the crow-bar under the staple to which the chain is fastened that secures it, and then you have the means at once of entering."

"But if we get in and are detected, how shall we get out again?"

"Are we not three to one? If the old verger should come, I think we could make a dead body of him in a very short while; and I cannot tell where you will be if you can't get the better of the old man."

"Well, say no more about it; up with the ladder, and we will get in and chance it. Such a night as this, it would be strange, indeed, if anybody heard us; but, as there is much to be got, why, we can't grumble at the risk."

The three men set to work about wrenching the staple out to which was attached a chain which secured the ladder. That was soon effected, and the ladder placed against one of the lowermost windows, and then one of the

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men went up, and forcing the window open said, after he had looked in, —

"All right — come up. We have got to a right place."

They all three came up one after another, when the first up crept in at the open aperture, and by means of ornamental work, and a monument that there projected from the wall in a manner that enabled them to descend with ease, and in a few moments more the whole three stood in the old cathedral of Winchester.

At that moment the bell tolled heavily the hour of twelve. The sound was solemn, and it made a deep impression upon the robbers.

"What a dismal, hollow sound that has, to be sure," said one.

"Yea; it sounded like tolling."

"Pshaw!" said one of them; "'tis no matter — if it be tolling, it is not for us, nor for the man we come to visit, so no more old women's fears; if you don't like stopping in this place, you had better set to work and be quick, when we shall have no further need of staying. Of what use is it for you to stare and gape about with white faces, and swelled eyeballs, like so many cats; be men — be active, and use you arms."

"Well, where are we to use them? What are we to do? You brought us here, and yet you do not tell us what we are to do. You know all about this matter, and you cannot, or do not point out where we are to commence."

"Here, then; on the very stone you are standing; set to work to raise this, and then we shall soon find our way into the vaults below, and we shall then satisfy ourselves for our trouble, and be well paid too, I hope."

"I hope so, too, Josh; for, to tell you the truth, I don't ever recollect so uncomfortable a job as that which I am in to-night."

"Well, you ain't got paid all, I'll warrant."

"I haven't got paid at all, yet; but we waste time; lend me a pick. I don't see how I am to get a tool in here. The chinks are all so small, that you can hardly put in the blade of a penknife."

"There is a hole somewhere near the head. There is a small piece of black marble."

"Yes; here it is."

"Well, chip that out, and then you may insert a crow-bar, or pick, beneath the stone, when you will find that it will lift up, and then, by main strength, lift it back, and we may go down."

These instructions were followed out. The black marble was discovered, and then knocked out, when a large crevice was discovered, into which a powerful crow-bar was immediately thrust; and then, by one united effort, they contrived to lift the marble slab up out of its place, though not above a foot, which required a great effort, when it is considered that it was imbedded in cement.

"Well, we shall be able to get it up now, I think."

"Don't be too sure, for we have not got it far — it is enormously heavy, and the lever has done all as yet."

"Well, then, are you all ready? A long pull, you know, comrades, and a strong pull, does the business. Now, then, altogether."

"Heave, ho!" whispered another, and they all three made a prodigious effort. It was not only a strong pull, but a very long pull, for the stone was so heavy, it came slowly and unwillingly upwards, and it was nearly three minutes before the enormous mass stood upright in the aisle.

"Well, I didn't think it would have been done. That's the hardest job that ever I had a hand in, and don't desire to have such another, but yet, hard as it is, it is easier than what we had to do outside."

"Yes, much, and you will soon find it is so. Lend a hand to clear away the rubbish that lies here; there's a trap-door underneath that leads into the vaults; it belonged to the monks of old, of whom it is said it served either for the same purpose of burial, or for a cellar for wine."

"Well, well, there are some things better than wine, I trow, in the cellar, now, if we can find the coffin; there has been no other burial in the vaults since he was buried, so we shall not have much trouble."

"But what are we to do with the stone? If we let it down again, we shall do some mischief."

"We must turn it corner by corner until we get it against the pillars, and there leave it; for if we let it down, it will go down like the report of a gun, and smash all that comes in the way."

This was agreed to, and it was not long before they propped the heavy mass of stone against one of the pillars, and then returned to the place where it had been raised, and began to clear away the rubbish, when a trap-door was plainly observable; and after much labour and force, they contrived to open the door, when there appeared a dark aperture, into which they could not look without some misgivings, for nothing could be seen.

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"Well, who's to go down?"

This was a question that no one liked to answer. And certainly no one would volunteer to go below. It was too dark to be inviting, and the men looked at one another as well as they could, for it was total darkness, or nearly so, in the aisle; and below, it was so utterly dark, that it was impossible to make out anything.

"What is to be done now? Have you got the lantern?"

"I have, and matches, but did not think we ought to use them before, lest we attract attention; however, we will have a light now, and should anybody look down, they will think there is a general meeting among the dead."

So saying, he lit the lantern, which threw a light into the vault, and rendered visible a flight of steps that ran up to the opening, but which were invisible in the darkness that had reigned in the place.

"Now, then, jump down, and see where the last coffin is placed; it is easily known from all the others, for I don't think there has been a burial here for many months — the old cathedral is not often disturbed for the reception of the dead, and only when some rich man dies and fancies he may lie more comfortable here."

"Ay, rich men can afford to be buried in a good suit of clothes, and money in their pocket, to bribe St. Peter to open the gate."

"Ha! ha! ha! well said; Peter has the keys."

"Yes, and here we have the coffin."

"Have we? Is this it?"

"Yes; don't you see that it has all the signs of newness about it? There is hardly any dust collected upon it; here we shall find our treasure; the coffin is a strong one, and will, I think, take some trouble to break open."

"Indeed! We shall be choked with the horrible stench which we have below. I can't stand it another minute — I shall be sick."

"Ay, and I too."

"Here, then, I have the lantern. Lay hold of the coffin and bring it up stairs; we can carry it amongst us."

"Ay, anything but remain here — that I cannot do."

"Be quick, for confound me, but such a mass of putrid flesh as there must be here, is horribly sickly. I would sooner be hanged than pass an hour here."

"I'm not so afraid of death as all that. I could manage to live through a night."

"You might, but you would soon find out the ill effects, and die of some fever or other; and that is what we shall have, if we remain here much longer."

The three men then shifted the coffin from its place, and then on to their shoulders, one at either end, and one under the centre.

The coffin was heavy — very heavy, and the men were tottering under their burden. They were strong men, but hardly equal to the task of carrying so dead a weight; but yet they never shrank from it, but, with slow and unsteady steps, they gradually neared the stairs that led upwards. They paused. If it was a task before, it was worse now. What more exertion could they make?

"Do you think the steps will hold us?" said one.

"I'm sure I cannot say; and perhaps not."

"I think they are rotten, or partially so; what do you say? How shall we get the body up?"

"There is a rope, is there not?"

"Yes."

"That will do then. I will get that; by its means we may hoist the coffin up to the stone pavement above. I'm almost sick."

"And I too. This place is enough to breed a pestilence in a town."

The smell in the vaults was certainly very strong and very pernicious. The foetid odour that rose from the vaults was especially disagreeable; the smell that comes from the accumulated and putrefying remains of human bodies, is of all odours the most noisome, and, to our tastes, the worst.

Right glad were the men, who had propped the coffin up against the ladder, to get up into the aisle above, to breathe a less impure atmosphere. They gasped again; and one of them climbed up the monument, to get to the open window, at which they had entered, to inhale some of the pure moistened air; and then, after a few inspirations, he returned, at the call of his comrades to aid them.

The rope was procured and secured round the coffin, and one man remained below to guide it, while the two

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others remained above to haul up the rope, which would bring the body, coffin and all, to the top.

"Well, Josh, how goes the storm?"

"It is blowing over, I think; it does not rain, and it is breaking. I shouldn't wonder if we don't have moonlight after all, and, if we should, we shall have a trouble to get away unperceived."

"You forget what hour it is."

"Hark! there are the chimes."

The four quarters now chimed from the great clock, and sounded solemnly and mournfully in the dead of the night. The iron tongue struck one, and the last sounds of the clock died away before any of the men moved or spoke.

"Well, we have been here an hour, and nearly two hours since our first commencement. It's nearly time, I'm thinking."

"Yes," said the man below.

"Heave ho!" called out the leader of the gang, in a low voice.

The two men at the top hauled at the rope, while he below pushed the coffin up with all his strength, and after a time they succeeded in causing it to rise about a foot, or something less, at each haul, and as it got higher, the man below could the better apply his strength to it, and at length it came up to the top.

Here, however, they experienced another difficulty. It was hard to pull up so high as to enable them to throw its weight on the pavement, and the rope was almost useless as a means of pulling it up higher, and the only one who had it in his power effectually to apply his strength, was the man below. However, after a while, to their great relief, the coffin lay fairly upon the stone pavement.

"A good job done!"

"So say I, Josh; and such another would completely finish me for the night. I might lie down and defy the world."

"How about the coffin -- there is no time to rest. I have a small flask of rum in my pocket, which we will discuss as soon as we have broken open the coffin, which I expect is the last hard job we shall have."

"And a hard job it would have been, had I not come provided with a screwdriver -- one that is used by undertakers in such work."

"Set to work -- good luck to you. I am quite dry, and quite tired too, and the sooner this is over the better. There, the screws come out easily enough, though they are long and hold firm."

"Yes, they go deep; but they have a wide worm, that carries them down or brings them up so quickly."

In a few minutes more the whole of the screws were drawn, and the lid of the coffin was thrown on one side, and the corpse was at once discovered to them. It lay calm and quiet; but yet it was terrible to look at. The living man had been tall -- remarkably tall, as well as remarkable-looking.

He was dressed as if for walking. It was strange, the corpse was apparelled as if were in life; and this, perhaps, caused the extreme paleness -- even extreme for a corpse -- to be so apparent that they spoke not, but gazed in silence upon it, until at length one of them said, --

"Put out the light. We have the moon's rays -- at least there is enough to enable us to see what we want, and the light is dangerous."

The light was put out, and the subdued light of the moon rendered all apparent enough to the robbers.

The storm had lulled and altogether ceased, while they had been busy in the vaults and getting up the body, and now it was a perfect calm. The moon, though obscured at the moment, promised to shed her rays upon the earth; and as it was at the full, and the clouds clearing off, the probability was that the town would become as light as day.

"There he is," said one of the men.

"Yes; and about as ugly a chap as ever I saw."

"He is no beauty: but he's been a fine man."

"If you mean tall, I dare say you are right; but he's not fine as I take it. He's not quite full enough about the chest and shoulders."

"He's got some fine rings, and a gold watch and chain. Well, there is a good ten or fifteen pounds each, and if his pockets are well lined, why, he will afford us a tolerable good booty."

"Yes; we must not complain. Shall we replace all?"

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"It is not possible to do so, either in time to enable us to escape, or to do it so as to escape detection. Besides, there would be no use in it. See how bright the moon is getting. We shall have as much to do as we shall get through to escape being seen. I am sure we shall run a great risk."

"I think so too."

"Well, then, commence proceedings. Ha!"

The moonbeams had fallen upon the corpse just as he was speaking, and he thought he observed a motion in the body.

"What is the matter, Josh?"

"Didn't you think he moved."

"Ha! ha! ha! dead! ha! ha! ha! dead moved --- buried moved --- ha! ha! ha! Eh? why --- oh --- it's all fancy; you'll see me believe it, presently. I do declare --- well, a man dead and buried --- I suppose a week."

"No."

"I think so--- "

"Well, it does not matter much how long he has been buried; but he can't move unless you move him. D --- n!"

As he spoke he started to his feet, and his hair began to straighten, and his limbs quiver, and yet he appeared to think he might be mistaken; for he endeavoured to speak to his companions; pointing to the corpse, he contrived to say,

"I --- 'I --- 'I take the j --- j --- jewels; he --- he --- he moves."

"Eh? Well, I told you I thought so, but you said no, and only laughed at me for doing so; but stand on one side, and let the moonlight come upon him, we can tell better then if he really does move; though, notwithstanding all I saw, I am inclined to believe it is quite an impossibility; but the more light we have the better we shall be able to tell how the mistake arose."

"I thought I saw his eyes move."

As he spoke he moved on the side, as he had been standing between the corpse and the moon's rays, and for the most part intercepted them; but the moment that he did move away, and the rays came full upon the corpse, a shivering motion appeared to pervade it, to the intense horror of the robbers, who could not believe what they saw, but believed they were yet mistaken, though they were too much terrified to speak or even move. They stood gazing upon the body with bursting eyes and gaping mouth, as if they had suddenly become spell-bound by the wand of some magician.

Presently the corpse opened his eyes and glared full at them. Oh, such glistening, lead-like orbs, that froze the very current of their blood; they knew not what to think, but when the body turned on one side, towards the moon's rays, all doubt vanished and the spell was broken.

"The devil, by --- !" exclaimed Josh.

Not another word was uttered by either of the other two; but they sprang like emancipated madmen up the slippery sides of the monument, and out at the windows, as easily as a fly can run up a wall. It did not occupy more than a few seconds to enable them to clear the place. Half a minute had not elapsed before they stood shivering by the beautiful old cross, at Winchester. *****

The corpse in the cathedral, which mysteriously became animated when exposed to the moonlight, turned towards the moon's rays and gazed upon the flying and terrified robbers, who had just exhumed him.

No word passed his lips, and he looked around him for some time in silence, upon the scene before him.

The moon came in at the tall windows of the cathedral, throwing long streams of silvery light upon the stone flooring, and upon some of the monuments that were erected by the pillars, or columns that rise to the roof.

All was silent, all was still --- no movement was discernible, save in the form that now sat up, and leaned on his elbow in his coffin; and he but turned his head slowly from side to side, as though he were meditating upon the lovely and solemn beauty of the place.

At length he arose, but he appeared to move with extreme difficulty, and once or twice he placed his hand in the region of the heart, as if he felt something there that pained him, and tottered about; but seemed to recover himself a little after a time, and muttered to himself, in low but distinct tones, ---

"I must have been another victim; I am weak, the vital action is languid, and my veins are empty; I must satisfy the instinct of my nature, and another victim must restore me to life and the world for a season."

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He looke up towards the window, gave one look around him and on the coffin, while a shudder passed though him; and then, gazing on himself and feeling for his valuables, he slowly clambered up the monument, and carefully got through the window, and thence into the open air, and he finally disappeared from Winchester churchyard.

**Chapter CXXXIV. THE STAR HOTEL, AND THE STRANGER'S ARRIVAL. --
A REMARKABLE COUNTENANCE. -- THE ILLNESS AND DEATH OF THE
STRANGER. -- A STRANGE REQUEST COMPLIED WITH.**

Some days previous to the scene related in the previous chapter, the London coach drove up opposite to the Star Hotel, and, as usual, out came a couple of waiters to see what there was from the metropolis, in the shape of a passenger, who might become an inmate of the hotel, and a customer, of course.

"Now, then, Billy," said the guard, a stout, good-humoured fellow, to a very stiff and punctilious waiter, dressed in black, with a white neckerchief.

"My good friend, my name is William, if you must be familiar, though I am sure I don't number you among my acquaintances."

"Very good, Billy. I declare you are one of the politest waiters that is to be found between Portsmouth and London; ay, and more than that, you are the politest. Didn't you say you were educated among a lot of gals -- young ladies, I mean?"

"I never held any discourse, relative to my early days, with you, my friend; I am not, just this moment, aware of it."

"Ah! I see you are too polite to pass an east wind without taking your hat off to it; how do they when they have none?"

"Have you anybody for us?" said William, mildly.

"Yes, my pink, I have."

"Who is he, and where is he? I must not waste my master's time; it is an impropriety I am especially anxious to avoid."

"You needn't be in a hurry, nevertheless, especially as I see he is fumbling about for small change; but what will you say if I introduce a customer to you, a good six foot high, and perhaps a little to spare; and the colour of a well scraped horse--radish? Eh? what do you say to that, my promrose?"

William did not know what to say, but, after a moment's hesitation, he said,

"We don't charge our customers by the room they take, or by their personal appearance. A gentleman is a gentleman, Mr. Guard, all the same, whether he have a red face or a white one."

"Well, that's good, Billy; but the chief thing is, after all, of what colour is his money, and how he parts with it; eh?"

The guard winked and William's impassive features were lit up with a spark of intelligence and vivacity, which, however, was only transient, and he relapsed into his old state of extreme and unimpeachable gentility.

"Hold your tongue, Billy; here he comes."

At that moment the gentleman pulled down the window, and said to the guard,

"Open the door, if you please; I shall get out here."

"Yes, sir," said the guard, who immediately obeyed the injunction; and a tall, but awfully pale individual descended the steps, wrapped up in a huge coat, so that but little of his person was seen, or features either; what little there was visible was not prepossessing by any means by the colour.

"This is the Star?" said the stranger, inquiringly.

"Yes," said the guard.

"I'll stop here. Are you the waiter?" said he, addressing William.

"I am, sir," said William. "Will you walk this way, sir?"

"Yes; show me into a private apartment -- let me have a good fire, for I am exceedingly cold."

William immediately took him into a room where there was a fire, saying, --

"If you please to remain here, sir, we will make you a fire and warm the room; and, as you are cold, perhaps you will prefer this to going into a room without a fire there already lighted for your reception."

"Certainly, I much prefer it."

"Would you like to take any refreshment, sir?" inquired William.

"Not now," replied the stranger, in mild accents.

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William left the room, muttering to himself, —

"Well, he deserves to be a prince; he is as mild and gentlemanly as a prince. I vow I never heard any one speak in such a tone, and with so much amiable condescension. What a pity he is so white — at least, that he is so, I only infer from the nose, and part of the forehead and cheeks around the eyes — these being the only parts that I have noticed; he is, indeed, not much unlike, in colour, to the guard's vulgar simile — a well scraped horse-radish. I never saw white so opaque and dead before."

While those thoughts passed through the mind of William, he saw that the apartment was placed in readiness for the stranger's reception, and placed himself in communication with the proprietor, and obtained his orders; he then returned to the stranger, and conducted him to his proper apartment, and then awaited his commands.

The stranger gave him some orders, which were at once executed, and then he said, —

"I shall sleep here, of course."

"Yes, sir," said William.

"I am very particular about my beds — I must have my bed well and thoroughly aired."

"Oh, yes, sir," said William; "we always — —"

"Never mind, never mind all that," said the stranger, blandly. "Never mind all that; I know what you would say. All your beds are always aired. Well, be it so — I have no desire to dispute it — but I once slept in a damp bed — I fell ill, and have never entirely recovered from it."

"Oh, that makes him look so horrible pale," thought William.

"So you perceive, my friend, that I have cause to be particular, and, therefore, you will excuse me when I inquire minutely into the character of the beds."

"Oh, certainly, sir — certainly, sir."

"Then you will see that my bed is aired, will you not?"

"Yes, sir, I will take care that it is especially aired; and, if you approve of my doing so, sir, I will have a fire lit in your bed-room."

"If you please. If you will do all this, you will greatly oblige me. Are there any females in the family?"

"Yes, sir; the servants," said William, fearing some impropriety was meant.

"Oh, the servants; and no others?"

"None," said William, quite suddenly.

"Oh, yes, that is right — none but the servants. Then my requests will not put you to any serious inconvenience?"

"Not in the least, sir," said William, pleased to find that the females had only been inquired about for fear of annoying them.

The stranger sat up in his room, and appeared to be very ill, and ate and drank but little, though he ordered whatever was requisite for a liberal individual; and, though taken away untouched, yet it was clearly understood he would have to pay for it.

The bed was used and approved of, and the tall remarkable looking stranger expressed himself satisfied to the proprietor of the hotel, who came to inquire if he should desire anything more or different from what was already done.

This was at once answered in the negative, and the proprietor retreated by no means prepossessed in the stranger's personal appearance, which was remarkable to a degree — that was noticed by every one in the hotel.

"Winchester is an old town — a city — sir," said the proprietor, by way of entering into a conversation with his guest.

"Yes, very old," said his guest.

"And the cathedral, sir, has been built in part ever since the Saxon times, and then increased by the Normans."

"Ay, it is very beautiful; one could wish to lie there, it is so calm and beautiful," said the stranger, with a shudder, which he endeavoured to suppress; and then he added, "The grave-yard is quiet and retired."

"Yes, sir. You have been in Winchester before?"

"I have," replied the stranger.

Finding any further attempt at conversation likely to appear intrusive, the landlord quitted the apartment with a bow, which was condescendingly returned by the guest, who folded his hands one over the other, and turned towards the fire, upon which he gazed thoughtfully for some time in silence.

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The strange and ghastly-looking countenance of the stranger had created quite a sensation among the individuals at the hotel, all of them declaring they never heard of, or saw anything equal to it in all their lives. But what was it? How did it happen so? They had seen dead men, but they had never seen any so ghastly and so fearfully pale.

"He doesn't seem long for this world," said one of them.

"If you had said he didn't belong to this world," said another, "I should almost have been inclined to believe you."

"He does look like a corpse," added an old woman.

"Yes, and what a tooth he has projecting out in front. Upon my word I never saw his like."

"And I," said another, "never beheld such eyes. Why, he is scarcely human. Such eyes as those I scarcely wish to look at again."

"He always appears to me to be in some dreadful agony," said the cook; "he really looks as if he had a perpetual pain in his stomach, and had eaten something that had disagreed with him."

There was some truth in this last assertion, for the stranger always did appear as if suffering from some internal pain -- mental or physical, or both -- and it was soon seen that he was rapidly losing strength, and could scarcely walk abroad.

The cause of all this none could tell; possibly, it was only a sudden illness, or perhaps it was a long affliction, to which he was used to, and hence the terrible expression upon his countenance, which appeared as if it had never been otherwise, so deep and so settled was the expression of pain. *****

The stranger appeared anxious to get out, but was unable to do so; he could just walk across the room several times in the day, but was unable to get down stairs; and whenever he attempted to do so, he sunk down, his limbs losing the power of sustaining his weight.

"I can go no further," he muttered to himself, as he endeavoured to walk down stairs; "I am lost."

As he spoke, a truly horrible expression came across his countenance, that made William, who came to his aid, step back terrified.

"You -- you are ill, sir," he said, in somewhat uncertain accents.

"I am ill," he replied, "very ill."

"Will you allow me to help you up, sir, to your room?"

"If you please," said the stranger, who was endeavouring to rise by the aid of the bannisters; and by these, and with William's assistance, he got up; and then, with some difficulty, he reached up stairs -- his own bed-room.

"I will send master immediately, sir."

"You need not be in any hurry," said the stranger. "I do not desire his presence."

However, William left the stranger to seek his master; and when he found him, he said, --

"Oh, sir, the strange-looking gentleman in No. 5 is very ill."

"Is he, William? What is the matter with him?"

"I am sure I don't know, sir; he sank down on the stairs just now, and could only get up to his room again by my help."

"Something serious I think, then. I thought he appeared ill when first I saw him, from the expression of his countenance."

"Yes, sir; 'tis very strange."

"Very," said the landlord, thoughtfully. "I'll go and see him; but, in the mean time, you had better send for Doctor Linton, who knows me, and will come at once."

"Yes, sir," said William.

The landlord immediately sought the stranger's apartment, which he entered without any ceremony, and advanced to the bed in which the stranger lay; and, upon his first glance at the occupant, the landlord stepped back in affright, so truly terrible did the countenance of the stranger appear.

"Ah," said the stranger, as he turned his glassy eyes upon him.

"I -- I -- I have come to see you," stammered the landlord. "I have come to see you; my servant informed me you were ill, sir."

"I am very ill."

"I feared so, and I have sent for Doctor Linton, who will be here immediately."

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"It is of no consequence; I believe, I am too far gone to recover." Another horrible spasm passed across his countenance.

"What does your illness arise from?"

"Decay of the system. I want renovating," said the stranger.

The landlord paused; he didn't understand this at all, for the stranger did not bear the appearance of decay about him. He was tall, and seemingly of the middle age, he thought, and nothing about him to savour of decay, save, indeed, the terrible and remarkable paleness which his flesh appeared to bear; and his system generally, in other respects, bore nothing of the appearance of general decay.

"Shall I send for any one, sir? Have you any friends I could write to for you?"

"None, sir, thank you," replied the stranger, who, however, bated nothing of his politeness, even in his present position.

"Have you any desire to see any one in particular?"

"No one, I thank you."

At that moment Doctor Linton was announced, and the proprietor having introduced him, left the apartment, leaving the doctor and his patient together; the former at once perceived, and wondered at his extraordinary paleness. After a few preliminary questions, he appeared quite puzzled, and said to him, —

"May I inquire what is the cause of this extraordinary complexion?"

"Certainly," said the stranger; "it was caused by damp beds."

"Damp beds," muttered the doctor, amazed, and hardly comprehending what was said, or the nature of the reply; he was at a loss, but did not say so, what was the connexion between cause and effect.

"Yes, damp beds," said the stranger.

"Have you ever suffered in this way before?" inquired the surgeon.

"Yes, more than once."

"And you have recovered?" said the doctor, abstractedly.

"I am here," said the stranger, mildly.

"Truly, you are," said the the surgeon. "I had almost forgotten that, your case is so singular. Your pulse is very low and irregular."

"It is," coolly replied the stranger; but immediately a kind of spasm shot across him, as he had before exhibited to the landlord.

"Do you feel much pain? — does that often happen?"

"No, only occasionally. I don't think you are at all likely to benefit me, sir," said the stranger, with much courtsey in his manner. "I do not mean any disrespect to you; but my complaint is a fatal one in our family."

"Are you all afflicted in this manner?"

"Yes, all before me died," replied the stranger; "and when it does come on, we have no means of avoiding the end that approaches; there is no medical aid that can be rendered, ever did us any good."

"You are quite an exception to nature, sir," said the medical man, "quite an exception. Your case cannot be beyond the assistance of medicine — if not to cure, to ameliorate — though its nature may not be ascertained; but if we could do so, we could tell you what we might be able to do."

"That has been attempted before," said the stranger, mildly; "and hence it is I am loth to give you needless trouble."

"Well, I will call upon you, and see you again; but you ought to take some medicine. I am persuaded that it is some great and extraordinary derangement of the system — a complete sinking of the whole system."

"Most undoubtedly it is a sinking in the whole system — a sinking which has never yet been stopped by human aid. But you can pursue what course you may deem proper."

"Will you take medicines if I send any?"

"Yes," replied the patient; "I will take them when you choose to send them."

"I will endeavour to send you something that shall infuse something like vitality into the system, that will indeed help you to rally."

"That will, indeed, be doing something more than was ever yet done by any one who attended any individual of our family. I feel I am very weak, and am sinking fast, and do not expect that I shall again have the honour of seeing you."

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As he again spoke, the same spasm seized upon him; his frame was convulsed for more than an minute, and his pallid features appeared to give forth expressions which it was impossible to describe.

The doctor paused, and gazed with something like fear and awe upon him. He had never before seen such a case so destitute of facts, nor yet such a man; it was quite beyond his experience; there was nothing like it in all his previous experience; there was no apparent cause for all that he saw. It might be some severe chronic disorder which did not manifest itself outwardly. If this were the case, it was most extraordinary.

But more extraordinary than all was, apart from the medical question, the strange and terrible appearance of the stranger; his paleness — the terrible expression of his features — the strange, and even revolting cast of his eyes, that completely baffled all his attempts to understand them, or to remember anything he had ever heard of, or seen.

The stranger languidly turned in his bed, and then closed his eyes, leaving his medical attendant to his reflections.

"Well," muttered Doctor Linton, as he looked at his incomprehensible patient. "I never met with so fearful a human puzzle before. I never saw such an expression of countenance in all my life; nor did ever I meet with such a case. Had he been one of the fabled monsters of old, the creation of the German mind, he could not have been more unlike a human being, to wear a human form.

As he spoke, he quitted the room, and made his way to the proprietor of the hotel, who was as anxiously waiting to see him, as he was to meet him.

"Well, doctor, what do you think of the patient?"

"Why, I don't know what to think. I never saw such a man before in all my life — I cannot make him out."

"Nor I. I can't understand what he means or what he is."

"Nor anybody else. But he is quite a gentleman; and yet there is something very frightful to be seen in him. I don't know why it is, I don't care about going oftener to him than I am obliged."

"I don't doubt it. There was something in the feel of his hand more like a corpse than anything I ever felt before."

"Indeed — it is a queer affair."

"Do you know him?"

"No, I do not," replied the proprietor. "He has not been here more than two days; and when he entered he had that deadly paleness which he has now."

"Did he indeed. It is, I dare say, natural to him, though it must create an unpleasant sensation, go where he would."

"He must feel it to be so, no doubt; but, at the same time, he could not avoid it. Have you come to any conclusion respecting his complaint?"

"I have not indeed; I will send him some medicine; though, to tell you the truth, I can hardly tell what is the matter with him. His disorder seems to consist of a rapid sinking of the whole system, accompanied by a few minor symptoms, and a spasm, which must be very painful; for it produces an extraordinary effect upon his visage, and his eyes glisten like a piece of tin."

"That's it, doctor. Do you know, I have been thinking for something to which I could liken those eyes to, but could not do it. When do you see him again?"

"To-morrow, some time; in the mean time I must bid you good day, for my presence is wanted in the Dundrum family."

"Oh, have you any of them for a patient?"

"Yes, two. Good day — good day."

"Good day, doctor," said the proprietor of the hotel, as he bowed the doctor out? and then, returning to his own apartment, he wondered, in his own mind, at all that had been said by that learned individual, when William entered his room with a hastiness of manner quite unusual to him.

"What is the matter, Willam?"

"Oh, sir — I beg your pardon — but the strange gentleman — —"

"Eh! — Well! — What?"

"Why, he's dying, and wants to see you, sir."

"To see me, William — and dying!"

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"Yes, sir — it's very sudden — but good Lord, how dreadful he looks. He clasped his hands and shook — it made the bed shake and the windows rattle, just as if an earthquake were taking place."

"Goodness me!" muttered the proprietor, who immediately quitted the apartment, and followed William to that of the stranger, who lay in the same attitude as that described by William; but he was evidently endeavouring to repress all nervous emotion, and by the time he was spoken to, he succeeded in this endeavour completely, and lay apparently calm and collected for the landlord's appearance.

"I believe you sent for me," said that worthy, in a subdued tone.

"Yes; I wish to speak a word to you before I die."

"Die!" said the landlord, with a start. "No, no, you cannot mean that — you will get better — you are deceived."

"No, no; do not endeavour to persuade me from believing what I know is the truth. I shall die, and that, too, before many hours."

"If the case is so urgent, let me send to Mr. Linton; he cannot have gone far, and he will return."

"Nay, do not do that; his aid is utterly useless — utterly."

"He is a clever man; but still, if your own feelings tell you that you can't live, allow me to send for a clergyman."

"My friend," said the stranger, "I have settled all that in my own mind. My affairs are all made up, my account is cast, and I shall learn the balance where I am going to. I wish, while I have breath, to beg a favour of you."

"Anything on earth that I can do, I will," said the landlord.

"Nay, I do not desire — all — that — I — I only want you to — to — to — promise me you'll — attend to my funeral."

"All shall be done as you desire."

"My breath — I feel it going. I have money enough about me; you will find in my pocket-book and purse, a certain sum."

"Yes, sir — yes."

"And with that you will have the goodness to liquidate my debt to yourself, my funeral expenses, and place the residue of that sum about my person."

"When you are dead!" exclaimed the landlord.

"Yes; will you promise me — will you swear to see it done?"

"Yes, I will — I do swear."

"See you keep the oath; my breath is going fast — my strength is leaving me — and — and — "

"I will do all," said the landlord again. "Will you have any friend attend your funeral obsequies? It's melancholy, but I am obliged to speak of it to you, because I cannot otherwise know your wishes."

"Do not mind that," said the stranger, turning towards the landlord; "but when I am dead, dress me in my clothes, just as if I were about to walk; let me have all my property and my money — such of it as remains after paying all charges — the remainder cause to be placed about my person — in fact, all that belongs to me; and place — me — and place me — me — me — "

"Where — where would you be buried?" said the landlord.

"Place me," gasped the dying man; "place me in the — the — "

A gurgling noise, succeeded by a sharp rattle in the throat, was all the sound that escaped him, while his glazed eyes were fixed, with a truly horrifying expression, upon the features of the landlord, whose presence of mind appeared to forsake him, and he exclaimed, falling on his knees in affright, —

"Lord, have mercy upon us, what a dreadful affair!"

"Horrible, sir," said William.

"Oh! are you here, William?" inquired the landlord.

"Yes, sir," replied that individual.

"Oh, I'm glad of that; did you see him die?"

"I did, sir. How dreadful!"

"Very; but I am glad you were here because he has made some singular requests about burying him, and in a certain manner, with all his clothes on and his jewels and money about him. Now I should be considered foolish if I did anything of the kind; but I have promised, and as he has no friends, I will do what I have promised."

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"It is very good of you, sir; though I think he has been very silly in making such a request; yet you cannot be so considered for performing the wish of a dying man; it is the duty of any one so promising to perform it."

"Quite right, William, quite right; but did you understand what he meant by his last words? I mean, where he wished to be buried."

"I don't know positively, sir, but I think he meant the cathedral — I thought so, at least. I am not sure he said so, but I believe he meant to do so."

"Well, I think so myself; and in the cathedral he shall be buried; but it is a terrible-looking corpse. I sure I could not sleep in the same room with him. Poor fellow! What he'll come to at last there is no telling."

"Yes, sir; he does look dreadful."

"You needn't tell anybody we have a dead customer in the hotel, William."

"No, sir."

"Because people might be curious, and wish to see him, and if they were to do so, I am sure they would leave the house."

"So they would, sir. He's a dreadful-looking corpse. I never heard of such a one. What can be the cause of it? — and to be buried in his clothes, too!"

"Ay, and his money and his jewels; that is very strange!"

"Very strange, sir, indeed; and the fewer persons who know of it the better, else the body will not lie very long in its grave. There will be those who would not mind turning resurrection-men for the value of what he had about him."

"So there would be, William; and now I think of it, the authorities of the cathedral shall know nothing about it; for who can tell what fancy they may take concerning it being an unchristian burial?"

"And yet, sir, he paid all his debts like a Christian."

"Yes; and left a remembrance for the waiter."

"There could not be a more Christian act than that, for who could be more Christian-like than to remember the waiter?" and William at once admitted the truth of the assertion, and they both left the room, and instructions were given to William to obtain the proper aid respecting the funeral, and an order was given to the undertaker to come and measure the corpse for its last garment.

All these things were duly attended to, and kept secret, so that a very few persons were aware of the fact that so strange an occurrence had taken place in the good city of Winchester, much less were they acquainted with the precise locality of the very house in which the occurrence took place.

When the morning arrived on which the funeral was to take place, some persons were surprised to behold a couple of mutes standing side by side at the door of the Star hotel, and there had been no previous signs of mourning.

The hearse and one mourning coach, however, was all that attended, into which one solitary mourner entered. There were several others made up for the occasion, to give the cavalcade an uniform appearance.

The body was carried down by eight men. It was very heavy, and the men bent beneath the load they bore, and when it was placed in the hearse, the one mourner got in, and they proceeded towards the cathedral, which was quite close at hand.

A few — very few minutes served to bring them to the goal, and before the entrance of the cathedral they stopped, and out came the undertakers, who contrived, with much exertion, to carry the body into the church; and then, after some preliminary ceremonies, it was conducted into the vaults, where it was deposited, and the burial service was said over it most duly and solemnly, and then left, it was presumed, safe and secure, to abide its final doom at the day of judgment.

But many thoughts prove but the shadow of our wishes, and this seemed but as a mocking shadow; as our readers are aware by this time of what actually took place in the dead of the night.

"In what name was the deceased registered — the burial, I mean?" inquired the clergyman, whose memory, like some of his other faculties, was obscured by age.

"His name was Francis Varney," replied the chief-mourner, who was no other than the proprietor of the Star hotel.

Chapter CXXXV. A RURAL SCENE BY MOONLIGHT. -- THE STORM. -- AN ACCIDENT ON THE ROAD. -- A NEW AND STRANGE ACQUAINTANCE ACQUIRED. -- A DISAPPOINTMENT.

It was one of those pleasant, moonlight evenings that are frequently felt, as well as seen, towards the end of August, that a party of individuals sat in a travelling-carriage, and were proceeding at an easy pace on one of the cross-roads that run from Winchester to Bath, and also from Southampton, the Isle of Wight, between Salisbury -- more properly speaking -- and Bath.

The evening was lovely: the day had been sultry, and the sun had not been gone down so long but that the heat of his rays yet remained. Indeed, though the moon gave light, yet the radiated heat from the earth, first received from the sun, was so great, that the light evening breeze barely tempered the air.

The party thus proceeding had been spending a few weeks in rambling about Southampton, Portsmouth, and Salisbury, and were now wending their way to the city of Bath. They consisted of but four individuals, -- Captain Fraser, his wife, her sister, and younger brother. The latter did not count more than twelve years, while the sister, Miss Stevens, was just seventeen years of age.

Captain Fraser had scarce been married six months, and was upon one of the early matrimonial jaunts which often take place in the earlier part of the married life, when all is sunshine, and the matrimonial barometer might always have the index nailed to "set fair" at such periods.

The lady's sister and brother were residing with her; for their parents were dead, and hence they, the captain and his lady, were their natural protectors.

They were riding in an open carriage, the head parted, and thrown back; and even in this manner they felt the evening air was scarcely, though riding, cool.

"I don't think," said Mrs. Fraser to her husband, "that ever I beheld so beautiful a scene. The time -- the warmth of the air -- the occasional delicious feel of the light evening breeze -- the serene light of the moon; altogether, I never felt so comfortable, or, I may add, so happy as I do at this moment."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said the captain; "it gives me an additional pleasure to find I can please you."

"Now, Fraser, that is too bad of you."

"What is too bad, my dear?" said the captain, inquiringly.

"Why, to say you are glad you can please. That is as bad as to say that it is a very difficult matter; and you know I am very easily pleased, especially when you make the attempt," said Mrs. Fraser.

"Well, we will not quarrel about that, my dear. But I must say, with you, this hour, time, and place are all one could desire, and such as we seldom meet: the scene across the country is truly beautiful!"

"Yes," said Miss Stevens; "it is beautiful, as far as we can see."

"What river is that yonder?" inquired the brother.

"That is the Willey; the same that we saw at Salisbury," said Captain Fraser.

"Indeed! I thought that came from another direction more northerly."

"That was another arm of the same river, and joined this about there, and all the low grounds on this side of yon hills are called the Valley of the Willey; and a beautiful little vale it is, too, fruitful and picturesque."

"How beautiful the moonbeams glisten on yonder water!"

"They do; but not so strongly as they did."

"No. What is the reason of that? The air appears to darken. I have noticed it for some minutes past. Why is that?"

"I suppose it is caused by the evaporation from the grounds and heavy dews, to compensate for the want of rain that usually takes place at this time of the year."

"Then we shall be obliged to shut up the carriage, for the dew is more likely to cause cold than anything else."

"It is so; but we are upon comparatively high ground here; and, moreover, they will not reach us yet; but, here are shawls; you can wrap up if you feel chilly, or you can put on your veils."

"It is yet so warm," said Miss Stevens, "that I should be reluctant to put on any more clothing yet-awhile."

"Do as you please, but do not take cold," said Captain Fraser. "How indistinct the scene becomes around; the

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river, which we just now saw so plain, is quite obscured, and you can scarcely tell where it is, save here and there, where the doddered willows appear, and which mark out the course of the stream."

"It is so," said the youth. "I can just see the green tops of the trees appear above the thick mist that rises from the river below."

"Exactly; that is the fact."

"And see how it spreads itself over the cornfields and meadows."

"Was that not a flash of light?" said Mrs. Fraser, suddenly.

"Light! I saw no light," said the captain.

"Nor I," said the youth; "did you, sister?"

"No, I did not do so; but it is very sultry, and therefore it is very likely just at this time of the year. How much farther have we to travel before we stop for the night?"

"I suppose seven or eight miles, not more."

"There, that was no mistake, however," said Mrs. Fraser, as a flash of light shot across the heavens, and left not a trace behind it.

"No, there was no mistake about it; nor did I think so before," said Captain Fraser, "only I have not noticed it; but it is harmless — it is what is called summer lightning, and has none of the the ordinary results of lightning."

"It will possibly make the air cool," suggested Mrs. Fraser, "and, in that case, we shall have a more agreeable temperature; to tell the truth, the extreme warmth and dryness of the air gives a strange uneasiness to the body."

"Another flash — ah, that's a change in its character."

"Yes; that is the blue-forked lightning, and I am much mistaken if we do not have a sudden change — hark!"

At that moment, a sullen and deep rumbling was heard in the heavens, followed by another flash, and then such a peal of thunder that boomed and rattled through the air in a manner that startled the dull echoes of the night, and made the welkin resound with the fearful sounds that filled the heavens.

"We shall have a fall of rain in another moment," said Captain Fraser; "push on, drive on, and let us get out of this as soon as we can."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the driver, and crack went his whip — the horses increased their speed, and they rattled on at a good pace.

"Had we better not stop and have the hood closed?"

"No," said the captain; "I can manage that very well, with the assistance of your brother, and we shall not lose time."

Captain Fraser, and the young gentleman alluded to, brought the coach-top up and secured it, just as a heavy shower descended in such torrents that they could scarcely hear themselves speak, so heavily did it rattle upon the leathern covering of the vehicle, and they sat for some time in silence.

Soon, however, the thunder and lightning filled the air with sounds and flashes in a manner that began to create a feeling of alarm in the minds of the ladies, and some uneasiness in the mind of the captain; not upon their account only, but because the cattle might take flight under the circumstances, especially as they were fresh, and had now scarcely run three or four miles; for their stage was a long one before they reached their destination, which was now about two days' easy journeys.

The thunder and lightning appeared to become more and more terrible; the storm, indeed, appeared to increase rather than diminish in intensity; the very centre of the storm appeared to be fast approaching, and making the spot upon which they stood the pivot on which it turned; its fury increased, and with it the horses were each moment becoming more and more unmanageable. Though in some measure aware of the fact, Captain Fraser kept his place, fearful lest he should alarm his wife, and at the same time distract the coachman.

Suddenly there was a bright and vivid flash of light, such as they had not seen before, but which illumined the whole place around them, and made everything as visible as if placed in the strongest light imaginable, followed by such a crashing peal of thunder that the living earth appeared to rock again.

It wanted but this to make the horses perfectly ungovernable, and they dashed away at a furious speed along the road.

"Good heavens! the horses have taken fright," said Mrs. Fraser, as she became aware of the speed they were going at.

"They have merely taken fright, my dear," said the captain, unwilling to increase their alarm by informing

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them of his own; "he will keep them in the middle of the road, and we shall be at our journey's end the sooner, and the more so the better."

They were upon the point of being satisfied, when the jolts of the carriage, added to its eccentric course from one side of the road to the other, attracted so much of their attention that Miss Stevens said, --

"See, captain, how the carriage sways from side to side; we shall all be over in another minute or two -- we shall all be killed!"

"There goes the thunder again, worse than your kettle drums," said young Stevens, who appeared to think it rather a joke; "the lightning flashes, too, as if we had got into an electrical machine."

"Do not talk in that way, Charles, for goodness sake," exclaimed his younger sister. "We shall all be killed presently."

"I hope not," said Captain Fraser, "though I admit it looks serious; but all you can do, and the best under all the circumstances, is to remain calm and quiet, and see what happens."

"See what happens! Dear me, captain, what do you think we are all made of that we should sit calm," said Miss Stevens, "and see what will happen, when there may be broken limbs, at the least, if not death?"

"It is the best advice I can give you."

"Had we better not get out -- I don't mind trying?"

"Aye, if you wish to run imminent risk of instant and violent death, you will make the attempt; if you remain in here shut up, you have every probability that, if we do have an upset, which is not yet certain, we may all escape with but a little fright, or at most a few bruises."

"Yes, sister; you had better wait for the worst, if the worst must happen, rather than rush into it."

This was sensible advice, and the whole party fell into a deep silence, which was unbroken save by the sounds of wheels, the rattling of the carriage, the rain, and the roar of thunder, enough to employ their minds, and at the same time to keep them in momentary dread of the fearful catastrophe.

Suddenly there was a crash and dreadful jolt; they knew not what had happened, except they felt that the vehicle was turned over.

In a moment more the door was opened, and a stranger lent assistance in getting out the unfortunate travellers.

"Do not be alarmed, ladies," said a strange, but courteous voice. "No further mischief can happen now, beyond inconvenience."

As the stranger spoke, he lifted the two ladies out of the carriage, and placed them in a sheltered position by the body.

"Are you hurt?" inquired the stranger, as he assisted Captain Fraser and young Stevens out of the fallen carriage.

"No, sir, I am not; I thank you for your timely aid. Where are the ladies?"

"There they are; I hope, uninjured."

Captain Fraser immediately ran up to them, and, seeing them in safety, said, --

"I am glad to see you are safe. I was stunned at first by a blow on the side of my head."

"Yes, we are safe; but we have to thank this gentleman that we have been so speedily and so easily extricated from our unpleasant prison."

"I am much indebted, sir, for your aid to the ladies. May I trespass upon your kindness to lend me a little further assistance?"

"I shall be happy to assist you under these unpleasant circumstances; but, allow me to suggest as the first thing, that the cushions be placed under the hedge for the use of the ladies, and what cloaks or coats you have should be thrown over them."

"Right, sir; I thank you."

"If you are deficient in them, my cloak is at their service, though I am afraid that it is almost saturated."

"I have enough here," said Captain Fraser, as he pulled out several articles of that nature; and then he, with the assistance of the stranger, placed them so that Mrs. Fraser and sister were almost, if not entirely, sheltered from the storm.

"Now," said the stranger, "the first thing that can be done will be to right the carriage, and place it in a position where it will receive no further damage."

"But the driver and horses," said Captain Fraser, "I must look after them. Had we better not look after them?"

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He may be dying."

"By no means," said the stranger; "he will do very well; if we place the carriage upright, we shall be able to replace the ladies."

"We can," said the captain, who appeared to be divided between the duties of humanity and the tender anxiety he felt for his wife.

"Exactly," said the stranger; "and permit me to suggest that he has either gone on beyond our aid, or does not require it."

"It is possible."

"And very probable," said the stranger; "but if you prefer it, and think the ladies will not suffer, we can walk on ahead till we come up with them, if they stop before the end of the stage."

"No, no, sir; you are quite right; I will get the carriage up if you can so far assist me; we shall then place the ladies in comparative safety."

"We shall so."

They immediately walked round the carriage, and examined its position, as well as they were able, when, to the captain's great relief, he found that it was still on its wheels, though the body was thrown over on its side.

"How can it have happened?" inquired the captain.

"I cannot well see," replied the stranger; "but you will perceive something must have caught the off-side wheel, and turned the whole of the fore carriage that way, which has left this corner of the body without support; added to which, the speed or momentum it must have acquired in its course, has thrown it over."

"Precisely. I see now how it is; but if we get the body up, it will fall again over on this side, since it has no support."

"Oh, yes, it will remain up, since it has lost all force, all moving power; unless, indeed, any of the straps are broken. We can try."

"Here, Charles," said Captain Fraser, "we shall want your aid."

"Oh," said the stranger, "the slightest assistance is valuable; it is the last strain or effort that may complete the removal. Now, if we can lift it up from this side, we shall soon right it, and then the fore carriage can be forced round, and the ladies replaced, until we can better dispose of them."

The stranger placed his shoulder to the carriage, as well as the captain and his brother-in-law, young Stevens, and thus aided, he soon lifted it up into its old position, and there it remained very quietly.

"Now we had better pull the wheels round."

This was done, and the carriage assumed its former state.

"Well, how could they have got away?" inquired Captain Fraser, examining the axles and the bars; "all appears right."

"They have broken the splinter-bar, and here are the remains of the traces. The splinter-bar, I find, has only lost its hooks, so it will do again. Come, sir, you have less damage to regret than I at first thought it possible you could have escaped with; I am truly glad it is so."

"Thank you, sir; your kindness and assistance has been truly great and efficient; but I have yet to find the poor fellow who drove us."

"We will seek after him; or, I had better ride on to the next town or house where I can obtain assistance, while you will be better able to protect the ladies by remaining with them, and my horse will carry me quickly enough."

"Oh! you are mounted."

"I am; but the ladies wait."

Thus admonished, the captain turned to the ladies, and, with the stranger's assistance, he conducted them back to the carriage, where they were replaced, without any material damage or misfortune of any kind, save what might arise from fright.

"Some one is coming this way," said the stranger. "If I mistake not, they are your runaways, by the sounds."

They listened, and distinctly heard the sounds of horses' feet coming along, with the jingling of harness, that made it pretty certain that what the stranger said was correct, and that it was most probable that this was indeed the man who drove them coming back with the same cattle, or some fresh.

A few moments more decided the speculation, and the man himself rode up, and looked at the carriage, saying, --

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"Well, I thought it was upset."

"So it was, but we have righted it now. Has no accident happened to you? But these are the same horses!"

"Yes, sir. When they got loose, or broke away, they went as if they were shot out of a gun, and away they went for some miles, until I contrived to stop them, which was a hard job; however, I thought then, as there was nothing the matter with them or with me, I had better return and see what was become of you, sir, and the ladies."

"Quite right. Do you think they will go quietly in the harness again?"

"Oh, yes -- oh, yes, sir."

"Then we will harness; them, and go on to the end of the next stage, when we can see exactly what mischief, if any, has been done."

This was immediately put in practice, and they were soon harnessed, the broken straps and traces being mended in the best way time and circumstances admitted, but effectually enough for the present purpose.

"Now, sir," said Captain Fraser, "do you continue this road, or the one we have come? I suppose we must have overtaken you, as you were coming this way."

"No; I was a traveller going in the same direction. I saw your speed from a distance, and, believing your horses to have taken fright, I rode on, and, being well mounted, I overtook you just as the accident happened."

"Then we may have the pleasure of your company on the road for some distance to come, I hope, sir?"

"As far as the next place to stop at, at all events; for I do not desire to travel further than I can avoid to-night."

"Then I shall be able to thank you more at leisure, and at a better opportunity than at present," said the captain.

"Do not name it; I am too happy to have had it in my power to render you any assistance. Shall I ride on and secure you proper accommodation when you do arrive there?"

"Your kindness is very great," said the captain again. "I am much beholden to you; but if we can get as far as we hoped to do, we shall not require it; there will be sufficient for travellers under the ordinary course of events. We shall do very well; and if we should not be able to get so far, we must make ourselves content with whatever chance accommodation we get on the road."

"Then we will journey for that distance in company," said the stranger, as he mounted his horse, which had stood quietly by while the tall stranger rendered the timely assistance he had to them.

They proceeded along now at a cautious pace. The weather had abated, and the rain was now less severe; the thunder only heard in the distance; while the lightning could only be seen in occasional flashes in the distance, in a direction away from them. The clouds began to lighten, and then the diffused light of the moon came and shed a gentle light upon the scene, though it was very scarce, and of comparative little use save it enabled them to see their way all the better.

The roads were good, and they travelled onwards with some increase of speed; and finding none of their amended horse-tackle had given way, they still kept journeying onwards at the same pace.

Time brought them to their destination, and when they arrived at the inn at which they were to stop for the night, they found it had not made much more than an hour or an hour and a half's difference.

When they were fairly housed, the stranger took an apartment to himself. It was while he sat before the fire that Captain Fraser entered his room.

"I must apologise for my intrusion," began the captain.

"Do not say a word on that head, sir," said the stranger; "it is no intrusion -- you are welcome. Be seated, if you please; I am alone, and perfectly at leisure."

"I have come to thank you for the service you have done us, and to beg that you will sup with us, and permit the ladies to have an opportunity of thanking their preserver in person. You will oblige us all by accepting the invitation."

"I am much obliged for your courteous offer," said the stranger, who was a tall, dignified man. "I will come after supper, if you please, and shall feel it a great honour, I assure you; but I am so truly sensible that my efforts were more owing to accident than to anything else, that I do not wish to hear anything more of it."

"You must not be so self-denying, sir. We do not wish to put any more merit on your act than we think it deserves; but that much you must accept, if you will permit me to use such a word. Shall we have the pleasure of your company?"

"After supper."

"I will not press you against your feelings; but you will come in after supper, sir? I hope I may have the

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pleasure of drinking a bottle of wine with you. Will you come?"

"I will, sir, and thank you for the honour."

"May I have the pleasure of being able to introduce you to the ladies by name?" said the captain, with a little hesitation.

"Certainly — certainly. I beg your pardon. I am somewhat forgetful; I forgot I had not passed through an introduction," said the stranger. "Permit me to give you my card."

As he spoke, he handed Captain Fraser a beautifully—embossed card, upon which was printed, in Italian characters, — "Sir Francis Varney."

Captain Fraser took the card and read the name, and then, passing a compliment, he said, that since he could not have his company to supper, then he should expect him when he felt at leisure and disposed to do so. * * *

"My dear," said Captain Fraser to his wife, when he returned to his apartment, "our new friend will not come to supper but will take a glass of wine with me afterwards."

"I am sorry he will not come; though, under other circumstances, I should have been glad of it; but I am sorry on this occasion."

"And why would you have been glad?"

"Because, after the flurry and upset we had, I am hardly fit to see any one, much less a stranger; but he so kindly and promptly rescued us from our danger, that I cannot feel reluctance at any time."

"Yes," said her sister; "and I must say I never heard a voice that sounded so really like a gentleman's — indeed, I could fancy that any one could positively assert that he was a gentleman, only from hearing him speak, without seeing him at all; but, be that as it may, I felt convinced he was such."

"He is very courteous, I must say," said Mrs. Fraser.

"And who do you think he is?"

"I have no means of forming any judgment."

"Well, then, he is Sir Francis Varney."

"Sir Francis Varney! Well, I do not know the name; I never heard the name before that time; but I think there was some one of that name in the time of Queen Elizabeth — an attendant on the Earl of Leicester."

"Are you not joking?"

"Indeed I am not; I have read so."

"And you think this gentleman may be a descendant of his?"

"There is no impossibility nor improbability about it, that I see," said Mrs. Fraser; "but I am the more obliged to him for his timely assistance. I am sure it was fortunate that he was so close at hand."

"Yes, it was very fortunate. Mary, my dear, we shall be introduced to a baronet. It is quite a prophecy of yours in saying he was a gentleman when you only heard him speak. By the way, Fraser, what sort of a man is he?"

"Very singular indeed."

"Singular! Ay — he is very tall."

"Yes, he is tall; but very pale; more remarkable and dignified than handsome; extremely courteous and polite."

"What age is he?"

"Well, I cannot tell; perhaps forty, perhaps not so old by ten years; it is quite impossible to say."

"Dear me, how strange! I think I could guess anybody's age better than that."

"You shall have an opportunity of doing so, then, in an hour or so, when he will come; and I think I may venture upon saying you will be pleased with his dignified politeness, and say he is much superior to most men."

The supper ended, and the wine was produced, and Captain Fraser, his lady, and two young relatives, were seated round a good fire — for the storm had chilled the air; besides, the damp they had stood in rendered such a precaution necessary and pleasant, notwithstanding the day had been sultry; but the change in the temperature was sudden and great — awaiting, with something like impatience, the stranger's arrival.

"He does not appear to come," said Charles Stevens.

"He is not here, certainly; but he will come, no doubt, the moment he is quite sure that we had done our supper, and he had finished his own; perhaps he takes longer than we."

"Perhaps so; but I am strongly tempted to go to him again."

"It might be construed into undue urgency, or something of the sort," said Mrs. Fraser; "and yet he might be

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waiting for something of the sort."

"So he might," said the captain. "At all events, I will go and see; if he were inclined to do so under other circumstances, he would not take offence under the present."

"Perhaps not."

At that moment the door was opened, and the waiter presented a note.

"A note for me?" said Captain Fraser.

"Yes, sir."

"Who can it be from?"

"From the gentleman up stairs, sir, who came with you an hour back."

"Oh!" exclaimed Captain Fraser.

"He was taken ill, and obliged to go to bed, sir."

Captain Fraser immediately tore open the note, and read as follows: —

"SIR, — I deeply regret I cannot keep my promise to take a glass of wine with you, and have the honour of being introduced to the ladies. Favour me so far as to make my excuses to them. It is a great pleasure lost to me on the occasion; permit me to say deferred, rather than lost; and if I might venture to make an appointment, under the circumstances, I can only say that, if convenient, I should be happy to breakfast with you, and then have the honour and happiness I have now the misfortune to lose.

"Sudden and severe indisposition alone have caused me to retire before I had the honour of seeing you, and expressing my inability to attend you. — Yours, obliged, "FRANCIS VARNEY."

There was a blank upon the countenances of all present. Evidently a deep disappointment was felt by all; but the captain was especially surprised, and, turning to the waiter, he said, —

"Did you see this gentleman?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was he unwell?"

"Yes, sir."

"I mean, was he, or is he, dangerously ill?"

"He was very ill, sir; but I don't know that he is dangerously ill. He suffered much pain, and he was obliged to have aid to go up stairs."

"Did he say what it was that ailed him?" pursued Captain Fraser.

"Not that I heard; though some said he had got the cramp and cold by being too long in the wet."

"Perhaps so — very likely — very likely — that will do. Let me know how he is the first thing in the morning; do you hear?"

"Yes, sir, I will take care."

"Well," said Mrs. Fraser, when they were alone, "I did not expect such a disappointment this evening. However, he makes up for it by appointing the breakfast hour for our meeting; it is the more agreeable, as we shall have had a good night's repose, and shall be the better able to appear to advantage."

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Chapter CXXXVI. THE ALARM AT THE INN. -- BED-CHAMBER TERRORS. -- A NIGHT SCENE. -- A MORNING SUCCEEDING TO A NIGHT OF ADVENTURE.

The inmates of the inn are all fast bound in sleep. The senses of all seem steeped in deep forgetfulness; even the hour of dreams was passed. The storm, which had raged so violently in the early part of the evening, and which had appeared to have gone and a calm succeeded, had returned, and the fury of the blast was only equalled by the deluging rain and the fearful rumbling of the thunder.

But calmly slept the beautiful and innocent Mary Stevens. She was young, and her mind bore no weight of care; when she slept no dreams disturbed her rest, but a calm, death-like sleep sat upon her soul, and steeped it in forgetfulness.

The storm raged around, but she heard it not; she was unconscious of it. Perhaps the disturbance and fatigues of the previous day caused a greater degree of depth to her insensibility, and rendered her mind less liable to slight interruptions. But she slept soundly, and even did not hear the intruder who walked across the floor of her bedroom, and stood gazing on her fair arms as she lay sleeping.

The intruder was a tall man, enveloped in some strange mantle, all white. He stooped over her, as if he listened to the beating of her heart, while his strangely bright eyes, which shone fearfully, appeared to express a horrible kind of joy, too terrible for human nature to contemplate.

He stooped -- he placed his hand upon her heart, and felt its pulsations, and a terrible and ghastly smile passed over his features, while a movement of the lips and mouth generally, appeared as if anticipatory of a coming meal.

Then he took the white arm in his hands, and cast a longing look at the features of the maiden, who appeared disturbed by the rude action, and moved in her sleep, and was suddenly aroused from her slumber by a severe pang in her arm, as though some creature had plunged its fangs into her flesh.

She started up, and found herself flung upon the bed with gigantic strength. She screamed, and uttered scream upon scream.

The old inn was filled with sounds of terror and pain. There was a loud knocking heard at the door. Then, indeed, the assailant left his prey to provide for his own safety; but it was almost too late, for the door was burst open violently, as he made for another means of exit, which was the means by which he had entered the apartment; but he was prevented, and, as the first person entered the apartment, he threw him down by placing something in his way. The light was thrown against some furniture, which immediately rose up into a flame.

"Help! help! Fire! fire!"

These were fearful sounds, such as had never before been heard in that place, and the inmates, woke up by the screams from deep slumber, were startled and terrified at these sounds, and springing at once from their beds, echoed the sounds as they run wildly about from place to place.

"Where is the fire? What's the matter?"

"Fire in the young lady's room."

All eyes were directed to that quarter, and in another instant there were several persons rushing to the room, the glare of the fire in which at once attracted their observation, and they rushed to the rescue; among the foremost of whom was Sir Francis Varney, whose bedchamber was not far distant from Mary Steven's. He rushed to the bed, and wrapping the bedclothes round her, he carried her out of the room and the scene of danger, and, as he came out of the room, he inquired, --

"Where is Captain Fraser?"

"Here -- here I am, Sir Francis," said the captain, coming hastily forward.

"Then, Captain, Fraser, I resign my charge up to you -- you are her proper protector; but I must apologize for my hasty intrusion into her apartment."

"Do not think of speaking in that manner, Sir Francis; we are already indebted to you for our lives, and now we are again your debtor. Your ready aid has twice saved the young lady."

Captain Fraser took Miss Stevens from Sir Francis, and then carried her, as she was quite insensible, to his

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own room to his wife, her sister, where she was laid upon the bed, and found to be quite insensible.

There was much confusion in the inn — people were running about from place to place, and tumbling over each other in the confusion of thought; and the moments were precious, for many were running about, yet none did effective service, though all were willing enough to do all that could be done by them under the circumstances.

"You had better get some water," said Varney, "as quickly as you can. It is useless to run about and stare at each other. Get all the buckets you can. Be quick about it. There may yet be time enough to save the inn, and keep the fire to the room where it is; but that time will soon be at an end."

Instantly two or three of the men ran down and got a plentiful supply of water, and then, under the direction of Sir Francis Varney, the fire was very soon got under, and the flames were extinguished.

Then came an inquiry how the fire had first appeared.

"Do you know how it happened?" inquired Sir Francis Varney, of the innkeeper, who stood quite mute with astonishment at the scene before him.

"Know, sir!" said the the innkeeper. "I don't know anything. I don't know myself. I don't even know where I am, or what's the matter."

"Then I beg to tell you, sir," said Varney, with much sauvity of manner, "then I beg to tell you, sir, that there has been a fire in your inn — a young lady frightened out of her senses, and I know not the cause."

"No more don't I," said the landlord, with a short grunt, indicative of wonderment and alarm. "I wish I did. I wonder who set the place a-fire; that's what I wants to know, and why he did it."

"The motive was not a bad one, I believe."

"Not a bad motive, that which causes one man to set fire to and destroy another man's property!"

"Not when it is not only not done with any evil intention, but it was not even done wilfully," said Sir Francis.

"Perhaps you saw it done," said the landlord, with another grunt.

"I did," replied Varney; "hearing the disturbance, I hastily threw on some of my clothes, and ran out of my apartment to ascertain what was the matter, and found several others had got here before me, and had burst open the door. The first who entered, had a light in his hand, and fell with it, setting the place on fire, which burned furiously for a minute or more, the hangings being dry and old. I took the young lady out, else I am sure she must have perished."

"Well, I saw you come out with her in your arms, like a salamander; but what I most want to know is, what was it that disturbed my customer? That is of the greatest consequence to me."

"You are perfectly right, my friend," said Sir Francis, with much composure, "to make that inquiry, that being the origin of all that subsequently took place. You are a man of discernment, and must see that the young lady herself can alone give us any account of that."

"True, sir; but I am much obliged to you for the trouble you have taken, not only for the young lady's sake, but for the property you have prevented being destroyed. You have, no doubt, saved the inn, and all it contains."

"That is enough, sir," said Varney, waving his hand, "you have said enough. I am glad I have rendered you a service, and that it has been effectual."

"It has been just the thing," said the landlord.

"Then take my advice. See the place is secure, and send all persons to bed, save, perhaps, a single individual, who might be set to watch the room which has been on fire, and which may have some slumbering spark in it, though I think not; but the quieter the place is, the sooner the young lady's alarm will be over, and then all will be well."

"Certainly, certainly," said the landlord, "it will be better to do so; but here is the only gentleman who can tell us how the young lady is."

Sir Francis Varney turned round, and beheld Captain Fraser coming towards them with a very grave aspect.

"Captain Fraser," said Sir Francis, "perhaps you can tell us what we are so very anxious to learn, and what we have been inquiring about."

"What may that be, Sir Francis?"

"We have been trying to learn what it is that caused the young lady to scream out in such a fearful manner. We have settled the cause of the fire — that has been manifest enough to us all."

"Indeed! I am not acquainted with it."

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"It arose from the first person who entered her apartment after the door was burst open, falling over something, and setting fire to the curtains, which blazed up in an instant, and set the whole room on fire."

"Indeed!" said Captain Fraser, almost incredulously.

"Yes, I saw that myself," said Varney, "and I stepped over him as he lay on the ground, and therefore know it; but how is the young lady? Has she recovered from the extreme fright into which she has been thrown?"

"It is a much more serious affair than I had any notion of, Sir Francis."

"I am concerned to hear you say so."

"Shall I send for the doctor?" inquired the landlord.

"Do -- that is what I came to ask you to do; she has recovered once, and has fainted again. I know not what to think. She has a singular wound in her arm. I can't understand that, at all events."

"I did not see it when I took hold of her; though, to be sure, what I did, was done in smoke and flame, and I could not be supposed to scrutinize very closely, had I been so inclined; but what kind of wound is it?"

"I can hardly describe it to you, save it is a bite; and there are teeth-marks plain enough to be seen; though we have no means of telling what kind of creature it was that inflicted the wounds."

"Indeed! I am concerned, for the effect upon the imagination will be very bad; but did she not see, or fancy she saw the object that injured her?"

"It was dark, and the storm raged without; moreover, she was held down by a powerful grasp; and when she attempted to rise, she was flung down, and she could feel the blunted teeth enter her flesh, and the creature appeared to suck her blood."

"Dear me," said Sir Francis, "what a very strange affair! It is fortunate I was obliged to retire early, and I slept the lighter, and was therefore easily aroused from my sleep; but I am proverbially a light sleeper."

"Are you, sir? But what has caused the wound in her arm I cannot tell; it is quite a mystery. She has got a fancy into her mind that it was a human being; but that could not have been the fact."

"I should imagine not," said Sir Francis.

"And then, I know of no animal who could commit such an act: a cat or a dog could not have done it, though a dog might have made the teeth-marks; but a dog would hardly have attempted to suck blood."

"They will do it," said Sir Francis, "that I know to be a fact; and I believe it to be one that is generally admitted by all persons, especially that breed of animals mostly kept, and which have something of the bull-dog in them."

"It may be so; but how could she be held down by one of them? She could not be struck down when she attempted to rise."

"It is not for me to combat the young lady's opinions; but, remember, my dear sir, how terrified, not to say how horrified, she must have been at such an unusual, and, I may add, unheard-of an attack; if you consider such things, and the improbability -- not to say what appears to me, the impossibility -- you will see plenty of room for mistakes to arise, and give her notions a wrong turn."

"That is very true."

"And besides, I would, if I were convinced of the contrary, endeavour to persuade her of her mistake, unless you can discover the perpetrator of the outrage, when justice demands that such a savage should be severely punished."

"By G--d! Sir Francis," said the captain, "if I could see him, I would shoot the scoundrel! But, then, I am getting angry without a cause; it may not be what she thinks, and then, you know, all one's anger goes for nothing."

"So it does; but, in the meantime, great care and attention is requisite to regain her confidence and serenity of mind."

"Oh, a day or two will make a great difference in these matters, when we come to change the scene."

"Are you travelling far, Captain Fraser?"

"As far as Bath," said the captain.

At this moment the landlord returned, saying to Captain Fraser, --

"I have sent to Mr. Carter, who will be here, no doubt; he is close at hand, and will come in a moment. He's a very clever gentleman, is Mr. Carter. I saw him perform four operations on coach accidents."

"Operations on coach accidents!" said Sir Francis Varney; "a curious matter, that. How did they succeed upon

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such materials?"

"Oh, they were two broken arms, and three broken legs."

"Indeed! Did they all recover?"

"No; only one got over it."

"Upon my word, a promising member of the faculty to entrust so tender a charge to, under such delicate circumstances. But, landlord, have you any bad characters about your house, or in the neighbourhood?"

"I can't say anything about the neighbourhood, though I believe it is as quiet and orderly as can be, or usually is. I never hear anything against it, and know nothing against it; and as for them in the house, I can answer they would not hurt a fly, unless provoked to do so; but what I mean is, they are all honest and tried servants."

"Well, that is saying a good deal," said Captain Fraser; "but, have you any dogs about the house --- I mean, any large dogs?"

"Ah! dogs! Yes, I have several dogs, and good dogs they are, too."

"Could any of them get into the rooms --- the sleeping-rooms? I mean, could any of them get into the room that has taken fire?"

"No, unless the door was opened," said the landlord. "They are not allowed to run about loose here, lest any one should get up in the night and be mistaken for intruders; for my dogs, gentlemen, would take any one they saw moving about outside of a night; but, otherwise, they are quiet, well-conducted dogs."

"Well, you mean to say they could not have got into Miss Stevens's room."

"I do; I am sure of it. They could not, because there were none of them about the house when we went to bed --- when the house was shut up at night. However, here is the doctor."

The medical man now arrived, and was forthwith introduced to Captain Fraser, who conducted him to the apartment in which Mrs. Fraser and Miss Stevens were awaiting the coming of the doctor. Captain Fraser, after having introduced him to the invalid, returned to the landlord and Sir Francis.

"Well, I cannot make it out at all," said Sir Francis. "There must be some mystery in it, I am persuaded; and if that could only be discovered, the matter would lose half its terrors to the mind of the young lady."

"No doubt it would do so," said the captain. "The fire and her wound together, have made a deep impression upon her."

"The wound!" said the landlord. "Is the young lady hurt, then?"

"Hurt, indeed! she is seriously hurt. She has received a severe wound in the arm, by some one, or some dog having seized and bitten her seriously."

"God bless me!" said the landlord; "I never heard of such a thing. Somebody began to eat her, I suppose. Upon my word, it would almost make one believe we are in the Cannibal Islands, to say the least of it."

"Here is the surgeon," said Sir Francis, who noticed that gentleman's approach.

"Well, sir," said Captain Fraser, "how is your patient?"

"I fear she is much terrified; and if she were to remain here long, I should hardly like to answer for her health. She has received a very severe shock."

"Her wound --- what think you of that, sir?"

"I really can't say anything about it, save that it is a bite; but how inflicted I cannot say. It is very mysterious, indeed; very strange! But, what I look upon as most important in the affair, is the impression it has produced upon her mind; that, you see, may last her all her life, and produce very unfortunate consequences. I do not know that it will be so, but I state what there is a possibility of --- or, I may, more correctly speaking, add, --- of what there is a great probability."

"I regret to hear you say so," said Sir Francis Varney. "Do you really imagine the young lady has been bitten by any animal?"

"Yes, I do; there are evidences enough to prove that. There is the wound in her arm, and the marks of the teeth quite plain; and she suffers from the anguish of it much; but I shall be better able to say more about it early in the morning, when I call again to see her."

"She will be able to travel, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, she will be able to do that; indeed, I would recommend she should try to do so, as the best means of throwing off all the unpleasant feelings and thoughts upon the occasion."

"Will you call early to-morrow?"

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"I will," said the doctor; and then he bade them good evening, and left.

"Well," said the landlord, "I'm amazed at what the doctor says about the young lady. I'm sorry it should have happened in my house; but I hope something will turn up to make it turn out different."

"That I'm afraid is not possible, seeing you have a clear demonstration of what it is now; the mischief has been done."

"I am the more sorry," said the landlord, "that it is likely to prey upon the young lady's feelings, which are to be considered in the case."

"Certainly, certainly; there is where the mischief is likely to spring from."

"However, it is of no use to stand here all night -- it is cold. I must get an hour or two's sleep before I get to business in the morning."

"I think so too," said Captain Fraser; "well, I will bid you good night, Sir Francis, and shall expect you in the morning to breakfast."

"With pleasure," replied Varney; and they all parted, each going to his own dormitory, to sleep or to think over the events of the night, as best they might.

Chapter CXXXVII.

The next morning came, and with it came also the usual bustle of a country inn, when strangers are stopping there, especially carriage strangers; as well as the usual coach stoppages, when they change horses, which they did more than once that morning. It was at a later hour than usual when the party breakfasted, and it was somewhat late when Sir Francis Varney entered the room.

"Good morning," said Sir Francis, with great suavity of manner, and in a most courtly tone; "I trust I see you somewhat recovered from the fright you were put to last night."

"Oh, Sir Francis," said Mrs. Fraser; "it was a dreadful fright, indeed; but we have so much to thank you for. To you we owe much, and my sister owes to you a double obligation — you have rescued her twice."

"I am happy to think I have been a fortunate instrument in serving you. I trust Miss Stevens is better than she was."

"I think she is better, Sir Francis; but she desires to remain in her apartment until we are ready to start. Though I thought it somewhat unreasonable, because, if she is to travel, she had better have come out."

"But her rest was disturbed by the accident, and it might have been early before she slept; and an hour's rest and repose might do much towards recovering her," said Sir Francis; "her own feelings are a good guide under those circumstances."

"I think so, too," said Captain Fraser.

"I," said young Stevens, "was awoke by a desperate riot caused by people running about; I did not hear anything of the scream."

"I was awoke by it," said Captain Fraser. "How did you hear of it — how were you awoke?"

"By a loud scream," said Sir Francis; "I was asleep, and when it awoke me, I knew not what it was. I remained for a moment or two in doubt as to whether I had not dreamt, but a repetition assured me that I was not dreaming — and knowing from the sound it was a female's voice, I jumped up, and dressed myself as well as I could; but, before I could do that, I heard people running about, and when I got into the gallery, I heard the door burst in."

"Did any one come out?"

"I cannot say — I saw no one; but the man who first entered the apartment fell down, from some cause or other, and set the bed—curtains on fire — accidentally, of course, but it was the same in effect."

"Did you see any one in the room, Sir Francis?"

"No one at all; I did not even know who slept there; but seeing the form of a human being lying there, and wrapping the bed—clothes, or rather seizing her and the bed—clothes, by grasping with both arms, I carried her out. I used but little ceremony, and the urgency of the case must be my excuse."

"And it is, Sir Francis, though I know not in what way we can manifest our feelings of gratitude to you."

"You may, madam, by saying no more about it; but I shall be delighted to think you have such a good opinion of my services; and the knowledge that they have been useful, that is a gratification to me."

"And one you are well entitled to, Sir Francis," said Captain Fraser.

"How far are you travelling?" inquired Mrs. Fraser.

"As far as Bath, madam, for the benefit of my health."

"We are going to Bath, Sir Francis, as well. I am sure it will be a great pleasure to Captain Fraser, to find that we are to have such a travelling companion — that is, if you can accommodate yourself to travelling in a carriage."

"I can travel as you please. I am mounted, and am used to such travelling, for months at a time."

"Do you travel much at a time, Sir Francis?"

"Yes, I have been a great traveller, for years; not so much as regards distance as to the constancy of my perambulations; for I continue for months together out, riding from one town to another."

"Without an attendant?"

"Always; I never carry a servant about with me; it cannot be done with comfort by any one. You have always proper attendance if you stop at a respectable inn, or hotel; or, if not, if the road you have to travel be a cross route, you cannot expect any additional comfort from a servant, but you are troubled at his not being comfortably

lodged; at least, I am, for I have tried it."

"I dare say there is much wisdom in that. I know from experience that a single traveller, who has leisure, and is willing, may enjoy himself better than he could if he were attended by his servant. You are somewhat restrained in your motions, and cannot do as you would please under all circumstances."

"I am fully persuaded of that, from experience; but I shall travel on horseback till I get to Bath, and then I hardly know whether I shall remain at an hotel, or take lodgings for the season — or what."

"What we intend is, to take lodgings," said Captain Fraser, "for a time — as long as we feel inclined — and then to enjoy ourselves."

"Quite right," said Sir Francis; "quite right. I am glad to hear you say so, and I hope it may be of advantage to Miss Stevens."

"I hope so too. Shall we have the advantage of your company en route?"

"I shall have great pleasure in having your company so far. It will give me great gratification, indeed; I shall be most happy to bear your company as far as the city of Bath, and shall consider myself the gainer by your society."

"No, we shall be the only party that will benefit by it; but we shall feel greatly your kindness, and I, for one, anticipate much pleasure on the road from your society, and also when we arrive in Bath."

"I feel such will be the case."

At this moment Mr. Carter was announced also. In a few moments more this individual was introduced to them; he was a plain gentlemanly man, who really was a clever man, notwithstanding the fearful account of his prowess and skill which the landlord had descanted on the previous night.

"Well, Mr. Carter," said Captain Fraser, "how do you find my sister — do you think she is any better than she was?"

"I think she is calmer, and much of the first violence of terror is gone; but I cannot say any more — she is still much disturbed."

"Do you think there is anything dangerous in her state?"

"No, sir, I do not; though I cannot hide from you the possibility that there is of her being permanently affected by it — I mean mentally; it may take a deep hold of her, and there will be no getting her free from it, save by judicious treatment."

"You do not consider much, then, of her wound?"

"The arm? Oh, yes; that looks very angry, and has been a very severe bite, and has caused her arm to swell; though I have no doubt about its getting well, still it will be very painful for some days; and, had it been a little more severe, it is possible that some of the tendons might have been injured, or an artery wounded."

"Upon my word," said Sir Francis Varney, "this had very nigh turned out a very bad and serious affair, if not a dangerous one."

"Of that there can be no doubt," said the doctor.

"Well, but, after all, what was it that has caused all this disturbance? What was it, a man or brute?"

"Decidedly the latter," said Sir Francis Varney, "decidedly the latter, be the form of the creature what it may."

"Indeed, you are right, Sir Francis," said Mrs. Fraser; "but she insists it was a human being who made this abominable attack upon her — why or wherefore, no one knows; but she insists it was a man."

"What do you say," doctor?"

"I only know, sir, what the young lady says."

"Do you think it probable?"

"I cannot say I do. I think it most unlikely; though, to be sure, there is nothing in it that is impossible. Had any one felt maliciously towards the young lady, they might have perpetrated the crime; but, in the absence of all malice, I cannot think so bad of human nature as to believe it."

"You discredit it, then?" said Sir Francis Varney.

"I do," said the doctor, "with all due respect to the young lady; but the probability of mistake is so great, and when you consider the terror so natural to the occasion, her powers of observation were limited and liable to error, that I cannot myself believe otherwise than there is a great mistake."

"And what do you consider of the wounds? I mean, do you think it possible they were inflicted by human teeth? Are they of that shape and character that could be inflicted by human teeth?"

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

"Yes, decidedly; that is, so far as I am able to judge, while the wound is swelled and angry, I should consider them just such as might be inflicted by the teeth of a man or woman."

"That corroborates the young lady's own belief."

"It does, so far," said Mr. Carter.

"Then comes the question of how could it have been done, and by whom?"

"These seem to be questions which cannot be answered. I asked the landlord all that could tend to elicit that information, but with no success; he knew nothing that could throw any light upon the subject."

"Perhaps he knew nothing," suggested Mrs. Fraser.

"Most probably he did not," was the reply.

"I know the landlord to be a respectable, though somewhat eccentric man; and I think him quite incapable of being a party to such an outrage upon any person, much less upon a lady who was stopping at his house."

"Well; however true that may be, yet it is undeniable that this outrage has been committed, though by whom we cannot say, for we do not even suspect anybody. I can't understand it at all."

"Nor I; but, as you observed, sir, the outrage has been committed, and here, too; but, unfortunately, no one is suspected, and justice cannot be done, which, in such a case, ought to be fully and clearly made out, for there can be no palliation."

"None at all."

"I wish," said Captain Fraser, "I had been first in the room."

"Why, sir," inquired Sir Francis Varney, "do you wish that?"

"Because you see, sir, I should have felt that inward satisfaction arising from the fact, that I fancy I might have ascertained whether any one was, or had been, in the room."

"The young lady said there was," said Sir Francis.

"Yes — yes; but then you saw the door opened, and saw no one come out."

"I did not, though, after I had Miss Stevens in my arms, I came away, and then it was possible any one might have got out, though there were others who would have seen them; but still, in the bustle and confusion of the moment, there might have been somebody."

"Yes, there is that possibility," said Captain Fraser; "and I don't see why I should trouble myself about this affair — I mean, by wishing myself there; but I should have done nothing but carry out the body — that would have been my first act."

"No doubt," said Sir Francis; "and what made such an act the more necessary is, the fact that she was in instant danger of death from burning, or suffocation."

"True — true; who would have coolly gazed around him, when there, on the bed, lay the unfortunate victim of God knows what."

"Well, sir, I must bid you good day. I have some patients to visit."

"Not before we square accounts, which is easily done. Let me know how we may stand, sir, and I will pay you at once."

This little affair was soon settled; and the doctor was about to depart, when he said, before he left the room,

—
"I have given the young lady directions what to do relative to her arm. She must not use it much; but any medical man who may chance to see it, will be able to prescribe for it; though what I have given I deem almost enough to effect her complete restoration, as far as regards the arm. The shock, the mind and nervous system have sustained, will only be eradicated by time and change."

"Thank you for your advice; that shall be attended to."

The doctor now quitted the hotel; and the landlord entered the apartment with a very serious aspect; and, after making his bow, proceeded to say, —

"I am very sorry, sir, for the occurrence of last night — very sorry, indeed. Indeed, sir, I cannot make it out at all. I have inquired all over the house, and nobody at all knows anything about it, nor can't think how it could be. A good many of them won't believe it at all, though I told them there could be no doubt of it, for the young lady was burnt, and the bed set on fire."

"You may be sure of that, landlord; the young lady has been bitten on the arm most severely."

"And, as for the fire," said Sir Francis, "I saw how that occurred."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

"So you said, sir," replied the landlord; "if that fellow as fell down had stood up, why, it wouldn't have set the curtains a fire."

"No, that is true."

"Well, then, he would have been able to have seen what was the matter, instead of his filling the room full of smoke and fire as he did; he hadn't no excuse to tumble down --- nobody knocked him down."

"But didn't he hurt himself very badly?"

"Oh, only about two or three square inches, or perhaps a patch as big as your hand, off his chin --- that's nothing to such as he."

"Very good. But have you examined the place, to see if anybody could have got in and concealed himself? Was there any possibility of a man's getting into your house, and secreting himself in any part of the bed-room, which would thus afford him an opportunity of doing what has been done?"

"Why, sir, I don't think it likely; and yet these people are so cunning, that you could not, by any possibility, guard against them in any way, especially in an inn. But there is no house free from intrusion of that character; but in this instance they could have had no notion the young lady was to sleep there."

"That is very true," said Captain Fraser, "and tends to show she was not singled out for outrage; but what seems very singular, is, that any one should secret themselves, and that with a view to commit such an outrage."

"That is very true," said the landlord; "but people do very strange things sometimes, and I think the object of any one hiding himself in the house in such a manner as this rascal must have done, was robbery."

"But he met with no resistance, and there could have been no excuse for so cowardly an assault as this complained of."

"There is much truth in that, and yet we don't know what human nature is capable of," said the landlord. "I have known a few things in my time; but the man, or whatever he might be, might have been tempted to make the assault complained of."

"What? Then, landlord, you imagine that a thief who had got into the house, would make an attempt to eat a young lady?"

"Why, as to eating her, sir," said the landlord, scratching his head, "I cannot say that he would. I don't know what his intentions might be, nor do I profess to understand it all. I can't, however, see what can be the motive, save malice and spite; they mightn't care whom they injured, so long as somebody was hurt."

"They must have been very bad."

"Yes, sir; and I wish I had seen them; if I had, I would no more mind chopping them in two than I would cleave a marrow-bone. I truly hope, sir, you won't consider that, however unfortunate the circumstances are, that I am blameable in this affair. I took all the usual precautions in this affair --- that is, my house was secured as usual, and the place watched during the day; for we are particular in that respect, knowing that we are very liable to be robbed."

"Exactly," said Captain Fraser; "and though I much regret the occurrence, yet, I tell you, I do not see anything in which I say you are to blame. It is simply a great misfortune, and there ends the matter."

"Thank you. I regret it as much, I am sure, as anybody, because I am very likely to be injured by it."

"You are not to blame. Allow my carriage to be at the door in half an hour, as we shall leave almost immediately."

"And my horse, too, landlord, as I bear this gentleman company."

The landlord departed, and went towards the stables, and gave the necessary orders; while the guests remained conversing on the extraordinary occurrence that had taken place, and much pleased with the courtesy of their new friend.

Many were the speculations that were indulged in respecting the attack upon Miss Stevens; many of them wild, but all wide of the mark, fortunately, for her frame of mind; and then, before they had at all come to any conclusion, or any satisfactory probability, the carriage was announced.

"Well, Sir Francis, I presume you will ride with us?"

"Yes, on horseback."

"I understand so; we shall be much indebted to you for your goodness; but here is Miss Stevens."

At that moment the young lady entered the room, ready attired for travelling, but looking very pale and timid. Sir Francis advanced, and, taking her hand, said, ---

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

"May I have the pleasure of hearing you say the occurrence of last night has done you only a temporary mischief?"

"I hope not," said Miss Stevens; "but, to you, Sir Francis, I owe everything. I am grateful to you for your ready and effectual aid under such trying circumstances. I am sure I never can repay you for your goodness."

"Nay, the task is easier than you imagine," said Sir Francis; "to know that I have saved you, and to see it has been effectual, is repayment enough. I am sure we never feel so much satisfaction and pleasure as when we find our endeavours, however important or unimportant they are, have proved effectual — that we have done what we desired to do — that is ample reward."

"You are so good, Sir Francis."

"We will say nothing about that. None are so perfect but we may see room for amendment; but we will have a truce, I hope, upon this subject, and now converse upon the pleasures of our journey."

"They, I hope, will be very many," said Mrs. Fraser.

"I have every expectation of it myself," said Sir Francis; "the day appears fine, and the sun is high. The storm of last evening has cleared the air of much of its heat; it is cool and pleasant. The country will look refreshed, the fields will be quite gay and pleasant, and the face of nature renewed."

"Well, I am certain it will be a pleasant journey under such a change, for I must say it was very sultry yesterday."

"It was," said Captain Fraser; "the appearance of the earth alone will tell that. But are you all ready?"

"Yes, all," replied Mrs. Fraser.

"Now, my dear Charles, what are you about?"

"I'm looking for my gloves," said the youth; "but I can't find them."

"Never mind them; we shall be off without you."

"I'll come before you have all got into the carriage, so don't wait."

"Permit me, Miss Stevens," said Sir Francis, as he offered his arm, "to have the pleasure of seeing you safe into the carriage."

They young lady accepted of the proffered arm of Sir Francis, though not without something like reluctance, though, why, she could not tell; but yet she did not like to appear to hesitate, and forced herself to do what common courtesy, if not gratitude, demanded she should do. She took his arm, and the whole party were shortly seated in the carriage, and with Sir Francis Varney mounted beside them, they all quitted the inn, where they had experienced such strange vicissitudes of fortune during one night, that it would never be erased from their memories.

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Chapter CXXXVIX. THE ROAD, AND THE TRAVELLERS. -- THE PLEASURES OF DOING GOOD. -- THE BEGGAR WOMAN. -- SIR FRANCIS VARNEY A PHILANTHROPIST.

The road was pleasantly bounded on either side by hill and dale scenery, while it was itself of a very diversified character; and at one moment they passed through long avenues of trees, at other times a bare heath, without so much as a dwarf hedge; and then well-cultivated country would succeed, studded with handsome villas, and country seats, old half-castellated mansions and halls, where gentlemen lived in the abodes of their ancestors, and felt pride in doing so.

The air was balmy and beautiful -- every object appeared fresh, and every tree and shrub looked as though new life had been infused into it; the birds sang merrily, and the whole party were in high spirits.

"Such scenes as these," said Sir Francis Varney, "please me better than the gaieties and follies of the town. I am sure there is much more happiness to be found by a contented mind, than there is in the feverish pleasures of a city."

"There is much truth in that, Sir Francis," said the captain; "but, in my own case, connected as I am with my professional friends, I cannot follow what is the natural bent of my taste; but I find pleasure wherever I go, for I am determined to make the best of all that passes beneath my observation."

"Sweets can be extracted from every bitter, and therefore it is good philosophy to take the bright side of a picture, in all the ordinary relations of life; we are better men and better subjects by so doing."

Thus the distance was soon passed over, and a stage was but the same as a pleasant morning ride; and then an hour or two spent of the heat of the day in quiet in some small, but respectable, inn, with wine and pleasing conversation, gave them a relish for the life they led.

The style of the conversation of the stranger, Sir Francis Varney, was pleasing in the extreme; he was evidently a man of great and varied talents and attainments, and one of great experience, and who had seen much of life.

Two days passed this way, and they had not reached Bath; they were tempted to stop longer by the way than they would have done.

"To-morrow," observed Sir Francis, "we must reach Bath. About three short stages will place us within its precincts, and then I presume the assembly-room, as well as the pump-room, will occupy much of your attention."

"We shall certainly go there."

"Have you been in Bath before?"

"Yes, but many years ago, when we were quite children, so that I have no recollection of the place."

"And you, Captain Fraser?"

"No, I have not, I am quite a stranger there; but for the kindness of your offer, I should have to trust to strangers, or my own good fortune, to find out those things which strangers usually seek, and those places they usually visit."

"I shall have great pleasure in showing you that which is worthy of your attention. It is now some years since I was there; but I believe, though there may be improvements, yet the place is essentially the same."

"No doubt; cities seldom alter much, unless it be in their suburbs. If the alteration be great, it will point itself out."

"Exactly so."

The party were seated beneath a large cedar tree, which stood in the inn garden, with a table, upon which were spread some wine and biscuits, walnuts, and a few things besides, of a character agreeing much with the place.

Into this garden crept an unfortunate beggar woman, who, espying the party from the road, escaped the vigilance of the waiters and menials who hung about the inn, and entered. She crept timidly towards the party, looking wistfully, but yet fearful of the consequences of the intrusion; for there was a notice in the village, which gave forth fearful threats to them, should they dare to beg for the bread for which they were starving.

Presently, finding the captain's eye fixed upon her, with a beseeching look, she dropped her curtsy.

"Who is that woman, and what does she want?"

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

All turned to look upon the unfortunate creature, who began her petition by saying, —

"Kind ladies and gentlemen, pity a poor woman who is starving. I am very weary, and am weak with travelling — "

"Eh! what do you do here?" exclaimed the waiter. "Come, come, we don't allow beggars in this place. The high roads, or the Bridewell, are the only places we have in these here parts."

"Do not be in a hurry," said Sir Francis, to the officious waiter. "It might have been right enough to prevent her entering; but now we have seen her, I cannot, if she deserve it, refuse to aid her in her affliction."

The woman dropped a very low curtsey.

"My good woman, where have you come from?"

"From Bath, sir," said the unfortunate creature.

"From Bath, eh? And what took you there?"

"I lived there."

"You lived there; if that were the case, why should you leave a place where you did live, to wander about where you cannot live? That is a bad policy, methinks. What do you say, captain?"

"I think so too, Sir Francis," said the captain; "but that may be only a verbal blunder of the woman; we can't expect propriety in speaking from such people; it would be expecting too much."

"So it would," said Mrs. Fraser.

"I have left Bath for two reasons, sir," said the woman; "one is, I was too unwell to work, and then my rent got into arrears. While I could work, I did pay my way, though living very hard."

"And what was the other reason?"

"Why, sir, I was turned out of my lodging, and having nowhere to go to, and finding nobody would assist me, was compelled to beg."

"What induced you to take this road, my good woman?"

"Because, sir, it will, if I live long enough, carry me to Portsmouth."

"Are you known there?"

"No, sir."

"What induces you to go so far? Speak out and do not be afraid; we have no object in asking you questions, save with the view of assisting you if we find you a worthy object."

"I am going to Portsmouth," replied the poor creature, "in the hope that I may hear from my son, whom I have not seen these many years, and who went to sea about seven years ago."

"You have a son then?"

"Yes, sir, I had one. God knows if I have one now."

The poor woman uttered these words with such sorrowing accents, that all were convinced of the truthfulness of them.

"Speak out and tell us your story. Bring the poor woman some refreshment," said Sir Francis; "her tale may interest us, and give us food for reflection. I am sure one cannot hear the misfortunes of others, without feeling grateful for the luxuries and blessings one enjoys over and above the common lot of mankind."

"That is very true, Sir Francis," said Mrs. Fraser; "and I am sure we ought not to pass those whom we can assist by a trifle, when our means will permit our doing so."

"You are perfectly correct, ma'am."

"Have you no husband?" inquired Mrs. Fraser.

"None, ma'am, none. When I had one, I had a good home over my head. I would not wish for happier or better days to come again."

"What was your husband?"

"A respectable tradesman, who kept a good house and his own servants. We spent such a life as that for nearly fifteen years."

"And how came it to a close?"

"His death, sir, which was brought on by a sudden cold; in a few days he was a corpse. I can never forget that dreadful day. We were living very comfortably and happy. My husband had just at that time entered into some speculations that promised to make a handsome fortune in a few years; and all promised success and happiness, complete and continued."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

"How great a change!" said Miss Stevens.

"Yes, miss, great indeed. My husband hearing some news that caused him to be anxious to ascertain its truth, he left home one wet night, and got drenched through; and where he went to, he was obliged to remain in damp clothes, and not being a strong man, he took a violent cold, and inflammation followed.

"After this he had medical advice; but he soon sank, and was pronounced beyond recovery; he died a very few hours after that, and I was left a widow. A few short hours caused a great change in my circumstances."

"What became of the business?"

"Why, that was carried on for a time; but an accident deprived me of that."

"What was that?"

"I will tell you, sir. My son was about fourteen years of age when his father died, and was just able to carry on the business; and I believe we should have done pretty well, because he was a steady youth, and I could trust him; and he looked after the men employed, and I was not robbed.

"However, a severe misfortune awaited me. I thought the loss of my husband a dreadful misfortune; and I believe it was; but in his case he left one behind who could help to maintain me. His loss I mourned; but it did not produce the same disastrous results that the loss of my son produced."

"How came you to lose him?" inquired the captain.

"Why, sir, I had occasion to have some business transacted at Bristol. I could send no one else, though I could ill spare him; but then I was compelled to send him, and did send him. It was to accommodate some terms of sale; and he only knew the affair. He, therefore, went to Bristol. He was pleased enough, being his first journey; and I could hardly have resisted his importunity, if I had been so inclined.

"He left me, and arrived safely in Britol, and was there a day or two, when, walking about one evening by the water-side, he was seized by a press-gang, and carried out to sea. It was useless for him to complain or to entreat; they would take him, and forced him on board a man-of-war."

"He served his king and country, then?" said the captain. "I honour him, upon my soul; and you are going to learn something of him --- if he be dead or alive?"

"Yes, sir; I know this much, he was alive about two years ago, and expected to reach Portsmouth in a couple of years."

"Well, proceed."

"When I heard my fate --- the detention of my son --- I was thrown on a bed of illness, in which I lay for nearly three months, during which time I was completely robbed, and run into debt; and when I recovered, I had but a few pounds in the world, for an execution had been put into the house, and all was sold.

"Thus was I left without a friend or a soul to comfort me, or any relative upon whom I could call for aid and assistance. I had no right to do so to any one; and after my misfortunes, I found that my former friends deserted me. I found that it was necessary to have the means of purchasing friends, just the same as anything else. I could obtain them for money; but without money I had no friends."

"I was by far too independent to ask for what I felt I was capable of earning. I could live upon little, and I at once left all who had formerly known me, before I attempted anything. I was determined that I would not even ask work at their hands, but get it among strangers.

"Of course this caused me to seek a subsistence in the lowest capacity, and I cared not for it, because it put a still greater barrier between me and my late acquaintances. It was a long time before I obtained any employment, because I was unknown to any one who could recommend me, or who wanted my services.

"This was to be expected; but the first place I obtained work at was through the interest of my landlady; and then I obtained more afterwards, and one led to another, till I obtained a hard-earned but honest living.

"I had a little money by me --- some two or three pounds; in case of being out of work, or in case illness overtook me, then I had something to fly to, the workhouse being a place of all others I most dreaded; sooner than go there I would consent to die by the roadside, and I have put my resolution to the test."

"You lost your work?"

"I fell ill for some months; all my little store of money was gone, and my rent grew in arrear. I became more and more deeply indebted, and what food I obtained was given me by others out of charity; but this could not last long, and a soon as I was able to walk, my landlady asked me for my rent.

"I then told her that I had no money, but that, in a few weeks, if I could find food to enable me to get up my

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

strength, I should then be able to work, and I would then pay her off by degrees, until I was out of debt.

"She knew what I had been, and had some thought that I had money, or if I pleased I could obtain it from my former friends, and expected me to make the attempt; but this I refused, and upon my doing so, she, after the first expressions of astonishment and anger, gave me the alternative of doing so or leaving the house.

"I was turned out, and had no refuge. I wandered about, and knew not where to go, or what to do; indeed, I was houseless and friendless — a wanderer without a penny. I could not now obtain work — I could not do it; and my appearance caused people to shut their doors against me, and I wandered about begging.

"This was the first time I ever took what I had not earned, save what was voluntarily given me when I was ill.

"One evening, as I was creeping about, I heard some men conversing about the different vessels that were out at sea, and one of them named the one in which my son was. I instantly listened, and heard one of them say that she was on her voyage homewards, and would be home in a month.

"I had no sooner heard this than I had some hope.

"I will go,' I said, 'to Portsmouth. I will meet my son, and he will not refuse to support his unfortunate mother. I know his disposition too well to dream of it; and should he be unable to do so, I will beg for him.'

"I slept in Bath that night, and then began to consider how I should get to Portsmouth. It was a long road; many weary miles must be walked over ere I could get there; and as for the means, I must trust to the charity of the passengers. It would not be much more than what I was doing. I could sit on a doorstep and beg; but to walk on the road where there were few or no passengers, I might starve.

"However, I resolved to make the attempt, because I loved my son; and if I could see him I should see an end to my misery.

"I started out about four days ago, and I have got this far; but I have had only bread on the road, and almost despair of being able to reach there; and the charity of people is not enough to support life upon."

"And where have you slept as you came along?"

"Wherever I could, sir; beneath the haystack, or even a hedge."

"Where did you sleep last night?"

"Beneath a haystack about seven miles from this place."

"And is that all you have got through to-day?"

"Yes, sir, every step; and considering my weak state, I consider it good travelling, and shall feel thankful for even that rate of travelling. You do not know how intensely I wish to get to see my son."

"I have no doubt of it, my good woman, and if I can, I will help you on the road. I think yours is a case that deserves some attention. If you choose to remain here all night and rest, you may. You shall have food till you go, and some food shall be placed in your hands before you go."

"Got bless you, sir," said the poor woman, in tears; "you will, indeed, do an act of kindness to me."

"You will stop?"

"And be be grateful to you for your kindness."

"Here, waiter," said Sir Francis.

"Yes, sir," said that worthy, running up.

"Just take this person, and see that she wants for nothing — let her have a bed here and breakfast in the morning, and let me know what the charges are, and I will pay for it — do you hear what I say to you."

"Yes, sir," exclaimed the waiter, who considered the charge as one beneath his dignity; but he was forced to obey, and the woman was desired to follow him, which she did, after thanking Sir Francis Varney for his humanity and generosity. * * * * *

"Upon my word, Sir Francis," said Mrs. Fraser, "you do those things as if they were common occurrences to you."

"Why, madam, I am — and perhaps I ought to abstain from making the confession — one who does not love to come in contact with misery; but then one does not feel justified in turning away from it."

"You must have a deep purse to be able to satisfy all such claimants."

"I cannot do that, if I were inclined, or they were deserving, which many are not, as you no doubt must be well aware."

"Indeed, that is a fact. Very few of the claimants possess the same strength of right to our pity and commiseration. I am certainly struck with the woman's manners, and her artless mode of telling her story."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

"Exactly. It bears the impress of genuineness about it."

"So it does."

"And when that is the case, I cannot resist the sense of my duty, which impels me to aid the distressed. But then I injure no one. I have ample means; and, therefore, others may do less, and yet deserve more credit. I have no heirs to come into my property, and I cannot, therefore, injure any one; if I were to give it all away, I should be entitled to do so."

"You are as good, Sir Francis, as you are courageous and fortunate," said Miss Stevens; "I am sure I have every reason to be thankful to you for two preservations."

"Nay, say no more about the past; you say things at which I ought to blush to hear, for my modesty is greater than you imagine; but, seriously, I take more pleasure in it than most people, and that may be a set-off against my disinterestedness, for I am only laying out my money in pleasure and amusement."

"No, no, that will not pass."

"It will, I hope; but permit me to return and see how they have disposed of this temporary protege of mine."

"Certainly, Sir Francis; don't let us detain you; we shall remain here some time longer, and then we shall leave the shelter of this house."

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Chapter CXL. THE ENTRANCE INTO BATH. -- A NEW SCENE. -- THE HOTEL AND THE LODGINGS. -- THE ATTENTIONS OF SIR FRANCIS VARNEY.

After Sir Francis Varney had left the place where the Frasers were sitting, there was a long silence, in which each of the party appeared to be engaged in meditating deeply upon something or other, and yet each shrunk from expressing them. The first who broke the silence was Captain Fraser, who said, --

"Well, my dear, what do you think of our new acquaintance?"

"I think he is a most amiable man."

"Very courtly," observed his his sister.

"Yes; a sure sign of good breeding -- of good company."

"He is that," said Captain Fraser. "I never met with one in whom dignity, ease, and complete and unceremonious courtesy were so blended."

"And he appears to be a very kind and amiable man."

"But," said Miss Stevens, "he is also a very strange and a very singular man -- a very singular man indeed! I never saw such a man before, or any one approaching him. What a strange complexion!"

"He has a singular complexion, and it strikes me he is well aware of it, and that is the reason why he prefers a country to a town life; and his solitariness, together with his manners, all indicate that his peculiarity in this respect causes him much annoyance."

"I dare say it may," said Captain Fraser.

"I never saw anything so truly terrible!" said Charles.

"Hush! do not speak in that way, Charles; it is ungrateful."

"I hope not; it is merely the truth. I never saw a corpse so pale! Indeed he is just such an one as you might imagine to have started out of a grave with an unwholesome life, and whoever had resuscitated him had forgotten to warm his blood, or to put blood into his veins."

"How very absurd you are, Charles! I am sure Sir Frances Varney deserves better of you than that. You are under a great obligation to him. I feel assured he feels the peculiarity of his complexion -- I mean it has an effect upon his mind; and, if we knew the cause of it, it is possible some disinterested action, terminating in evil to himself, has been the cause of it."

"Well, sister, I do not mean to say that you can admire such a visage; but you ought not to say I am ungrateful, for I am not; and, moreover, I never saw any gentleman whom I liked better -- his conversation is quite superior; but then, gratitude, surely, does not prevent one noticing so glaring a circumstance."

"Certainly not," said Captain Fraser; "though I fancy it would be better to remain silent upon such topics, if we cannot commiserate them."

"I think you are quite right, Fraser," said Mrs. Fraser; "he deserves respect at our hands, and the less that is said in regard to his misfortunes the better."

"I think the evening is getting very cool," said Miss Stevens; "will you remain here any longer? -- I shall return to the house."

"We may as well all go -- especially if you feel chilly."

"I do."

"Then come along; to-morrow we shall be in Bath. Come, sister, you must be quite well to share in the gaieties of the place. You know you said you should have the greatest pleasure there -- you have been anticipating it all along."

"I did," said her sister.

"Well, but you will do so now. Why should your expectations not be fulfilled? I can see no reason why they should not. Bath is a gay place, and a city apparently made solely for the amusement of those who can pay for them."

"I have been so alarmed and terrified, sister."

"I know that, my dear; but you have had now two days' constant change of scene, and lived, I may say, almost

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wholly in the open air, so that you ought not now to be very nervous, sister."

"I might have been worse under other treatment," replied Miss Stevens; "but at the same time you can have no idea of what it is to suffer from such an outrage; you cannot conceive anything like it."

"I dare say not; I am sure it must have been dreadful."

"It must," said the captain; "but we will not say anything about a matter so disagreeable and so inexplicable."

"Suppose we go in."

"With all my heart; we shall be in Bath to-morrow, and you will have nothing to fear; how does your arm feel now?"

"Sore, but much of the inflammation has gone down; that I think will soon be well, and then I shall be able to use it as I used to do; I don't think it will leave any permanent injury of evil behind."

"I am glad of it," said the captain.

They now all returned to the inn, while the whole of the party passed the remainder of the evening in company, retiring at an early hour with the view of rising early for the purpose of getting into Bath in the afternoon, or before the evening set in, at all events. * * * * *

The next morning came, and with it a cloudless sky. They were all in high health and spirits, and sat down to a breakfast that was especially prepared for them.

"What has become of your protege?" said Mrs. Fraser to Sir Francis.

"I have not seen her this morning. I have not risen long, and I have had no time to spare, but intend to see her before I go, and see that she has means to reach Portsmouth in safety."

"Will you send for her here, Sir Francis?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Sir Francis; "I will tell the waiter to inquire if she be ready, and, before she goes, to send her up."

"That will be the best."

This accordingly was done, and in about a quarter of an hour the poor woman came up to the room; there were several alterations for the better in her appearance, and she did not look so careworn and cast down as she had done; she appeared thankful, and refreshed with rest and food.

"You are now ready to start, my good woman?" said Sir Francis.

"I am, sir, thanks to you."

"I wish you all possible success in your mission, and I hope your son may be living, and prove grateful to you, as his mother."

"If living, I am sure he will, sir; and I do not doubt now but I shall be able to meet with him, thanks to your bounty."

"I hope you may. Have they treated you well in the house, below?"

"Yes, very well, sir, and kindly."

"I am glad of it. Have you any food given you to carry you on your road?"

"I have, thank you, sir."

"Then there remains now nothing to be done, but to give you some silver to enable you to provide lodgings, and now and then a lift on the road."

"Thank you, sir," said the unfortunate widow, as she took the silver which Sir Francis held out to her. She could only shed tears of gratitude; and Miss Stevens added some to it from her own pocket.

"You have our best wishes," said Sir Francis Varney. "Go now; we have done all we can for you — good day."

"God bless you," said the woman; "may you never experience misfortune, or ever know the want of even luxuries; you who can give, deserve to have. The poor and unfortunate have few such as you, sir, for benefactors."

"That will do," said Sir Francis. "Good day to you."

"Good day, ladies and gentlemen," said the woman, curtsying low, and then turning round, she left the apartment.

"Poor thing," said Sir Francis, "she has a long journey before her. A temporary aid given to poor people, often lifts them above want, and places them in a decent position in society.

"So it does," said Mrs. Fraser.

"Yet, you see, people disclaim charity, and say private charity is pernicious in its effects. But are there not two

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sides to any picture? An individual might as well say it was pernicious to take medicine because people sometimes poison themselves with some of the ingredients. Besides that, it does good to the state; for it often prevents such a one from coming to the state, and being a burthen upon society at large. I am really of opinion that much temporary distress might by aid be avoided; while, without that aid, it would, in all probability, become permanent."

"There is much wisdom in what you have said, Sir Francis; though you must be aware that it opens a door to much abuse and reliance upon the charity of others, which can scarcely be credible."

"Oh, yes; I expect there is an abuse of everything; but we do not, from that, argue its total cessation."

At that moment the landlord entered the room, saying the carriage was ready, as it had been ordered.

"Then we may as well at once proceed to the carriage, which is waiting, and we are ready to depart."

"And," added Sir Francis, "I am ready too."

They once more left the house they had slept in, and the carriage again bore them onwards towards the city of Bath, which was now only three short stages from them; and where they could arrive at almost any hour they pleased, if they chose rapid travelling; but this they did not, because it deprived them of much of the pleasure of travelling — the views and beauties on the road.

There were many gentlemen's seats on the road, which called forth comment and admiration; as well as many smaller estates and houses, that were often picturesquely situated, as well as lonely.

At length they came within sight of the famed city; and, each moment they neared it, saw fresh evidences of a large and populous place. However, they stopped not; but the closer they came to the town the faster they went, until they were really within the city.

"Here we are in Bath at length," said Sir Francis. "It is a fine city, and much of fashion and talent may be found here."

"I am glad we have arrived here at last," said Captain Fraser.

"And so am I," said Mrs. Fraser; "for I am almost tired of riding every day. I begin to want rest; I want to stop for a time in one place."

"We get fatigued, even with a change," said the captain, "after a time; and yet our lives are a complete round of change."

"Yes; if you consider the character of time."

They now stopped at one of the principal hotels, into which they all entered, and ordered their dinner; and, while the ladies arranged themselves for the occasion, Sir Francis Varney and Charles walked out into the town, where they amused themselves with looking at the different objects which were presented to the gaze of the stranger. In all these things Sir Francis appeared to be well versed — knew what was now, and what had been formerly. * * * * *

Two days had passed by, and there had been but little time lost, so far as the visiting of one part of the city and another was concerned, and they gradually became acquainted with and visited the different places of amusement — at least, so many of them as could be visited by them in the time.

Sir Francis Varney was the chaperon; and, as he obtained attention and consideration wherever he went, he was a valuable aid and assistance, and the family had now got quite used to him, and he to the family.

The peculiarity of his countenance or complexion wore off, his pleasing manners producing an effect that acted as an antidote to that, which was likely to cause some peculiar feeling in all who looked at him; but his courtly manners completely took from any one with whom he came in contact the power and the desire to exhibit any dislike or aversion.

However, there was not one among all those who looked upon him who did not look upon him with various emotions; but they were only such as result from a source that acted upon their feelings and tastes, without producing any deep or permanent emotion in any one.

Great care was taken by Sir Francis in dress, and his display was altogether good, but there was no ostentation; his manners were those of a man who was used to the position and sphere above what he even then moved in.

There was no mistake in the matter at all, and the Frasers were well convinced that he was what he appeared to be; and there was, moreover, an evident partiality for Miss Stevens manifested by him, which had already been more than once remarked by the captain and his lady, who tacitly approved of the honour, though nothing was

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broached on either side.

"Sir Francis appears to be a very gentlemanly man," said the captain.

"Very," said the lady — "very. I never saw one whom I could find so little fault with; indeed, I may say he had none."

"That is a very extensive compliment, at all events," said the captain. "No fault is a thing you can say of but very few people indeed."

"I mean, as far as personal behaviour is concerned. Of course I know nothing more; his demeanour appears perfectly unexceptionable. I am sure I never saw any one at all his equal in that respect."

"Perhaps not. He appears to be very attentive to your sister; indeed, I should say he appears to be very partial."

"I think so too. What do you say to Sir Francis Varney, Mary," inquired Mrs. Fraser, "as a lover, eh?"

"I cannot think of him in such a light," said Miss Stevens.

"And wherefore not?" inquired the captain.

"Because I could not bear the idea. I don't know why — I can't tell you; but I could not do so — it would be against my nature to accept of such a lover. It would much pain me to refuse one who had done so much for me; but I could not accept of him."

"Upon my word you appear to feel strangely upon this matter," said the captain; "but I think you might think twice before you answered thus."

"No; think how much I might, it could make no alteration in my mind; for the more gratefully I think, and the more I endeavour to be, yet the stronger would be my repugnance to have such a man for a lover."

"Dear me, Mary! how can you say so?"

"I do indeed."

"Ah, well! girls will be girls; but he has not done you the distinguished honour to ask you, so you must not refuse in anticipation. You may consider the grapes are sour because they hang so high."

"You ask me a question, to which I have given you the best answer I can upon the moment. Besides, we know nothing of Sir Francis."

"We know enough of him, I think, to speak and think with the utmost gratitude of him. Not that that should make any of us overlook the precautions that are usual on such occasions. And as for your opinion, why, that might be amended by time; and I am sure that what we do know of him is enough to cause us to respect him, and to have confidence in him. He has not sought our acquaintance, and that is one guarantee in his favour."

"So it is."

"But all this is useless. Sir Francis appears very sensitive. He is of retired habits and tastes, and, perhaps, something of that may result from the disadvantage under which he lies, which he may feel severely."

"So he might; and, therefore, I would never, if I could help it, make any personal allusion of any character before him, even though I were speaking of some one else, and it had no reference to him, as he might apply it to himself."

"That is quite right, and just what it ought to be."

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Chapter CLXI. SIR FRANCIS VARNEY IN BATH. -- THE OLD WOMAN AND HER FANCIES. -- THE MURDER IN BATH. -- THE TREASURE.

Sir Francis Varney, when he walked out into the city of Bath, appeared to be lost in deep thought, and walked along as if he saw nothing that was going on around him; he was lost in meditation -- something weighed heavy upon his mind, and he now and then muttered inaudibly to himself.

Whatever might have been his purpose, he merely wandered about without going to any one place, as if he were in the search for an adventure, rather than having any specific and determinate object. But, after much wandering about, he came near the corner of a street, where he saw two persons conversing together. A stray word appeared to rivet his attention, and he paused, and then stepped into the shadow of a doorway and listened.

"You see, Martha, Aunt Matthew is an old miser. She would sooner see all the world at the last gasp, before she would dream of parting with a shilling. I am sure it is much too bad."

"What is too bad?"

"Why, that she, and such as she, should have so much money, and others, who would work hard, should have none, or even the means of procuring it."

"Yes, it is hard; and yet if those who have it did not keep it, there would be no one who would be worth money."

"That is all very well; but the more money circulates, the more hands it gets into; and that, of course, enriches every one who has for a time the possession of it, for they do not part with it unless they have value for it."

"Well, well, that may do very well; but it does not appear to me to be any business of mine that such an one should beg anything of anybody else; but no matter, she has money enough."

"She is single, is she not?"

"Yes," replied the other.

"Then you may, after all, possess all she has."

"I may, but she is fat and forty; she may live for years, and in the meantime I may be a beggar all my life."

"No, no, not so bad as that."

"And what is worse than all, while she is living, she is decreasing the money she has, and it will yearly get less and less, till, if any comes to me, it will be so small a portion of it, that I am sure there will be but little good come of it." "Indeed. If she be such a miser as you speak of, I should have imagined that the property, personal or real, would increase under such management as that."

"It would, if she were not living on the principal."

"On the principal -- what do you mean?"

"That she lives on the principal, as I told you. She has got some strange fancies in her head, and one of them is, that the banks will break, all and every one of them, from one end of the kingdom to the other."

"What a notion."

"Yes, and that is not all; she believes that all banks will break, so all the public securities will be of no use, but only so much waste paper; and real property will all be seized, and there will be I don't know what universal ruin, desolation, and disorganization."

"What does she do?"

"Why, keeps all her cash at home; and then goes to her strong box and takes out her bright gold guineas, which appear in such abundance, that it would seem as if it could never sensibly diminish; and thus she has been going on for a matter of two years or more."

"Upon my word, what can she dream of? If she go on in that manner, I am sure, too, that she will be a beggar."

"That is certain; but she thinks not, and you can't argue her into any other belief whatever that is contrary to this matter. However, I have no favour in her eyes, because I am her relative."

"And why should that be?"

"Because, being her relative, she thinks I may be wishing her dead every day she lives; so, you see, if she go on with this feeling about her, she may take a complete dislike to me, and I should never have a farthing left me,

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even if she died before all was gone, and dissipated."

"Very true. Where do you live?"

"I have been living with my aunt.

"Indeed! And where may that be?" inquired her companion.

"Where — why, don't you know number one hundred and nine, Chapel-street? but I have left there — that is, I shall do so to-night."

"Will you? You are wrong."

"I doubt it, very much — very much indeed."

"What motive can you assert there is, to make it good policy in doing this?"

"She will think I do not care about waiting for her money; and that motive being observed, I am sure it will influence her in my favour."

"Then, you will not go back to-night?"

"No, not at all."

"Well, you know best; but I should. However, I must now leave you, and bid you good day. I must go."

"Good day," said the other, and they quitted the place.

When the two speakers had left the spot, Sir Francis Varney came forth from his hiding-place, and gazed after them for some moments in silence; but when they were no longer in sight, he muttered, —

"Could anything be more fortunate! I am reduced to the last guinea. I have not another pound to pay my way with. Just at a moment, too, when I think I may be successful at last in securing a victim."

He then walked onwards until he came to the neighbourhood of the street he had heard the stranger name, and then he paused and approached the house with some curiosity, but passed by it without stopping.

It was a corner house, and a blank wall ran a short way down the street, being the side of the house, and a small portion of ground called a yard; here the wall was lower — here there was a chance of getting over, and here Sir Francis Varney paused a moment, as if examining the place with care and scrutiny.

He looked all around, and saw no one approaching; he heard no sound, and he saw no face in any window that was within sight. It was, moreover, too dark to be seen, and he, without a moment's hesitation, ran a few paces towards the wall, and by a violent effort succeeded in placing one hand upon the summit, and then the other soon followed.

Sir Francis Varney was a man of great agility and strength, and he was not long in drawing himself up to the top, and then he dropped down.

It was fortunate he dropped heavy, and also fortunate, from that circumstance, he fell upon something soft. The good fortune of the occurrences was dependent upon each other. We say it was fortunate he fell heavy, because he fell upon the old lady's yard-dog, an unamiable cur, and prevented an alarm, for the dog was crushed, and unable to utter a single howl before the animal died.

There was now nothing to do but enter the house if the back door was open; but upon trial this proved not to be the case.

This was a matter that required some consideration; the door was not to be forced, and he hoped to get in by that means, but he was foiled; but yet it was something to have possession of the yard, he could hide here; but yet that increased his danger, for if he remained there, he was liable to a discovery, and that, too, before any attempt had been made upon the coffers of the old woman, and no good effected by him.

What to do he could scarcely tell; but after some thought, he determined to attempt the back windows in the parlour, or room above the ground; and to effect this purpose, he would have to get upon a water-butt, and thence to the railings facing the window of the room, and which appeared to have no shutters.

Having once made up his mind, he set about it at once, and was soon on the top of the water-butt, and made good his hold upon the small balcony, and then he drew himself up.

This was a work of some difficulty, because the balcony was very close to the window, and left him no room to lean over; but yet he succeeded, and found to his great joy that the window was only closed without being fastened; he had only cautiously and noiselessly to lift it up, and he could enter it.

This he did at once, and then stood in the room; but all was dark, and he could not hear a sound throughout the house, for he listened many minutes, lest he might be suddenly intruded on by some one, and then there would be no escape from there, and he would possibly lose all.

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Caution, therefore, was the order of the day, and he gently closed the window, lest the draught might be felt in some of the other parts of the house.

That was very fortunate, for there was every possibility of a discovery resulting from such a course; for any one, feeling a greater than usual draught, would soon inquire into the cause.

Having got thus far, he opened the door and walked into the passage, and then he heard the sound of conversation being carried on in an undertone; he listened at the door, and heard two female voices.

"Betty," said one.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the other.

"Have you shut the shutters, and locked up all the doors?"

"Yes, ma'am.

"The kitchen-door?"

"Yes, ma'am — all right as can be; nobody can get in, I'll warrant."

"You don't say so?"

"Oh, but I do; the dog's out in the yard, too."

"When you have had tea, I'll have him brought in; he mustn't lay out there, poor creature, to spoil his coat, and catch cold. I'm almost thinking I ought not to let him stay out to this hour."

"He's well enough — he'll not hurt — he's got the kennel to sleep in, and he's plenty of straw; there's many a one about these parts as would be glad of such a bed. I've taken care of him."

"Very well, Betty; sit down to tea, and, when it is over, I'll bet you anything that old Martha Bell will be here."

"Lord bless me, ma'am, you don't say so!"

"Yes, I do; but I won't be at home; she and I have fallen out of late, and I'm not inclined to make up the quarrel, for she won't believe the banks will break, and you know they will, Betty."

"To be sure, ma'am, they will — I know very well they will; it's quite certain — as certain as the almanac."

"Yes; and, what's worse, she wanted to borrow ten pounds, and that, you know, will never do at any price; she would break, too, and then I should have loss number one, and no one can tell how soon number two might follow."

"He! he! he!" said Betty; "oh, lawks, I shall split."

"What's the matter now — what are you laughing at, silly?"

"Oh, you are so funny, ma'am; I'm sure you'd make anybody laugh — you do joke so, it makes one laugh."

"Laugh! — what is there funny in losing ten pounds, I should like to know? Nobody would laugh at that, I should imagine; I am sure I should laugh at nothing of that sort. If you were to lose ten shillings, I am sure that I should not laugh at you, nor do I think you would, either."

"No, ma'am, I'm sure you would not, and I am sure I should not; but you do say such things that make me forget all about the money."

"Well, then, go down stairs and fetch some more coals."

"Yes, ma'am," said Betty; and, before Sir Francis Varney had time to slip back and open the door of the other room, the door of the one he was listening at was suddenly opened, and Betty stood before him.

She came out plump, before he had time to step back; and she ran against him before she was aware any one was there; for coming from a room where there was light, she could not see at all in the dark passage.

"Oh, my — "

She had got thus far in her exclamation, when she received a heavy blow from the intruder, which felled her senseless to the floor, and, as quick as thought, he drew his dress sword, and plunged the point through her heart. Not a groan followed — she was dead, and might be said to have died while bereft of sense or motion.

"What is the matter, Betty?" said the woman — her mistress.

No answer was returned, and Varney paused, as if uncertain what to do. He was in some doubt if he should or not go in, or await the woman's approach to where he stood. He had not been seen, or she would have screamed out; and if he went to her she would see him, and have time to alarm people.

He paused, and awaited her coming; but she appeared to defer doing so, and merely said, —

"Betty — Betty, what has ailed you? What can be the matter? You don't mean to say that the tea has got into your head? No, no," she muttered, after a pause; "that can't be the case. She must have been to my medicine bottle, and that has been too strong for her. I shall discharge her. She'll be breaking something or other, and then

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who knows where that will end — begin by breaking a basin, and end by breaking a bank."

So saying, she muttered something unintelligible to Varney, and then began to rise and walk along the room towards the door.

This was a moment of suspense — the door opened suddenly, and then she stood before Varney, who made a rapid thrust with his sword. This would have been as fatal as that which he had dealt Betty, but the mistress was more fortunate, at the moment, for a steel busk was the means of preventing its taking effect.

"Murder! What do you want! Oh, you wretch — I know you now! Depend upon it you shall be hanged! Murder — murder!"

"One word, and you are a corpse," said Varney.

"Mercy — mercy! Will you spare me — will you spare my life?"

"I will."

"Oh, thank you — thank you! I never hurt you, and I don't think you would me. I am very sorry that I made any noise — but you will spare me?"

"Yes, upon one condition."

"On a condition?" said the woman, tremblingly.

"Yes, upon a condition."

"Tell me what it is you require of me, and I will comply."

"Then," said Varney, after a moment's pause, "show me where you keep your money. I must have money, so give me plenty."

"Plenty of money, did you say?"

"Yes, plenty. I want some. You have money I know — gold — gold in quantity."

"Ha, ha, ha! gold! Oh, yes — gold! Ha, ha! how funny!"

"Funny! Is my sword funny?" asked Varney; "because, if you think so, you may have a small portion of it, which you may consider funnier still."

"No, no; but I have no money — none at all, save a little money I have for immediate expenses. I have but little; for nobody now—a—days keeps money in houses, if they can get any at any time."

"But you have plenty of money."

"I haven't any, upon my— —"

"You have. You keep it in the house, you know, because the banks might break, and you would lose all. Now give me some at once, or you are dead as any nail in your house — mark that!"

"Oh, dear! — oh, yes! What would you have of me?"

"Money," said Varney, pressing the point of his sword against her side.

"Oh, mercy! I'll tell you all; but — but you must be satisfied with what I have got, and not leave me a beggar, or kill me because I have no more."

"I will be satisfied with what you have got; but that I know to be much more than I can carry away with me."

"Oh, good lord, you don't know me, or else you would know the reverse of that. A poor lodging—housekeeper is not the person to have much money in the house; but if the truth must be told, I have up stairs my quarter's rent, which I ought to give my landlord. I can give you that, but God knows how he will believe me when I tell him I have lost it."

"You have all your property about you. You have gold in quantities."

"I have not."

"Then take the fruits of your obstinacy," said Varney, in a fury; and, making a savage and sudden lunge at her, he passed his sword through her breast, and with a smothered scream she fell to the earth, where she lay gasping and writhing for several seconds, when a rapid gurgling sound came from her throat, and she died.

"'Tis done;" said Varney to himself; "'tis done, and it would have been as well if I had done it as first; but no matter, 'tis done quietly."

There lay the two bodies upon the flooring, the one in the passage by the door, and the other in the parlour. There was a long pool of black blood, extending from one to the other of the two corpses — they mingled their blood in death, though they held different positions in life. What could be done? there they were, and even Varney could not pick his way without treading in the blood.

He at once entered the apartment, and began to examine the whole place, but he did not find much there — a

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few odd pounds, and yet he turned everything upside down, to use a common phrase; but yet there was nothing of the sort which he hoped for, and expected to find.

"Can I have mistaken the place?" was his first thought.

Upon consideration, he saw reason enough to make his mind easy upon the score of mistakes in that matter. There was the number and the street, and the old woman, and her conversation answered exactly to what he had heard; and after a few moments' consideration, he muttered, --

"It must be right; there are more rooms than one in the house. I will go and search through the rooms, and if I don't find any, I will set the house on fire. Indeed, I think that will be better done, it will prevent the deed taking light, and as little suspicion may be as well incurred as can be."

This was a thing only thought of to be resolved on; but he cast that aside, and proceeded with his search, and having finished that room, he splashed through the blood, and once more stood in the passage.

"And now for the bedrooms," he muttered.

The candle he held was the only one he could obtain, and he was compelled to walk steadily, lest he should lose its aid by going out; however, he soon got up stairs, and walked into the best bedroom, where he again began to search about for the hidden treasure, but found it not.

"Curses upon the stupidity of the old fool, where does she hide her money? I am sure she has it here, and I wanted to get back without delay. I did not want to be away long, and here I have been, I dare say, an hour."

This was true, and he turned things over and about in great haste; but his endeavours had liked to have been useless, as regarded the discovery, only his eye chanced to light upon a panel.

He started up and pulled away a part the bed--curtains, behind which it was partially concealed.

"Ha! ha! what have we here? What I have been wishing to find, no doubt. This is the secret hiding--place of her gold -- the treasury."

However, whatever it might be, it did not appear to be in his power to determine, for he could not open it.

This was, of course, a provoking state of things; and Varney seized hold of each implement that came to his hands, but threw each down again, being unable to effect his object by any means whatever.

He started up suddenly, after making many desperate attempts to break the door open, which, however, were futile, and exclaimed, --

"There are keys to these places, and I am sure the old woman must have them about her, if this place be really the receptacle of her wealth, as I have every reason to believe it is. I will find out, if I can; no doubt, however, I shall find it upon her somewhere -- I'll try."

He immediately went down stairs and found the body of the old woman; it was fast stiffening; but the clothes were all sopping in blood, and he turned her over hastily until he found out the pocket; and from that he drew a bunch of keys. They were all bloody, but he did not hesitate about seizing them.

"These will, no doubt, let me into the secret. I shall find my way in, now, and then the house will no longer hold me."

He turned, and quitted the corpse; and, in going upstairs, he saw for the first time that the stairs all bore the imprint of his own foot; he saw they were stained in blood, and were clear, distinct, and well defined.

"It matters not," he muttered; "fire will, and shall efface that; and, besides, if it did not, what care I?"

He ran up the stairs, and again entered the bedroom, and was once more kneeling before the door of the cupboard. The bunch of keys was composed of many, and he tried one after the other, until, after many trials, he came to one, which was of a peculiar make and shape, and which convinced him he was now in possession of the right key.

"I think I have succeeded, now," he muttered, as he put the key into the lock. It fitted very closely into the lock, and then it slowly turned, and he saw the door open; but it only disclosed another door.

"What is the meaning of this?" muttered Varney; "what, is there another door to be found? I suppose some of these keys will fit this as well."

However, he was not compelled to make the search, for the key of this inner door hung up by one corner, on a little hook, in a niche which had been apparently cut out on purpose.

This was soon opened, and then came rather a startling sight.

In a small cupboard were packed a heap of human bones -- more than bones, for they had yet the flesh dried and sticking to them -- the skull was brown and bare, save here and there remained some hair.

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"What is the meaning of this?" he muttered, angrily — "and have I troubled myself in this manner for only these few bones?"

It was, however, an apparent fact. There was the place, and it was now opened, and the contents were plain enough — bones! — bones! — human bones! There could be no mistake; and Varney rested his hand on his knee, and gazed intently into the cupboard at the bones, and everywhere else.

He was about to rise, when, somehow or other, he was induced to push the bottom shelf — why, he could not tell; but, when he had done so, he found it give downwards. Yes, the whole cupboard went down; he pushed, and pushed, until the roof was no higher than the floor; then, indeed, he saw a sight that caused him to feel a satisfaction.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "ah! this is what I have sought, and I will have it — gold! — gold! — aye, here is gold in heaps, more than I can carry."

He stretched forth his arm, and leaned into the cupboard, and then examined the contents, and felt assured that there were several thousands of pounds; the glittering heap before him was what he wanted, and for which he had remorselessly committed such fearful crimes.

"But I must make haste — I must make haste. I shall lose what I have such a certainty of possessing."

So muttering to himself, he put as much gold into his pockets as he could, and carrying a bag under his arm, he re-locked the cupboard. Having retraced his steps below, he replaced everything; while at the same time he carefully examined his person, to see that there were no traces of his deeds upon him; and then, wrapping himself up in his cloak, he left the house, and proceeded towards his hotel.

Chapter CXLII. THE SCENE AT THE HOTEL. -- THE RELATION OF THE CAUSE OF SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S PALENESS.

When Sir Francis Varney reached his hotel, he hurried to his own apartment, and then he called for his luggage; and when that was brought to him, and he was alone, he unlocked a portmanteau, and placed his gold in it; and then, having taken care to dress himself, he again met the Frasers below, at the evening meal.

"I have been strolling the streets for an odd hour," he said, "and find things pretty much as they used to be; I don't see many alterations worth speaking of."

"And yet they say they are improving daily."

"They may be; but only in parts and places; and it does not alter the general plan of the place, though appearances may be benefitted."

"Exactly; that, I dare say, may be the case; as, indeed, it is most likely to be the fact, especially when we see that, save in the case of entire new streets, all improvements are effected by individual exertions."

"Exactly; but life and happiness is the result of individual exertions," said Sir Francis; "but yet many shrink from prosecuting a scheme of happiness, lest barriers be placed in their path that would be as injurious to all as they are effectual."

"Indeed, that is often the case."

"I have met with many instances of blighted devotion since I have wandered about over the green vales of England."

"I dare say you have met with some adventures?"

"I have, sir. I have met with many that, perhaps, few men would have ventured into, and ever expect to come out alive; but I have not done so without paying dearly for my temerity."

"Indeed; have you incurred much danger?"

"I have, sir."

"But still it must be pleasant to fall back upon the remembrances of the past, and recall scenes and events that possess interest to your mind."

"It is so. I remember well that, some years ago, when I was in the north, that an occurrence took place that has left a lasting memorial upon me, and one I can never forget as long as I live."

"It must have been a serious affair."

"It was a serious affair -- a very serious affair. I was going to Scotland, when, by some accident, the carriage in which I was travelling broke down, and it was unable to proceed, and I took up my abode at the nearest inn; where I determined to remain until the carriage was repaired, which would, it was said, take a couple of days, at the least.

Well, in the evening of the first day, I walked about visiting the different places where I could hope for any pleasure; in doing so, I was wandering slowly down a lane, when I heard voices on before me. The wind blew from them to me, and I heard all they said.

"Then this evening," said one.

"Yes, yes; I consider this the most favorable opportunity than can be taken advantage of."

"Well, then, we had better go at once."

"Yes; now we are on our road there, you see, and we shall be soon there; there will just be light enough to reconnoitre."

"Very well. We can secret ourselves somewhere about the place, where we shall not be discovered, and then we can get into the house at our leisure."

"But we may have to meet with opposition."

"Then, we must resist, too. You don't intend to be taken, I suppose?"

"No, not I."

"What did you intend to do if you were caught?"

"Fight my way out, or, if need be, I can push my knife into the ribs of any one who may be in my way."

"Right. I shall be inclined to do for any one who wants to keep me against my will -- you may reckon upon

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that for a certainty; and if the old man but as much as moves or utters a single cry, I will do for him."

"You don't mean that, do you?"

"I do, and will do it."

"Then I know, and I will do the same. I like to have a pal that will stick by me, and have no nonsense. However, we need not be in a hurry, and just do what is necessary — go to work steadily and determinedly."

"Agreed. We will now go on — strike off to the left here, and we come then to the house. There's only one man servant, but he can be dealt with; and as for the old man himself, he cannot do much."

Then they both proceeded across the fields until they came to some thick wood, when I lost sight of them.

Well, I knew the house they were both going to, and I determined to proceed by another route to the same place.

I followed the lane as far as it would go, and found it led up to the very house which I had heard the men declare their intention of robbing, and possibly of murdering the owners — the inhabitants, I must say, for master or servant alike they would not hesitate in destroying.

I entered the house — the door was open, — after having walked up a broad and stately avenue of linden trees which lined the way up to the hall door. I was for some moments unable to make any one hear, but soon after I heard some one approaching the hall. I paused, therefore, and presently there came an elderly gentleman, with a grave but pleasant countenance, upon whose shoulders fell a profusion of snow-white locks; he was venerable, yet pleasing in the expression of countenance.

He bowed when he saw me, but looked rather surprised.

"I dare say, sir, you appear surprised at my intrusion; but I do not come without a motive."

"I dare say not, sir. But you are welcome; will you walk in?"

"Thank you," I said, "but I have come to put you on your guard against an attempt at robbery, and possibly murder, that is to be made upon your house to-night."

"Indeed, sir. I can hardly believe any one would be so wicked as to do anything of the kind; and yet, I am sure you would not say so if you had not some grounds for such a belief."

"I have," I replied, "and I will relate them."

I then related to him distinctly all that I had overheard in the lane, and the direction the men had taken. He appeared very thoughtful for some moments, and then he said to me, as he led the way up stairs, —

"Will you walk up stairs with me?"

I did as he desired, and followed him up stairs, until he came to a small observatory erected in the top part of the house.

"You say you saw them enter the copse between here and the lane yonder."

"Yes, I did; and I imagine they may be seen if watch is kept in such a place as this; for I am sure they intend to examine the house, as to the means of approaching it, and they expect to find only yourself and a man-servant."

"They would have met but little more, indeed; however, I am fore-warned, and I will take care to be fore-armed."

"That is my object in coming to you; to effect this is all I seek; and now I will bid you good evening, for I have got some distance to walk before I can get back to the hotel where I am staying."

"Are you staying at an hotel?"

"Yes," I replied; and I named the place where I was stopping, when he said, —

"You are welcome, if you are pleased to do so, to remain here; I shall be most happy with your company."

"Thank you," I said; "and frankly I must say, I should like to see the issue of this affair, and will accept of your invitation, though, perhaps, I have accepted of your invitation too readily."

"Not at all — not at all, you are heartily welcome; we will sit up and wait for these fellows; when we have beaten them off, we can retire in security to rest, without fear of disturbance."

"Do you see them?" I inquired, as he was looking through a telescope towards the point I had named.

"No, I do not see them yet," he said; "no, no; and yet I — I think I see something now through a portion of the copse — it's difficult to tell what they are about; if they go much further in that direction, they will be plain enough; there — there they are; I can see them both plainly enough."

"Two of them?" said I.

"Yes," he replied, "I see two; they appear to be looking this way; what are they doing now? Oh, I see, they are

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making for a place of concealment nearer the house. Well, sir, I am much obliged to you — very much, indeed; for you have evidently saved my house from being robbed, and myself from murder — I owe you my life."

"Nay, sir, not so bad as that; the villains might not have been successful enough to have effected an entrance before you were alarmed."

"And if they had, what could I have done? Why, truly, I have fire-arms, but I should have been loth to have used them, and my hesitating might have cost me my life; so I have to thank you for life and property."

"As you please," I said; "but what steps do you intend to take towards your own and your property's preservation?"

"I shall obtain the aid of another, and quietly await their coming; but as I think, from their appearance, they are not mere country people who come about robbing from distress, but men who make a kind of profession of housebreaking, I will have both taken and dealt with according to law."

"It is their deserts," I said, "for a more deliberately planned affair I never yet heard of; and what makes it so very black, is the fact of their early making up their minds to murder any one."

"No doubt," he replied; "but that is an inducement to take them in the fact. I will send for one man, and, what with ourselves, we can secure the villains; we are enough to do that."

"They are desperate," I said.

"But they will yield to numbers," he said."

"No doubt; but there must be a yet greater number; the odds, in my opinion, are not great enough to secure victory. These are desperate men, for they will not be taken, and two to one will not deter them — one, or even two lives may be sacrificed before they are secured, if they do not get off."

"Well, then, you appear to think that we had better obtain more aid?"

"I do," I replied. "At least, a couple of men, if not, three, over the number you first spoke of, if you wish it to be perfectly harmless in its results."

"I should so desire it," he replied.

"Then you'll find that requisite," I answered.

Then I was invited down stairs, and great hospitality shown me by the old gentleman, who was an exceedingly pleasant companion. He was well informed, and a well read man, and was the only inhabitant of that large mansion.

He had been many years a widower, and had but one child, a son, a young man of great promise; he was abroad on a tour, and he was awaiting his return with great anxiety, as he was somewhat longer than he had anticipated.

We sat conversing for some hours. We had a handsome supper, and afterwards some choice wine, and then in came three stout countrymen.

"My friends," he said, "I want you to keep watch and ward to-night in my house, to protect it from robbers."

They agreed to do so, but expressed some surprise at what had occurred, and appeared to believe it hardly possible that any one could have been wicked enough to compass such an object.

However, he told them all I had said, and they were sent below, where they were served with a very good supper, and promised reward, with injunctions not to speak after a certain hour.

This all arranged, I and my host seated before a fire, and with some wine, we passed the time agreeably enough. * * * * *

"The time passes," said my host, as the clock chimed the hours. "I wonder if anybody is about now?"

"I should think," I replied, "they must be about thinking of what they have in contemplation. I am sure it is a quiet hour in this part of the world, and I should imagine that no human being can be asake about here."

"None, I dare say, save ourselves, and our assailants, if they have not altered their minds, and given up their intentions, or altered the night they intended for the attempt. Who can tell? they may have done so."

"I hope not."

"No; it will be very uncomfortable to be in constant dread, never knowing any night I lay down what I may come to before morning; I may lose my life, and never again see my son."

"Yes," I replied; "but had we better not put out the lights?"

"I will order it to be done."

As he spoke, he rang a bell, and when a servant appeared, he said to him, —

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"William, you had better put out all lights, and be quite silent; and if you hear any noise, get out of the way, and remain silent, unless they try to get away and elude us."

"Very well, sir."

"And as soon as you hear them at work, you had better steal up and let me know, as I intend to be present when they are taken into custody, as I have a particular desire to see it done."

"Very well, sir; but you don't know the danger you run. These men are desperate men, and they care not what they do."

"I know all that, William; but hasten down, and see my orders executed."

"Very well, sir," said the servant, who at once left the room.

"These people," said my host, "are not willing that I should run any risk; perhaps they think they will not have so indulgent a master in the next. Perhaps they are right; for I give but little trouble, and my servants are mostly out visiting some of their relatives."

"Indeed. I thought you were somewhat slenderly attended."

"I am. I have two very ill away at this moment, and I have another away on a visit to some relative."

"Indeed; they have an easy life under you."

"It is much the same as not having them at all; and yet, I must say, I have nothing to complain of; my wishes are complied with, and I have all my work done well, and punctually to a minute; and, if they have extra work to do, they never complain, but set about it cheerfully."

At that moment we heard William creeping up the stairs, and my thoughts soon reverted from the contemplation of the calm contentment in which all here appeared to dwell, to the confusion and bustle that was now likely to ensue.

"Hilloa, William!"

"Yes, sir, they are come," said William, in a low voice.

"Where are they getting in at?"

"In at the pantry window, sir. I can hear them unbolting the shutters. They have cut a hole out of it, and they will be clear in in another minute."

"Very good. Now do you all keep together, and, at the appointed signal, rush upon them, and bind them hand and foot."

"It shall be done, sir, as soon as they get into the kitchen."

"Very well. I will come down and watch the operations; but don't let them get back again."

"Oh, we'll take care of that."

"Make haste," he said, "and station some of them under the stairs, so that they cannot escape. They must both be taken."

"And they shall."

"Go one. Will you come down with me," he said, turning to me, "or will you remain here till we have secured them? You, sir, are a stranger, and, perhaps, you had better remain here."

"No, not I," said I. "I will go down with you, by all means, and we will see how these fellows behave themselves under these circumstances. Let me see them. I was the first to discover them, and I hope you will not refuse me permission to be present at a denouement which I have, in some measure, been instrumental in bringing about. I wish to be present."

"Then follow me," said my host; "we shall not be too soon, for several minutes have elapsed."

I waited not a moment, but hurried down stairs, and found that, as I was going down the kitchen stairs, the robbers were well aware of the fact that they were entrapped; and, in their rage, they fought with desperation, and forced their way out of the kitchen, and through the barrier placed below; and, seeing they would effect an escape, I jumped over the rails, and stood between them and the way out.

I had but my sword, and I drew that, and placed myself in a position, threatening destruction to the first who should attempt to pass.

This, however, was disregarded; and the two men rushed at me, hoping to bear me down, but my weapon ran through the first, when a pistol bullet laid me low, and the man rushed over me."

"Good Heavens! and were you shot, Sir Francis?"

"Oh, yes, and was severely injured; and it was some months before I was cured, the bullet having wounded an

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artery."

"That was dangerous."

"Yes, so much so, that two surgeons declared that, had I bled another half-second, I must have been dead — that I must in fact have bled to death, and I should never have recovered; for I had, they thought, scarcely half an ounce of blood in my whole body — scarcely sufficient to cause the heart to beat."

"It was a fearful state — where did you remain?"

"I remained at this gentleman's house the whole of the time; he was very liberal, and very generous; I wanted for nothing. He said that, but for the immediate attention of the surgeons, he thought I must have bled to death; he saw me fall, and one of the men, without waiting for orders to do so, ran for a surgeon, and hence the rapidity with which the medical man was in attendance. And, what was worse, I had, in about two months afterwards, to undergo an operation to have the bullet extracted."

"Good Heavens! you had a severe time of it?"

"I had; and I had nearly lost my life a second time, for I lost a vast quantity of blood again; and, ever since that, I have been of the extraordinary pale complexion which you now see."

"I thought it was natural," said Mrs. Fraser, suddenly; but a look from Mr. Fraser told her she had done wrong.

"No, ma'am, it is not, indeed, natural."

"It was not until the loss of blood occasioned it, I presume?"

"No, captain, it was not; it resulted partly from the dreadful loss of the vital fluid which I sustained, and partly from a most violent virulent typhus, which I took in consequence of my looseness of system — that, I believe, did more than anything else towards bringing me to my present position — for, before, I was considered fair and florid in complexion, but my friends hardly knew me, or professed they did not, and I have not seen them from that day to this."

"Upon my word, Sir Francis Varney, you have had some extraordinary occurrences in your life. I am amazed at them; indeed I could scarcely believe one person, especially a gentleman of your property and standing— —"

"Why, as for that, I can only say that my position and rank here have given me the means to enable me to go through them without any inconvenience, for I have no home or place dedicated to domestic delights; such a life I should be proud and happy to possess, but which I can never accomplish; indeed, I may say, I fear to make the attempt; but, no matter. The prime of life will, in a few years, pass away, and then I shall be past the desire for a home; and yet Varney-hall in the north, is an ancient, palace-like abode, that would grace a duchess."

"Is that your ancestral hall?"

"It is," said Varney, with emotion.

"And now uninhabited?"

"Oh, dear, no. When I determined to lead the life I do, I could not permit the old place to become ruinous and deserted and, therefore, let it, and those who now live there, are well able and willing to keep the place in repair."

"That is fortunate."

"Well, sir, I hardly know what is fortunate or unfortunate as regards myself; but I have one of my old fits of melancholy come over me."

"Nay, you must battle against them, Sir Francis."

"I have ever endeavoured to do so, but I don't know how it is — I cannot, somehow or other, bear up — I feel a terrible depression of spirits."

"I am truly sorry to hear it; but let us hope that the gaieties of Bath will restore you to your wonted serenity."

"I am sure I wish it," said Mrs. Fraser; "but where are we to go to-morrow? — can you tell me that, Sir Francis?"

"To the pump-room in the morning — the library and the assembly in the evening, if you are inclined to do all at once."

"Yes; well, then, suppose we make the attempt; we can but give in if we find it too much exertion, though I am inclined to believe we shall not find it beyond our strength," said Mrs. Fraser.

"Then that is our agreement," said Sir Francis.

"Yes; it is."

Chapter CXLIII. THE SCENE OF THE MURDER. -- THE VISIT TO THE HOUSE. -- THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF THE TREASURE.

The next day came; there was much excitement in the family of the Frasers; each one could see the partiality of Sir Francis Varney for Miss Stevens. She herself could not pretend that it was not so, or that she was unable to see it. It was quite plain and evident, and yet it gave her great pain, because she had an unconquerable aversion to him, who was her benefactor, and to whom she owed so much.

This, however, was a strong and inexplicable feeling in her own mind, and she felt that if death or Sir Francis were her only alternatives, she must choose the former. This was from some feeling, from what source it sprung she could not tell you, that appeared to forbid her permitting the approach of such a lover.

It might have been instinct, or it might have been that she had taken a personal dislike to him on account of his complexion; and yet she could not admit so much even to herself as that, and yet it must have had an origin.

She looked at him much more and more each hour, and more and more did she dislike him. At length she felt so much repugnance to him, that, if it were not for the deep gratitude she owed him, she would fly from and not even endure his society, good as that she was compelled to admit really was.

When he offered her his arm in their walk to the assembly-rooms and the pump-room, they were much pleased with the appearance of everything, and with the attentions of Sir Francis, who certainly did all he could to make the party comfortable and amused, he was so well acquainted with every object.

As they returned to the hotel, at which they all remained, they passed the house of the old woman who had been so cruelly murdered the night before. Sir Francis cast a cursory glance at it as they passed, but there was no sign of the door having been opened, and the murder had not yet been discovered; and this arose from the fact that the old woman was an eccentric, and her shutters had remained in that way before; and, therefore, no one took any particular notice of it.

When the party had reached the hotel, Sir Francis said, --

"You will, I presume, attend the ball this evening at the assembly-rooms?"

"We should wish to do so," replied the captain. "Do you intend to go, Sir Francis?"

"I will, captain. It is now some time since I went to such a place, and I think the change will be so great and agreeable, that I will go."

"Then we shall have the advantage of your guidance," said Captain Fraser; "and I hope we shall long have the pleasure of doing so."

"You are very good in saying so, captain; and, if agreeable to yourself and the ladies, I am willing, and shall be happy to bear you company."

"I am sure," replied Mrs. Fraser, "we shall always be happy with Sir Francis Varney's company, and thank him for his condescension -- shall we not, sister?"

"Yes. I am sure I shall be much obliged to Sir Francis for this, as well as many other services he has done us."

"Do not talk in this manner," said Sir Francis, -- "do not speak of the past, Miss Stevens; it is the present I would wish you to think of; at the same time, I desire only to be accepted, because I may not be thought intruding."

"Dear me, Sir Francis, how you talk! Really, I am afraid we have said something to give you displeasure, or my sister, here, has misbehaved herself; if so, I shall really take her to task for so doing."

"You will be acting unjustly if you do. But permit me to leave you for a short time. I have some matters to transact. I expect a remittance of money to this place, for I usually appoint some particular town or city, for I do not consider it safe to carry any great amount of money about me; it gives such temptations to robbery and violence that, travelling as I do, from place to place, I am especially liable to such attempts."

"Certainly, you are."

"Then I will bid you good evening, for the present," said the baronet, and he left the room.

* * * * *

When Sir Francis left the apartment in which he had been with the Frasers, he walked to his own apartment, and taking a large cloak and a small portmanteau he had purchased, he made his way to the very house where he

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had the night before committed such a double murder.

Before he reached there, however, he put the cloak on, and when he approached the house, he found the street entirely deserted; then hastily stepping up, he put the key into the key-hole, and at once opened the door and walked in.

He paused a moment or two, and then went down the passage a few feet, until he came to the body, for which he felt with his foot.

"Ah!" he muttered; "I see all is right — quite right; here is the body — nobody has been here to disturb it."

He took out materials for obtaining a light, and then he pushed past, and walked up stairs, until he came to the bed-room, where he again opened the strange receptacle of gold and bones; but, as he did so, what was his amazement to find a small packet of paper lying down, but all the gold gone!

He started up in an instant, and laid his hand upon his sword, but at the same time he appeared rivetted to the spot, and paused in this attitude for more than a minute.

Then, recovering himself, he gazed round slowly and carefully from side to side, as if to assure himself he was not trapped. But hearing no sound — nothing stirring from any quarter whatever, he began to think there might be some mistake in his vision.

"Surely — surely," he muttered, "no one could have come in, and, seeing the bodies, possessed themselves of the money, and then walked out. They would surely have given the alarm; besides, any one who had entered would never have gone further than the bodies.

"It is impossible," he muttered, and he again stooped down to examine the cupboard from which the treasure appeared to be abstracted. But there was nothing to be seen, save the bare boards; no signs of the treasure remained. This was a strange and mysterious disappearance of what could not have gone without human means.

"How did they get at it?" he muttered; "the place was locked, and in the same order as I left it; there is no getting into such a place without unlocking or forcing open the cupboard, or, I may say, chest, for this is a strong place; it is not broken open, and I have the key."

Varney paused for several moments, and then he picked up some paper, which was folded up, and seeing it was written upon, he thrust it into his pocket, and again looked into the treasure coffer, but all was gone.

"D — n!" muttered Varney, furiously stamping his foot, as if at that moment only he had become perfectly aware of his disappointment. "What can be the meaning of this? But this is no place for me; some one has been here, and the murder is known. I must quit it — eh?"

At that moment there came such a peal at the door with the knocker, that made the house appear as if it were a pandemonium of noises and echoes, which followed the first stunning sounds that filled the place.

Varney started and listened.

"Ah," he said, "they have tracked me here. What can that mean? Have they, indeed, laid a trap for me? Do they think I am caught? But, no — no, I am too fast; they know me not, nor can any one have traced me here, for they know not where I came from, and — but there, it is useless speculating; they may have laid a trap to catch whom they could, or they — ah, they have seen the light, and the house being shut all day, they now want to see if anything is the matter; but I'll warrant all is safe and clear; there is nothing known, and all I have to do, is to get away."

That was very true; all Sir Francis had to do was to get away; but it was somewhat more difficult to perform than he had any notion; for, as he came out into the landing, he found there was an unexpected obstacle in his path. As soon as he attempted to descend to the back parlour for the purpose of getting out of the back window, he found the door had been burst open by the impatience of the mob who stood below, and the door not being very strong, the shoulders of those who were nearest were sufficient to force it open.

In a moment the passage was filled with the crowd, the foremost of whom tumbled over the body, and were up in a moment.

"Good God!" exclaimed one, "here is somebody lying down in the passage."

"It is a corpse," said another.

"The woman's murdered," said another, "Get a light — get a light, and let us see what is the matter. Here is a dead body — a light — get a light, can't some of you?"

"Well, I suppose we can; but what of it? I expect it can't be done without giving anybody time to do it in; if you think it can, you had better do it yourself, and perhaps you'll begin now."

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However, there was a light produced, and that put an end to the altercation, and silence was immediately restored, when they saw the congealed blood, and the body lying in it; and then one, on pushing his way into the parlour, exclaimed, --

"And here's the old woman, she's dead and cold."

"She's murdered!"

"Yes, there's no doubt about that, poor creatures; and no one at hand to lend them any assistance. What a horrible affair!"

"Yes, horrible; but who's done it? There are rooms up stairs; they had better be searched; let's go up at once."

"Aye -- aye."

Sir Francis waited not a moment more; he had heard enough to convince him his only chance was to escape while he could, for if they once seized him under such circumstances, he would not be able to escape again, and he immediately rushed to the back window; but there was no balcony there; he could not get out there, so came to the landing, and just reached the short steps that led to the roof, and there, had scarcely got the trap-door unbolted, when he heard a voice say, --

"Up stairs, lad -- up stairs. I hear somebody there trying to get out -- up stairs, lads, and follow him -- up stairs."

There was a shout, and then all rushed up stairs, and Varney had scarcely got into the loft, when some one called out, --

"I see his legs -- he's got into the loft. Up the steps."

"Hurrah! hurrah! up the steps, my boys; follow me," said one man, as he got on the landing, and ran to seize the ladder; but Varney saw the necessity of preventing immediate and hot pursuit, lest he should be recognised and followed to the hotel, when that would be death to his hopes.

Just as the man had reached the ladder, Varney lifted it off the hooks upon which it hung, and flung it back against the man, who fell back, and he, with the fallen ladder, created a dreadful confusion amongst those who were coming up stairs, many being knocked down, and the remainder retreated, thinking that at least there were a battalion of murderers.

This gave Varney time to get to the roof, and he then crept along several house-tops, without being discovered, though he could hear the shouts and hum of the mob, as they gathered round the house he had left.

Then how to get out of his present position was a question he was not well able to tell. He must let himself out through some of the houses, and to do that without raising a hue-and-cry, was a question he was not able to solve. Once or twice he thought of letting himself down from the outside; but this he gave up as being impossible, for destruction to himself would be the instant result.

"I must get into one of these houses, and remain concealed," he thought, "till the dead of the night, and then I could get through the house without any trouble, or fear of detection -- but then the Frasers. I must not disappoint them."

This last consideration appeared to determine him, for he immediately crawled to one house that appeared to be the best calculated for his purpose, and he at once entered it by means of a small window that belonged to an attic. In this room was to be seen only a bed, and a few chairs, and a table.

All was silent, no one was moving; he stepped up to the bed, but was somewhat startled to find it occupied by some odd-looking human form, wrapped up in a curious and uninviting manner.

"Ah!" thought Varney, "I didn't think to have found any one in possession of this place so early; but they sleep, and that is enough."

He had scarce said so, when a voice said,

"Nurse, nurse -- confound you, why don't you bring my posset? Do you hear, cuss you? here have I been kept here for two hours without my supper, and what you gave me last night had no rum in it. How's a man to get well, and kept upon short allowance? I tell you it cannot be done, not at any price. Will you bring me my grog posset, or won't you? You inhuman wretch, to keep an old sailor upon short allowance of grog and won't give him any except in the shape of a posset!"

This was pathetic, but Varney paid no attention to it, and gently glided out of the room. When he quitted the apartment, he descended the stairs, and then he came to the passage or hall, when he was met by a stout female.

"Whom do you want?" exclaimed the fat female.

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"Madam," said Varney, "are you aware of the calamity that has befallen you?"

"No, sir. What — what is it?"

"The lunatic in the top room has in a fit of malignity set the upper part of your house in flames. You had better take care of yourself."

"Oh, my God! the house is on fire!" said the fat woman. "Oh, mercy, mercy! Fire! fire! fire! The house is a fire."

Varney turned round and opened the door, just as several people were rushing out of their rooms at hearing these alarming exclamations.

"That will do," muttered Varney, as he closed the door behind him, and then walked hastily towards the hotel, to which, however, he did not go quite straight; he went a little on one side to avoid meeting the crowd, as being an unpleasant mass of human creatures which are singularly unpleasant to meet with, leaving them to secure themselves and find the murderer, if they were able to do so.

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Chapter CXLIV. THE ASSEMBLY. -- SIR FRANCIS'S FIRST OVERTURES TO MARY STEVENS. -- THE BREAKFAST SCENE. -- AND THE HONOUR DECLINED.

Sir Francis Varney, as soon as he reached his hotel, changed his habiliments, and sought the Frasers, whom he found ready for the assembly, and somewhat fearful he was not coming; but he easily excused himself on the score of illness, and then they persuaded him to remain at their abode, and they would all do so too; but at the same time Sir Francis insisted that his indisposition was but temporary, and he would rather visit the place, as it was a ball night.

Thus persuaded, they agreed, and the five of them proceeded to the assembly rooms, where they amused themselves as fashionable people usually do. They danced, and were highly delighted with the place, which was certainly of a very superior description, contained the very elite of the Bath visitors, and appealed to advantage.

The wealth and beauty to be found in the room would have caused many a heart to bound with rapture, whether it was the miser's or the lover's; for both could there find that which gladdened them most, gold and beauty -- wealth and youth; each could gloat his eyes on that he held dearest.

"Did you ever witness a scene like this?" said Sir Francis Varney, as he led Miss Stevens to a seat, and handed her refreshments. "Did you ever behold one in which was collected so much beauty and youth?"

"There are many happy faces," said Mary Stevens.

"And hearts, too, I hope," said Varney.

"I hope so, too," replied Mary.

"There are several here who have never been to a ball before; 'tis their debut in life, and a fine and lovely commencement it is; and if all their future years should be such a round of pleasure and gaiety as this, they needs must be happy."

"I am sure they must. People here seem to wish to make each other happy."

"And if they strive in heart, they must succeed in doing so, and in making themselves happy too."

"No doubt they do."

"And you, Miss Stevens, would you not make yourself happy when you make others happy?" inquired Sir Francis Varney.

"I certainly do feel happy when I am an instrument in the hands of another doing good, and seeing it really gives others happiness."

"That is one of the noblest ends of life."

"And one which you, Sir Francis, have pursued to some purpose. You ought to be happy, if any man can claim happiness."

"I am, in one respect; but when there is a great void in life, which has to be filled -- when that void is in the affections, can it be surprising that sorrow and grief are there?"

"I cannot give you an answer, because I have no knowledge of such an existence; had I, it would be otherwise; but I cannot say yea, or nay."

"Well," said Sir Francis, "it is so; that void is in my heart; and, before I saw you, I felt it not; but now," he paused, "but now I feel it -- feel it deeply, and I shall ever do so unless -- but I hardly dare say more -- my heart will never again know sorrow, and never again feel tranquil. Wants and wishes have sprung up which, until now, have never presented themselves in the shape of possibilities, much less probabilities, and which now are realities."

"This is a strange conversation, Sir Francis."

"It is, Miss Stevens, and I feel it to be so; but, unfortunately, I have a certain difficulty to overcome, which, perhaps, accident, more than courage, will enable me to break through. But, to speak plainly, before I saw you, the whole world was alike to me; I cared not for one more than another; but, now the world has new charms, I have new hopes and wishes. God knows if they are to be dissipated, like the morning mist before the glories of the rising sun. Love has made sad havoc in my heart; and to love and despair is the bitterest lot humanity can fall into. Man can bear all that adverse fate may entail upon him; but that saps at the foundation of the superstructure, our

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love of life, without which, society could not hold together; and, with disappointed love, there is no love of existence."

"Indeed, Sir Francis, I regret to hear it."

"Will you prevent it?"

"I cannot now answer you any such question, if I were inclined to do so — I have not the power. See, Sir Francis, there is another set."

"Will you dance?"

"No; I do not think I will dance any more to-night; but I shall be glad to rejoin my sister and brother."

"I will lead you to them, with pleasure; but will you allow me to name this matter to Captain Fraser?"

"I have no right to dictate to you, Sir Francis," said Mary, with evident embarrassment, "much less would I do so, or endeavour to do so to one to whom I owe so much; and yet I fear it will be fruitless."

"There, yonder, are your friends."

As Sir Francis spoke, he pointed to another end of the room, to which he was leading her, and which was occupied by many of the most fashionable and beautiful; they also had to pass down a lane of fashionables who were occupying seats, having been fatigued by dancing — many not having danced at all, but come to keep watchful and Argus eyes upon the sons and daughters whom they brought with them.

These, at least, noticed them — all eyes were fixed upon them, and Sir Francis, certainly with an air of triumph, led the beautiful Mary Stevens towards her friends, who were gazing at them with attention.

Mary thought herself somewhat awkwardly situated, and knew not how to release herself; and also felt that any attempt of the kind would really be as ungracious as it would be ungrateful, and so resigned herself.

A few yards more, and then she was once again in the company of her friends, but not released from Sir Francis, for he seated himself by her side with the ease of one who was well accustomed to their society, and of those around him.

"Well, Sir Francis," said Mrs. Fraser, "you have not been unnoticed in the ball-room. You have created quite a sensation; your dancing is superior, and your tall figure has set you off."

"You mistake, Mrs. Fraser; the object of such general attention was no other than your beautiful sister — my fair partner."

"Don't make her vain."

"That, indeed, would be a misfortune; but she has such an excellent capacity of mind, that she runs no danger of such a misfortune; but even were it not so, there would be much excuse."

"You are flattering, Sir Francis."

"Not I, I assure you. How do you find yourself?"

"I am getting fatigued. My recent journeys must plead an excuse for my weariness at such a time and in such a place as this."

"I am not surprised at this, considering how you have been riding about for many days past. Would you choose to retire to-night, and remain later on another occasion?"

"I think," said Captain Fraser, "it may be as well. What do you say, my dear?"

"I am quite willing."

"And so am I," said Mary. "Indeed I would much sooner we left early — if midnight can be called early."

"It is much past that hour now."

"Then I think we are decided upon going."

"Very well," said Sir Francis; "then I will obtain a carriage for our use, and then we shall retire to our homes."

"If you please, Sir Francis."

Varney then rose, and went out for the purpose of procuring what was wanted, and, by the aid of a little silver, he soon obtained what he desired, and then returned to inform his friends of the success of his mission.

They then left the ball-room, and proceeded at once to enter the carriage, which was so placed that they could at once enter without any inconvenience; and they soon gained their hotel, and, after a slight repast, they separated. * * * * *

It was late next morning when Sir Francis Varney entered the room in which he usually took breakfast with the Frasers; but, though late, he only met Captain Fraser.

"I am afraid, Captain Fraser," said Varney, "I have kept you all. Perhaps the ladies are gone out?"

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"No, no; they have not yet come down. Indeed, had you been in five minutes earlier than this, you would not have found me here."

"Well, I know not the reason, but I slept well myself. To be sure," said Sir Francis, "I did not fall readily to sleep, and that may account for it."

"Indeed! and do you not sleep sound?"

"Usually — I may say, generally; but sometimes some reflections keep the mind actively employed against one's own wishes."

"They do so, Sir Francis. I have myself found that to be the case; but I am sorry my female folks do not come down."

"Nay, nay, Captain Fraser, do no wish that on my account. I am rather pleased they are not down than otherwise."

"Indeed, Sir Francis!"

"Yes," replied Sir Francis, "as it leaves me an opportunity of saying a few words to you, Captain Fraser, upon a subject that concerns myself nearly and deeply."

"You amaze me, Sir Francis."

"I had hoped you might have had some guess at it, Captain Fraser, as it would have helped me through my task; for my heart almost fails me when I think of the possibility of want of success — my want of nerve is not habitual."

"I can depose to so much, Sir Francis; you showed courage, and nerve, where courage and nerve were most wanted."

"Ah, well, Captain Fraser, If I had been brought up to your noble profession, I should have been better able to make an impression; but I will do my best; but the subject is a grave one, as it relates to my feelings toward your sister-in-law, Miss Mary Stevens."

"Indeed, Sir Francis!"

"Yes, Captain Fraser. I, who have passed through so many ordeals of beauty, have at last been compelled to bow before the shrine of beauty. I am a devoted and humble admirer of Miss Stevens's charms and virtues."

"Well, Sir Francis?"

"I now beg your permission to visit her, and be accepted in your family in the character of one who ardently wishes and desires to become a member of it by means of an union between myself and that young lady."

"Personally, Sir Francis, I have the greatest pleasure in hearing you say so much."

"Then I am likely to be fortunate."

"So far as my approbation, and my consent are concerned, Sir Francis, you certainly are successful; but, according to the vulgar proverb, as one swallow makes no summer, so one individual's consent is not decisive where two are required to concur."

"Certainly, Captain Fraser. I was not wishing to put the young lady aside; but having your consent, I may go on to endeavour to obtain the happiness I so much look forward to — but I may count upon your good offices?"

"You may, most certainly."

"And your amiable lady?"

"Yes, I think I may say she will unite with me in using all due means of aiding you in your wishes — but here she is."

At that moment, Mrs. Fraser entered the apartment, and advancing to Sir Francis, offering him her hand and saying, —

"Sir Francis, how do you do this morning? I am afraid I have kept you — ah, I see you are alone with Captain Fraser — where is my sister?"

"Mary has not yet come down," said Fraser.

"Ah, we are both late, I think."

"I am, madam; but you have come at a right moment."

"Have I? Why do you reckon it so?"

"Because I was just at that moment speaking of you, and here you are; so that I can speak to you, which is much better."

"Well, so it is — but what is it about?"

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"You amiable and lovely sister."

"Ah, that is what you men always say — it is just what Captain Fraser said to me."

"Then may I hope for a like success?"

"I don't understand," said Mrs. Fraser, doubtfully."

"Why, I was saying to Captain Fraser, if he could obtain your aid in my behalf in an attack upon your sister's heart. I have been unable to hold out any longer — I am deeply and desperately in love."

"Well, that is a very dangerous disorder, and I must see what Mary can do to console you in your affliction."

"You will indeed deserve my best thanks if you will do so; and, should success crown our efforts, how deep a debt of gratitude will mine be to you."

"How much are we not yours already?"

"But my whole happiness will be through your efforts."

"Oh, no, no; remember, you said but just now it was my sister you meant to wed, and not me."

"Good God! how could you imagine I had any such profane thought?"

"Ha! ha! Sir Francis, I must see what I can do with Mary; but, she comes — another of the *dramatis personae*."

Mary Stevens at that moment entered the room, and felt most abashed at finding all eyes rivetted upon her without speaking, and she advanced towards the fire, having made an inclination to Sir Francis, saying, as she came down, —

"I fear I have been the means of keeping you waiting. I am sorry you did so; but I was really not aware of the hour."

"Nor were we," said Mrs. Fraser; "and it appears we have all been late, save Sir Francis, who, like a true knight, has been at his post, I don't know how long before I came down myself."

"Nay, don't you listen to any charges, Miss Stevens. I have been here but a very short time, though I ought to have been here earlier."

"It is fortunate then you did, Sir Francis, and I am relieved of the charge of detaining breakfast to an unusual hour."

"It matters but little when it is had, so long as it is to be had when it is wanted. What say you, Sir Francis?"

"I believe that the grand object of all our wishes and wants, is to have what we want when we want it. An eastern potentate could not be better served, or more powerful, or richer, than to be able to say so much."

"You are his equal."

"I am in some things certainly," replied Sir Francis; "but I want an empress, and thus, you see, I am dethroned and rendered powerless by a few words."

"You can obtain even that."

"Not exactly; for she whom I might choose might refuse to become mine; then, I am a weary wanderer upon earth's surface — I am no longer one among men; but a mere existence, moving about without filling any allotted position."

"This is very doleful, Sir Francis," said Mary; "if you say much more, you will spoil your appetite for breakfast."

"Mary, that is a cruel cut, you did not mean it, I dare say; but it is a sufficient rebuke. I must come to plain speaking, and at once hope you recollect the subject upon which I spoke to you in the ballroom last night."

"I do, Sir Francis; it would be affectation to say I did not."

"Well, I have sought Captain and Mrs. Fraser's permission to endeavour to win those smiles and good wishes, that I so much desire should be mine."

"You can never deserve less than good wishes from me," said Mary Stevens; "you cannot have less, I am too deeply indebted— —"

"There, now, pray permit me to interrupt you. I must not hear any more of that; I did my duty on that occasion— —"

"Occasions!"

"Well, occasions; and I hope no gentleman, having the power, would have done otherwise; and if so, I have only done what others would have done under the same circumstances — a very ordinary act indeed."

"You are making less of it than it deserves, were it only for our sakes."

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"I see you won't entertain my wishes seriously; but, recollect, what is sport to you is death to me — the affections of a blighted heart cannot weigh lightly when the evil is consummated."

"Do not think, Sir Francis, I wish to evade or to slight any wishes you may form; as far as I am concerned, they are a great honour to me; but I am yet too young, and averse to anything of the kind yet to feel justified in seriously entertaining such matters as those you allude to."

"That, indeed, must be a mistake; you are not too young. Let me hope that you will not refuse to allow me the satisfaction and pleasure of your company; that would indeed be a greater misfortune than could otherwise happen to me to be deprived suddenly of that, I assure you."

"Certainly I cannot feel otherwise than gratitude to you, Sir Francis, and derive that pleasure in your society which others feel, and which all your friends must experience; but we will say no more upon this subject, except that I have given as serious and positive an answer as I can."

There were many other observations made during breakfast—time to much the same effect, but it is unnecessary to record them, and the breakfast passed off as pleasantly as possible, under the circumstances.

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Chapter CXLV. THE TWO SISTERS. -- MARY STEVENS'S DISLIKE OF SIR FRANCIS VARNEY. -- AN USELESS SUIT. -- DISUNION.

There was much stir in Bath next day on account of the murder that had occurred, and everybody spoke of it. The papers were filled with it, and it was thought to have been the most barbarous murder that had ever been committed, and most active exertions were being made to discover the perpetrators of this horrid deed. All sorts of conjectures were being made as to who the murderer might be, and his object in becoming one. Gold, of course, was assigned as that.

There was something terrible in the fact that this should have occurred just as the Frasers had arrived in Bath -- it was startling, they thought, though they could of course have no connexion with it whatever.

While the examinations were being proceeded with, Sir Francis Varney appeared out in the streets as seldom as possible; not that he had any fear of recognition, for that was impossible; but, at the same time, he would not run unnecessary risk, while so much was to be won.

The days passed, and many very pleasant hours were spent, and the gaieties of Bath were enjoyed to their fullest; while Sir Francis was their great friend everywhere, for, somehow or other, Sir Francis obtained the precedence go where he would, and they shared it with him.

He pressed his suit with much ardour, and Mary Stevens appeared each day less and less inclined to accept of Sir Francis Varney for a lover. She felt a greater and greater repugnance to Sir Francis, who, however, pressed her more hardly and more assiduously than ever.

However, Captain Fraser and his lady were sensible of the advantages of such a match to themselves and to Mary, for they could not believe that one so courteous and brave could do otherwise than make any lady happy; the first objection would wear away in the person of such a man as Varney; they therefore espoused his cause warmly when they found that Mary was averse to the match.

"What can be your objection, Mary?" inquired Mrs. Fraser.

"I cannot tell."

"Surely it cannot be an insurmountable objection," said Captain Fraser, "since you do not know what it consists of. You cannot have a very definite idea; and possibly a little explanation may set the matter to rights."

"I know well enough what it means."

"Do you, dear? Why not tell us?"

"I will. It consists of a strong dislike to Sir Francis. I cannot tell you why; but it is a very strong and yet distinct feeling."

"What can it arise from?"

"That I cannot explain."

"If you could, we should be able to come to some conclusion respecting it; but at present it appears like a blind, causeless antipathy, and, against one so well calculated to make any feamle happy as Sir Francis Varney, is so extraordinary that it really exceeds belief. I cannot express my regret and astonishment."

"I cannot understand it."

"I am sorry for it."

"And more like ingratitude, Mary, than I thought you capable of. There are two occasions upon which you stand indebted to him for your life. He risked his own greatly on the last occasion."

"I am truly sorry it should happen so, sister."

"Well, then, Mary, amend the error; for if it were an ordinary affair, common dislike might pass very well; but towards such a man as Sir Francis Varney it is decidedly wrong. Indeed, when I recollect the horrors of that night -- when I remember the flames and smoke, and saw you wrapped up safely from the effects of the fire, while he was exposed to every breath of hot air-- --"

"Hush! I recollect it all; but it makes me shudder."

"Can you, then, regard such a man with cold dislike? Upon my word, I am shocked at your baseness."

"Sister, sister, you are too severe -- too severe."

"Only just, Mary -- only just."

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"More than just. Do not turn persecutor."

"I would not; but this conduct of yours make me feel strongly — very strongly, and I can hardly face Sir Francis Varney and tell him that one who belongs to me can treat him in such a manner."

"Does love always spring from gratitude?"

"It is useless to ask such questions, Mary, or I might retort by asking if such services as his always produced dislike. But Sir Francis is no ordinary man. Suppose you do not love him, which might be explicable; but then you have no other love; you are fancy free, are you not?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, then, you have no motive for dislike, though you might be indifferent. In such a case, I should not have thought it possible that there could have been less than gratitude, and the warmest esteem for his services and his own good qualities; for he has as good qualities as a man can have."

"Yes, sister; but that dreadful night has left such an impression upon my mind, that I cannot, dearest, do what you desire — I mean I cannot love Sir Francis Varney."

"What! not love him because of the remembrance of his services?"

"You quite misunderstood my feelings upon that occasion. I can never feel grateful enough for the rescue from the horrible monster who attacked me while I slept at the inn. I can never forget that moment of horror and terror. I cannot even to this day make out the object of the intruder. It was not robbery, and it could not have been any ordinary attack, for it was not carried on in the usual manner. To seize any one by the arm, and suck the blood from their veins, appears to me to be a proceeding quite unaccountable in the ordinary course of things."

"It was very strange."

"Yes; and, stranger than all, it has given me a perfect horror of man in general. I cannot abide the thought of being married at all; indeed, I won't, and I hope that is enough."

"Upon my word, my good sister," said Captain Fraser, half angry and half jestingly, "you would almost make me believe you were desirous of taking the veil; but you cannot have any reason for taking such a strong antipathy to male creatures. You must know very well that, because you have got a fright in a country inn, that all the abodes of men in the world are not filled with goblins, spirits, and the like, and wicked ogres, who are only waiting to eat up young maidens."

"It was no jesting matter to me."

"I do not say but what it was a frightful reality; but, at the same time, such terrible occurrences as these cannot be supposed to happen every day in one's life; indeed, one in a long life would be a terrible frequency which is never known, and I think you might dismiss the subject from your mind, as an inexplicable event, unpleasant and unprofitable to recall."

"But it has been too terrible and too mysterious for me to ever forget; and, least of all, could I do it in so short a time."

"Well, I do not expect you could forget it immediately; but, at the same time, I cannot see how it could affect your opinion of your preserver. Indeed, it is a strange perversion of intellect, not to say a degree of ingratitude, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand or believe."

"Well, I can say no more," said Mary.

"Tha is very resigned and easy on your part; but what we are to say to Sir Francis Varney I am sure I cannot tell. It appears to me that you have a childish dislike to him — one for which you can allege no reason, and, therefore, improper. I wonder what he, or any impartial person, could think of it, if they had all fully and carefully explained to them."

"I am sure I do not know; but it is usually sufficient, in a case of this kind, to say one cannot love the party, and to escape from what becomes an infliction, or, in time, a persecution."

"But this is not such a case as you would appear to imagine. There is no persecution, and Sir Francis only desires that you will permit him to attempt to obtain your good will."

"But knowing he cannot obtain that — speaking in the light you mean — it becomes a serious annoyance to me to think I should always be attended by a person who, on the score of having done me some services, expects me to listen to his addresses, and to accept him as a lover. It is becoming a slave, indeed, when one must not exercise one's discretion in a matter that so nearly concerns the happiness of my future life."

"You are making mountains out of mole-hills, Mary."

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"I have not taken the same view of this matter that you have," replied Miss Stevens, "and therefore you quarrel with me. I think that a great deal too bad; I did not believe you would have quarrelled with me upon such a subject — one that concerns me so much, too, as this."

"Exactly; it does concern you, and it concerns us also, and that is the reason why we feel warmly upon the subject. Your want of motive is so apparent that it quite concerns us — we are completely staggered. What it can all end in I am sure I cannot tell; but Sir Francis must think us an ungrateful set, or at, least, he must believe you are actuated by the worst and most ungracious caprice, and capable of great ingratitude."

"I am sorry for it; but for all that, I cannot consent to marry Sir Francis Varney. I know not why, but I do."

"You really ought to be ashamed of such an admission, for I am sure he does not deserve such treatment."

"I am compelled to admit that to be true."

"Then why, in the name of Heaven, should you let prejudice surmount reason — and reason that you acknowledge ought to be paramount? You know your folly, and yet you persist in it. Was there ever such folly? Come, Mary, come, you must give up this kind of nonsense; you must act as I have always believed you would; you must meet Sir Francis in a proper spirit, and the result will no doubt be that you will banish all these idle fancies."

"I should be glad to do so, for they make me very unhappy."

"Well, well, they are calculated to do so, and when you have cast them aside, your own happiness and that of your friends will be much increased." * * * * *

There was much stir in Bath on account of the murder, and the papers were filled with terrific descriptions of the scene, which some even went to the trouble and expense of producing sketches of, which, what with being badly drawn, badly copied, blotted, and printed, and being as unlike the original as possible, gave the inhabitants and strangers not a very vivid idea of the place.

When, however, the details were adverted to they were terrible enough; and when Sir Francis Varney entered the apartment in which he usually dined, he found his friends were full of the discussion.

"Have you seen anything of the murder, Sir Francis?"

"No, sir," replied Sir Francis.

"Well, there is a dreadful affair happened. How horrible to think — they might not have been discovered at all, but for the neighbours breaking the doors in."

"What is it all about, captain?"

"Why, two old women were murdered a few nights ago, and they have but just been discovered; the papers are full of it."

"What, the murderers? Well, that was a quick discovery."

"No, no; I mean it was not discovered at all, as it is supposed, till at least four-and-twenty hours after the deed."

"Dear me; how was that?"

"I cannot tell, except the old woman was an eccentric, and her shutters had been closed before for a whole day; but there were no other signs of life about the house the whole day, which alarmed the neighbours much, and they began to take precautions towards the evening to force the door, when a tall, peculiar-looking man was observed entering the house by means of a key."

"They observed that, did they?"

"Yes; he was seen quite plain."

"It will be fortunate, if he should have been the murderer, because they can identify him."

"Undoubtedly they can."

"I am glad of it," said Varney.

"Well; he was seen to go in, and then to go over the house, because there was a light seen to travel up stairs, and stop there some time; and then they knocked for admission, but not being answered, they at once forced open the door, and they all rushed in, but were horrified to find themselves tumbling over the dead bodies of the old woman who kept the house, and her servant."

"Ah! it must have been a startling thing, certainly."

"Well; they stopped a moment or two — as was most probable at such a sight — and then they ran up stairs, believing the murderer was there."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

"And was he there?"

"He must have been so, because they heard him get up to the roof, and they followed, but were baffled, because he threw the ladder down, which caused them some confusion, and during that the murderer contrived to escape."

"Well; it was quite a field of adventure; but it is to be lamented," said Varney, "they were not successful in their endeavours to catch the murderer; but what is the alleged motive for the deed?"

"They say that she had some strange fancies, and that, among others, she had all her money in the house -- her capital, upon which she lived, without any fear of exhausting it. That was known to some one or other, and got whispered about, and it is presumed that for this purpose the poor woman was murdered."

"How horribly barbarous! but ain't there any suspicion upon any one, because it is usually the case?"

"There is, I believe."

"And upon whom does it fall?"

"Upon a relation of her own, who has not been seen for some days, and who had been know to have spoken with impatience at the old woman's life, and the mode in which she spent her money."

"That speaks for itself," said Varney.

"So it does; but they have not taken him yet."

"I hope they will, I am sure; because the whole affair is so truly horrible!"

"So it is. Will you go to the theatre to-night; there is no ball -- we can have an excellent box?"

"What do you say, my dear?" said Captain Fraser to his lady.

"I am willing. Are you agreeable Mary?"

"Yes; I am quite content with your decision."

"Then we are all agreed to the proposal. There will be a celebrated actress from London there, and I hope we shall find the entertainment well worthy of our patronage -- indeed, I have little doubt of it."

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Chapter CXLV. THE EFFECTS OF PERSEVARANCE. -- SIR FRANCIS VARNEY AND MARY STEVENS. -- AN EVENING PARTY AND CONVERSATION.

The evening was spent agreeable enough at the Bath theatre; Sir Francis Varney having taken the greatest pains to ingratiate himself with Mary Stevens so much and so delicately, that she could not but feel ashamed at her antipathy towards him, and certainly did all she could to get the better of it, and succeeded in some measure in doing so.

They all returned home in very good humour with themselves and everything. Captain Fraser and his lady were completely predisposed to look upon Sir Francis Varney as one of the first men in England for rank and breeding; even Mary Stevens was compelled to admit she never saw any one whose demeanour was to be more admired more than his.

The next morning they all assembled at the breakfast-table, and were all full of lively images and thoughts of the preceding evening.

There was much more of cordiality and intimacy than had been felt among them before; for Sir Francis Varney's courtliness gave way, and he became almost as one of the family. Mary looked upon him with something like wonder, to see how agreeable a man could be whom she disliked.

One or two days more passed in this manner; and the dislike of Mary Stevens to Sir Francis, if not less, was at least not so active or violent; but she received him as an old friend.

That much emboldened Sir Francis, who again resolved he would speak to her, and that in the presence of her brother and sister, hoping by such a proceeding he should be able to overcome her dislike or fears by his own efforts, aided by Captain and Mrs. Fraser, who would create a diversion in his favour.

"I wish not," he said, "to be importunate; but, in a matter that concerns one's future hopes and wishes -- one cannot well slumber over them -- I wish to become one of such a family as that into which I find myself so strangely and accidentally introduced, though I fear I have failed to make myself as acceptable as I could wish."

"No one could think Sir Francis Varney otherwise than acceptable," said Captain Fraser; "your services to us alone would be enough to endow us all with the most lively gratitude and admiration, were you only to appear amongst us with no other qualification; but you add those which evidently make any gentleman an ornament to the circle he may grace with his acquaintance and friendship."

"You take a favorable view of all that you see, Captain Fraser."

"No, no; I merely speak what I think upon a subject which I have had, I may say, some experience. I have myself had some dealings in the world; my profession puts me forward, and I may repeat what I said."

"No, no, I will not suffer you to do that; what I wish to do is, to impress, if possible, my fair friend here with favourable sentiments towards myself. I am not as some of the young men of these times, who win by the violence of their suit, which they urge with all the haste of violence to attack and storm the citadel."

"That is a very good plan, Sir Francis; why don't you yourself pursue such a system? It must carry the citadel by assault."

"No, no," said Mary, "you will not do anything of the kind. Was that the way in which you yourself acted? If so, I am sure I pity my sister; for what can she hope for when she was taken in such a violent manner?"

"Oh, no, no; Fraser was the unfortunate victor, who was taken prisoner in the moment of victory."

"Yes, that is the fact; I was taken prisoner; but I have since been appointed governor in the enemy's country."

"Ha! ha! ha! well, that is a fortunate issue to your adventure. I would that mine were as fortunate -- I love, and yet fear to say so."

"Fear never won a fair lady," said Fraser; "so don't be afraid."

"What does my fair enemy say her?"

"I have said so much upon the subject, sir, before, that I was in hopes I should not have had any occasion to say more."

"I am sorry to hear you say so."

"Why, it is a pity to render a matter that is settled uncertain, without the prospect of anything being gained by

it."

"So it is; but I hope that is not the present case, Miss Stevens. My petition, I hope, is not rejected merely because it has suffered so before. I cannot but hope, though despair for ever stare me in the face for it; but perhaps devotion and heartfelt love may make some impression upon you, and soften the rigours of a heart that cannot, I am sure, feel any pleasure in the distress of another."

"No, no, Sir Francis; you only do me justice in saying so much. I can, indeed, feel no pleasure in such things. You may rely upon it, gratitude alone would prompt me to comply with any request you might make at once and cheerfully; but you must admit that this is a question that alters the complexion of other matters, and what might be proper under other circumstances, cannot be expected under this."

"Nor am I so unreasonable as to expect anything of the kind. Now, Miss Stevens, you much mistake Sir Francis Varney if you think him capable of such meanness. I wish you to act from your own unbiassed judgment, and, however painful the result, yet I would in silence put up with your decision. But still I hope you will not act imperatively -- that you will look upon my suit with, at least, not a harsh and averse spirit. Have some compassion upon one who is entirely at your mercy."

"Come, Mary, do not act unkindly."

"I -- I do not know what to say. I -- I cannot give any other answer."

"Nay, I won't hear of such a thing, Mary," said Mrs. Fraser; "now or never. I will not say that you must not be mindful of the past; but you were never ungrateful, that I know. You cannot be otherwise than happy."

"You embarrass me."

"Miss Stevens, let nothing weigh with you, save your own happiness; that is my object, and my own at the same time."

"Say yes, Mary."

"I -- I cannot."

"Will not! What objection? What on earth could you wish for more?"

"Do not press me."

"I should be sorry to do so at such a moment, were it decidedly your desire not to give an answer now; but I do beg you will not let me linger longer than necessary. Indeed, I find I cannot exist in your society and be deprived of the hope that I may call you one day mine own."

"Do, Mary, say yes -- say yes!"

"Will Miss Stevens give me leave to suppose that there may be a time when I may be rewarded for my patience? I will not press you for a plain answer now, but give me some token that I am not to remain unhappy."

"Come, Mary, come -- Sir Francis gives you every indulgence."

But Mary was obstinate some time longer, until Sir Francis, in a transport, pressed her hand, and placed it to his lips; at the same time she suffered her silence to be construed into a consent to his wishes. * * * * *

"Well, Sir Francis," said Captain Fraser, "let me congratulate you in having subdued the enemy, and you, Mary, in having such a conqueror. I protest it was a hard fought battle, and one that I could not tell who would prove triumphant."

"I feel well assured you may congratulate me, Captain Fraser. I congratulate myself, I assure you; therefore you may do so to me."

"I do heartily."

"Thank you; I shall be happy. But what are the tactics for the night?"

"What are we to do?"

"Yes, precisely."

"Oh, suppose we have a nice party among ourselves. We can amuse ourselves, I dare say. I am fatigued myself, and care not to go out to-night. We have all gone out so lately that it will be a change and a rest."

"So it will," said Miss Stevens. "I am really glad that we shall have one night, on which we can retire at early hours."

"Are you willing, Sir Francis, to spend a dull evening?"

"It cannot be dull, at all events, in such company. I shall be happy to remain with you, indeed. I feel that a quiet, happy evening is a thing that would be very acceptable to me, at least; but still I can do as you please."

"Then we'll have a quiet evening among ourselves."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

"Have you heard anything more about the murder that took place the other day?"

"No," replied Sir Francis. "Have you?"

"I have," said Mrs. Fraser.

"What have you heard?" inquired Sir Francis.

"I will tell you," replied Mrs. Fraser. "You recollect that the nephew had been suspected of having murdered the two women, and committed a robbery afterwards."

"Yes, yes; I heard so much."

"Well, they have taken the nephew now, and he has been examined before a police-constable, and will be again examined in another day or two."

"Indeed! they have made quick work of it. How can they suspect he had any hand in the affair?"

"I believe they knew he had been very poor, and had been very impatient for the old woman's death, that he might have it all. Now, such a line of conduct was bad, and has caused persons to suspect him; and, also, the fact, that he has got a quantity of gold about him, for the possession of which he cannot account."

"Ay, that seems bad; but what kind of excuse can he give for the possession of such treasure — he is surely not silent?"

"Oh, dear, no, he is not silent. All he says, however, is, that his aunt gave it him to leave the country with."

"That is strange — very singular."

"It is, and that is why they disbelieve it; besides; he had made no preparations for his departure, that have yet been discovered — besides, his shoes were evidently soiled with human blood, and the footsteps in the passage and on the stairs — at least, some of them, were exactly of the same size."

"That is a strong proof."

"So it is; but there appears to have been an accomplice, for there are other footmarks of a different size, much larger and longer."

"Dear me," said Varney; "didn't you say there were many people who ran up stairs after the man, who got away?"

"Yes; to be sure."

"Well, some of them might have left a foot-print."

"Well, I suppose they might, and yet they must have reasons for saying that these footsteps were those of an accomplice; perhaps they were fresher than the others, or it may be they have a different appearance from the more recent ones."

"It may be so."

"However it may be; it is quite certain that he has done the deed; whether he had any help or not, he, at least, will be punished."

"No doubt he ought to suffer for such a deed; it is that which gives security to the rest of society."

"But it was a dreadful thing. A murder committed by a friend or relation is, I think, more heinous, if possible, than when committed casually, by ordinary murderers, whose sole crimes are murder and robbery."

"To be sure; when any tie that can bind one individual to another is broken, who would have taken precautions against such as those whom we value; but he was ungrateful, and killed his benefactress — for such she had been."

Chapter CXLVIII. THE WEDDING MORNING. -- THE PROGRESS OF JUSTICE, AND THE DISCOVERY OF THE MURDERER. -- THE DISSIPATION OF A SCENE.

The days flew by, and the aspect of affairs insensibly changed. Sir Francis Varney gradually drew over the scene such an appearance of candour and disinterestedness, that the Frasers were delighted with the prospect of such an alliance, and they left no means of propitiating and influencing Miss Stevens in his favour; and they succeeded to a certain extent in stifling all expressions of dissent, and brought her to a state of passive obedience.

She had nothing to allege against Sir Francis but her dislike to him, and even that she felt was weaker, and the more she exerted her mind, the weaker such impressions appeared to be; a convincing proof to her that it was a mere blind, reasonless prejudice which it was her duty to throw off, and she exerted herself to do so.

Thus it was she became passive in the hands of her friends; and Sir Francis Varney had the satisfaction of seeing that he was about to pick up a bride at length. His pleasure knew no bounds, and his eyes glistened in a manner, that once or twice Mary recoiled from him in terror, and she had nearly revived her first feelings against him.

However that might have been, he saw his error, and he conducted himself differently afterwards; for he too well knew the effect it must have upon the artless and beautiful young girl, whose affections he cared not to win, so that he stifled her objections, and obtained her hand -- her heart was not with him an object.

"I think now," said Captain Fraser to Sir Francis, when they were alone -- "I think, now, Sir Francis, that we ought to come to some understanding."

"I shall be but too happy, Captain Fraser, to do so, in every sense of the word, and upon every subject we can have in common."

"Then we shall have no difficulty in this affair."

"I hope not, I assure you."

"Well, then, Sir Francis, you desire to marry into our family?"

"Most unquestionably; my heart and fortune are at the disposal of Miss Stevens. I care for nothing else but her -- fortune, Captain Fraser, is no object to me; I do not care for a single penny piece. I have enough for myself."

"Money is not happiness itself," pursued the captain.

"I believe it -- I feel it."

"And yet Mary is not penniless; she has her dower, though by no means a large one; yet she has one."

"Then let the whole, whatever it may be, be safely, securely made over for her own use, and that of her children."

"It is generous -- very generous of you, Sir Francis; and your generosity much embarrasses me, and I hardly know how to proceed with a little matter which I deem a part of my duty to perform."

"Do not let me be an hindrance to you; I am sure I should regret it much; besides, the more we know of each other, the greater confidence we have in each other, provided our knowledge is of that character that will increase our respect."

"You are quite right, Sir Francis."

"Well, captain, I hope what you are going to say, will not give me cause to feel myself less happy than I am."

"I hope not; I believe not; but what I was about to say is a very ordinary and common occurrence on an occasion like the present."

"Well, let me know all about it, and then the murder will be out."

"Good. We have but little more than personal communication with each other, apart from our respective homes; and we do not know much of each other in the ordinary acceptance of the word. I wish to know something relative to your private affairs."

"I really cannot do so, unless you travel northward with me."

"Indeed -- indeed -- "

"Stop. I can give you corroborative proof; I have none direct about me; but I can do that much; but perhaps it will not do."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

"Quite enough. I am satisfied — if you can give me corroborative proof of what you say, and that without premeditation, it will be still stronger and more valuable."

"If you think so, what do you say to those two letters, Captain Fraser?"

"Two letters."

"The one is from my gamekeeper, and the other is from my bailiff, who has to overlook my property, and advise me of what was being done on the estate, and the state of my financial affairs."

"They will do, sir, I believe."

As Captain Fraser took the two letters, he looked at the post-marks, and saw that they were plain and readable, and the date: they had been correctly described by Sir Francis Varney — they came from the north, and one was a business-like letter from the bailiff, and one quite in keeping from the head gamekeeper, both of whom mentioned many local and petty matters, that fully bore out all that was to be expected from them.

"And do you keep up an establishment of this character, Sir Francis?"

"I do. I can afford it, and I do not like to turn the knaves adrift on the world, who have, ever since they have been born, looked for abundance from the soil that produced them; and I don't think I shall be justified in having the hardness of heart to turn them off."

"You are a kind and good master."

"I wish to be so."

"And when, Sir Francis, do you intend to return there?"

"I am glad you ask the question. I should like to take my bride there to spend the honeymoon. I wish now to leave other objects, and to get back as soon as the ceremony is over. There I should like to take her; it would be a rare and splendid life to lead in the old gothic mansion — as much like a castle as anything I can describe; but an ornamented castle, of course, for I don't mean high walls, and no windows."

"Certainly not."

"But will you assist me in obtaining her consent to a speedy union; and, that effected, we will whirl off for the mansion, and you can follow us at leisure. The union will, I hope and believe, be most happy."

"I hope so. I trust and believe it will."

"In the meantime, any more information or proof you can desire shall be obtained for you. Do not be backward upon this head."

"I am quite satisfied, Sir Francis." * * * * *

Thus Sir Francis Varney had succeeded in hoodwinking Captain Fraser and his wife, and had now entirely subdued all shew of objection, and had so far succeeded as to obtain a quiet and tacit consent to all he desired.

The interview described was reported to Mrs. Fraser and her sister, and was considered liberal and satisfactory, and the marriage was spoken of as likely to be immediate, which brought forth no remark from Mary, and the matter was considered as nearly settled; the day only was to be appointed, and that could not be very distant.

One morning as they were seated at breakfast, and that after the day had been fixed at a greater distance of time than Sir Francis Varney liked, the subject of the murder was again brought up, and Mrs. Fraser said, —

"There is nothing more about the murder now — is there?"

"No," replied Sir Francis; "not that I have heard of. I believe the unfortunate man will be tried one of these days — he stands committed."

"Stop," said Captain Fraser, "here is something in the paper."

"What is in it?"

"Something more about the murder."

"What is it?" inquired Sir Francis. "I am anxious to learn if they have done anything more, for I was sick of it, and wish to know when such a horrible tragedy will end — the sooner it is past and forgotten, the better."

"That is true; for knowing a man is lying waiting for the hour to arrive when he shall die a violent death, is truly terrible."

"So it is. They seem to say there is some clue to another person, of a most remarkable appearance, who escaped through another house, and deceived the inmates by describing a fire that was up stairs."

"Indeed! How strange," said Sir Francis.

"Yes; they say they will not publish more, lest it defeat the ends of justice."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

"Something else sprung up, I suppose?"

"No doubt. But here is something more: the prisoner will be tried in a few days, and, if condemned, executed in a very short time."

"Then I wish that one happy marriage would come off before that time. I am sure Mary will be wretched, and I cannot be so happy as I could wish to be."

"Then postpone it for a few weeks."

"No, no, no; that would never do; hasten it. Besides, we should have to pass through all the wretchedness consequent upon knowing a man -- a murderer, it is true, and perhaps two of them -- that is waiting to die."

"I think myself," said Captain Fraser, "that we might, with advantage, leave Bath before the trial takes place. It would certainly be more comfortable."

"So it would," said Mrs. Fraser; "and, to tell the truth, I begin to get tired of this place, beautiful as it is. In fact, I want to get to your mansion in the north."

"Not more than I do, madam," said Sir Francis. "Will Miss Stevens permit me to persuade her to shorten my period of probation, to escape some of the disagreeables we have mentioned relative to this unhappy affair?" * * *

The wedding morning was arrived. Sir Francis Varney had not been sparing of his ill-gotten gains. He willingly made some handsome presents to Mrs. Fraser and Mary Stevens; jewels were the form he gave them in; and Sir Francis himself took care to display no small degree of ornament, and yet he appeared to be a man, who, though wearing and having the best of all, still wore but little ornament.

But the occasion made the change in his habit. And now the post horses are ready at the door -- ready to bear them northwards. They are at the church. Sir Francis, and Mary Stevens leaning upon his arm, come before the altar, and the friends of the bride were on either side of them. The clergyman was about to read, but asked first, if any knew any causes or impediment, to the marriage.

No answer was returned; when there was some bustle at the other end of the church, and the clergy man paused to ascertain its character.

In a moment more there was a motley group of persons making towards the altar; and foremost among these were two or three peace officers, and after them a woman, dressed in many clothes, which added to her natural obesity.

"Ah, that's him -- that's the wagabone that said my house was on fire when it warn't; that's him as frightened me so, that I'm quite thin through it."

"Shiver my timbers, and they begin to creak a bit now -- d -- n the gout! -- but that's Varney, the vampyre! Who'd a thought he would always be turning up in this way, like an old mop as nobody can use?"

Varney turned to the clergyman, and begged that these mad people might be turned out, and, after the ceremony, he would meet any proper accusation at a proper time and place; but he showed his anger so strongly, that Mary shrank from him; while the two officers demanded him as a prisoner.

The clergyman yielded; and Sir Francis, striking the officer near him down, made a rush at a side door, and escaped.

The fact was, there had been more than one doubt about the murder; and Sir Francis had been followed to the hotel the night of the murder by one of the waiters, who came up behind him. They took his shoes, and found they were bloody; and all things being traced home to him, it was agreed to capture him at home; but he had left for the church, when the officers followed him. Old Admiral Bell, who was gouty, happened to see him pass, and determined to unmask him, which he did.

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Chapter CXLIX. THE MURDER IN THE WOOD DEL NOTTI. -- A NEAPOLITAN SCENE.

There had been a great heat during the day, even for the sunny shore of Naples. Not a cloud had been seen all day, not a breath of air had been stirring; all was golden sunshine -- all was fair; the very sea glittered like molten gold, and the heat was oppressive in the extreme -- so much so that even the Neapolitans themselves stirred not out of doors, but sank listless and sleepy on the couch, fanning themselves, and endeavouring to create an air that would give some slight refreshment.

Even the sea was calm -- the very waves lashed the shore lazily, and appeared to partake of the general weariness that came over all nature -- all things that moved.

There was no soul stirring in the villas that were seen dotted about the environs of Naples, most of them like palaces, surrounded on every side by gardens and fountains, walled in, and secure from the intrusion of a stranger.

There was one of great magnificence adjoining the small wood Del Notti, that reared its stately structure on a slope looking towards the sea, though at a mile or two's distance, but close adjoining the wood.

The gardens were extensive, and abutted on the wood, which was a cool and shady spot at most times, and if such a one were now to be found, it would certainly be found in the wood Del Notti.

The trees grew tall, and spread their branches out until they interlaced each other so completely, that when the foliage was on them the light rarely found its way to the earth, save in a dim and diluted form.

Here there might now and then be found some of those who had been overtaken by the heat of the day, or who from choice preferred the coolness of the woods to the walls of their houses. Here, then, reposing beneath the great trees, might occasionally be found a few individuals who slept in coolness and shade.

Near the wall of the villa where the wood ran were some tall black trees, mostly fir and cedar; there beneath one of the latter lay a tall, gaunt-looking man, who, notwithstanding the weather, was wrapped up in a cloak of large dimensions, and sable colour.

There was something strange in that man's appearance; above all, the cloak which he wore was a thing so much out of place, that none other than himself could or would have worn it. What was his motive none could divine, were it not for the concealment of his person, which seemed likely enough.

His slouched hat was bent over his eyes; his face was scarcely distinguishable between the collar of the cloak and the hat, though he lay on his back motionless, and without heeding aught that neared him.

It was true, there did not exist any reason why he should take any heed, seeing that at that point no one ever came. It was a spot that was not frequented, having a bad name, which usually deters people from trusting themselves in such a place.

However, the stranger lay motionless, and apparently without fear. Perhaps it was the long two-edged sword he wore, that gave him his security; at all events, he lay there in silence, and almost motionless -- quite and entirely so, save the motion in breathing; and his eye now and then turned in a particular direction.

The hours rolled by, and no one approached, till the sun sunk towards the ocean, there to bury himself till another morrow appeared.

The heat of the high noon was past, and the shadows of the trees reduced the light in the wood to a twilight; and the stranger arose and stood beneath the shadow of a tall one, while he appeared to be listening for some sound which he appeared to expect from some particular quarter of the wood.

The hour of noon is some hours past; and with it a gentle sea breeze begins to fan the heated shores, and here and there might be seen some of the inhabitants creeping about in the shady places.

The stranger listened, and from the quarter to which he appeared most to direct his attention, he heard sounds proceed. These were those made by persons walking over the dried leaves and sticks which lay scattered about from the effects of the storms that sometimes visit even these pleasant shores.

"She comes!" he muttered, and his eye glanced round, and he grasped the hilt of his sword. "She comes! but does she come alone?"

He paused, and again listened.

"She comes not alone -- another is with her; but no matter; she shall come. I have the means of security here.

But, above all, I need her."

He paused again, and listened, but quietly drew his sword, which was long and sharp, and stood beneath the tree, while the voices and sounds slowly approached, until they came quite distinct and audible.

"And so," said a man's voice, but in a low key, "the marchese is not well."

"She is quite indisposed."

"I was about to say I could hardly feel it in my heart to regret it."

"And why could you be so unfeeling?"

"Because, by dear Fiametta, had she been well, you would scarce have got away from her this evening, and I should have had but little of your sweet company."

"I admit that; but were you not selfish in desiring it?"

"Yes, I was."

"And are you not ashamed to say so?"

"No, I am not, Fiametta. I can acknowledge anything that concerns myself and you; for I must admit a great deal of selfishness in this matter. I love you tenderly, and that puts all the world beside us. I think nothing of any one save you, and for you I would sacrifice the whole world."

"I am fearful of you."

"And wherefore should you be fearful of me, fair one? Am I not willing and ready to fight and die for you? I would not fear the summons of death this moment, if I knew that I could save you but one hour's pang."

"I hope," said Fiametta, leaning on her lover's arm, "I hope that you will never be called upon for so sad a sacrifice. I am sure I should never know an hour's happiness if I thought there was a possibility of it."

"I do not think there is any possibility of that happening. But, Fiametta, when do you hope for an end to this slavery? Can't you leave the old marchese? — she is anything but kind to you, and would marry you to one of her poor relatives; and unless you marry with her consent, you will never be rewarded for the many listless hours you have passed, night after night, at her bedside."

"But she will reward me when she dies."

"What an age to wait!"

"Surely you cannot grudge her life!"

"I do not, only so long as it is a term of imprisonment for you. If you would leave her, and come back with me, I will make you happy. You shall have a happy home, and form new ties, and new affections."

"I have not got so tired of the old, that it is necessary to change them; but I cannot leave the marchese. She is almost alone — no one goes near her to do her a good office, and I am her only friend."

"And yet she won't give you liberty."

"She says I am too young, and, if you must know all, she says I am too pretty to be trusted in everybody's company."

"I must admit there is much of truth in that, and yet I cannot see its application in this instance, as far as I am concerned."

"No; that is not to be expected from you, you know; but this must be admitted, that she speaks of men in general. Besides, she says, if I have patience to await her death, she will handsomely endow me."

"Upon my word, I think the old woman only wants to lease her life a few years longer, or, I should say, wishes to live forever."

"How can you make that appear?"

"Thus — when you are waiting for people's deaths, you never do succeed in hearing of their dying within any reasonable space. It gives them new life, and the spirit of opposition and obstinacy is created within them, and they won't die."

"For shame."

"Nay, you will find, Fiametta, that we shall both grow grey-headed in waiting for the happy moment when you and I are man and wife. Do not stay, then, any longer, leave here, and come with me; we shall be happy, and defy the world."

"But look what a dowry I shall lose."

"Never mind about that. Such a dowry would not make you young again, nor would it recall many years of past service and attendance upon her. You must know how very precarious such a life must be. It may so happen

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that you may forfeit all you have deserved through some fancy of this old woman. She may take it into her head to insist upon your marrying her poor cousin there. You know, if you were to displease her, she might very easily leave you nothing for your pains."

"I admit all that; but it amounts to nothing, because she has said as much that she would never force me, only she wished me to marry him, as being a worthy man and one who would act justly to me through life."

"Justly through life! What a sound! It sounds but little of love. Justly, indeed! I would I could act no otherwise to others, but to you, Fiametta, I should as soon think of forgetting you as merely acting justly. I love you; I would, at this moment, lay down my life for you."

At that moment they neared the stranger, who was standing silently and motionless, with his sword concealed beneath his cloak, but eagerly watching them, and devouring every word they uttered; and, by degrees, they drew nearer and nearer.

"I am sure it will be wise to wait awhile. I am sure the poor old marchese will not live long. She cannot eat and drink, save with great difficulty. I am sure we shall not have long to wait."

"I am willing to abide by your wishes, Fiametta; but it cannot be well to wait for an age -- it cannot be well to wait till we are old."

"I know that; but-- --"

Fiametta screamed, as her eye fell upon the stranger, who rushed out upon them, with his sword drawn. This gave her male companion time to defend himself, by, in the first instance, jumping aside.

"Mercy! mercy!" screamed Fiametta.

Her lover drew his sword, and put himself upon his defence, saying, as he parried the first thrust of his enemy,

"Villain! what mean you? Is it robbery you would attempt, or murder alone? Will nothing but shedding blood satisfy you?"

The stranger made no reply, but pressed on furiously, and with great strength and skill, for two or three minutes, when Fiametta's lover, by changing his ground, contrived to elude so desperate an assault upon his life.

Fiametta, however, believed her lover was getting the worst of it. She screamed out for help several times, but none came. However, it caused the stranger to press his adversary more quickly, and to hasten his own movements, for he was quite desperate and furious; but this laid him open to the assaults of the other. But, so fierce the attack, and such was the strength exhibited, that Fiametta's lover was compelled to give ground.

"What is your object, villain? -- speak!"

But the stranger spoke not, but furiously threw himself upon him, and endeavoured to beat down his guard, which his great strength and height almost enabled him to do; but as the other gave ground he was obliged to follow him, and then his foot caught against some of the tangled roots that grew out of the earth, and threw him forward; and his adversary, not slow to profit by it, and rid himself of so dangerous an enemy, stepped forward and received him upon the point of his sword.

"A good deliverance," said the lover, drawing his sword out of the body as it fell to the earth -- "a timely deliverance, truly."

He wiped his forehead, for the perspiration streamed down his face; the day was warm, and his exertion great.

"Oh, Jose," exclaimed Fiametta, "what a horrid man!"

"A brigand, I suppose."

"But he said nothing -- he asked nothing."

"No, he meant murder; there is no doubt of it, now, in the world; but I never saw such an ill-looking wretch before."

As Jose spoke, he kicked the hat and cloak off which the brigand wore, and which remained partially on. There was a ghastly wound in his breast where Jose's sword entered and let out the life of the the stranger.

He was very tall, but thin and emaciated; his features remarkable, and he wore some straight, straggling hair, that was disordered, and fell over his forehead and face of more than marble paleness.

"Well, I never met with such an encounter before, and I never met with such an ill-looking villain," said Jose. "Come away, Fiametta; we need not say anything to any one about the affair. I will not come here again, though it may be needless to take the precaution, seeing that none could be brought to match this fellow in villany and ugliness; at least, it is so to my mind. Come away."

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Wiping his sword on the cloak of the fallen man, and sheathing it, he took the hand of Fiametta, and drawing it through his arm, left the spot.

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Chapter CL. A MAIDEN'S MIND DISTURBED. -- AN EASY WAY OF PROMOTING COMFORT OF CONSCIENCE. -- THE MONK.

The spot was deserted, and no soul came near; but the body lay, with its ghastly wound, all sopping in its gore. It was a fitting place for such a scene as this; no sound was heard, and the lazy hours turned slowly over, till the shades of evening came on apace; the light grew dim, and darkness increased; but there the dead body of the tall, remarkable-looking stranger lay, without motion. It was cold and bloodless -- death had long since deprived it of its last spark of animation. * * * * *

Jose and Fiametta quitted the neighbourhood of the deed of darkness as quickly as they could, and it was many minutes before either of them spoke, so filled were their minds with the reflections natural to, and consequent upon, the strange occurrence that had just before fallen upon them.

At length Fiametta broke silence, by saying, --

"Oh, Jose, what a dreadful thing has happened!"

"Truly, it had like to have been a dreadful affair; but it don't matter now, he's settled, I believe."

"Yes; but you have killed a man."

"Truly, my dear Fiametta, I have killed a man, or devil, I don't yet know which; but that man would have killed me if I had not done so."

"Yes, he would; but how dreadful."

"So that being the case, it is, in my opinion, a very good job he is dead; a very good job, indeed; he will be safe where he is."

"But still," said Fiametta, crossing herself, "how dreadful it must be to be slain thus; with all one's sins upon one's head."

"What would have been my fate?"

"As bad, and to me it would have been worse by far; but still it is really dreadful to think that there should be a soul thus sent to heaven without so much as the good offices of a priest."

"He would have killed me without giving me time for repentance. He would have forced me to leave a world in which I have all happiness yet to know; a world which I am by no means prepared to quit."

"Truly no, Jose, nor I; but what a state for this man to be in; he is so much the worse prepared than even you, because his end was bad; now, you had no evil intention."

"None -- none."

"You did not know even that you were in danger from him."

"I did not, Fiametta, else I had never brought you there. I cannot understand what brought him there -- what he wanted, or why it was he made such a desperate attack upon me; my life was aimed at."

"It was, Jose; but have you no private enemy, whom you believe capable of such a deed as this? Surely -- surely it cannot be done, save from some motive."

"That is the thing that most puzzles me; I cannot understand the motive. I know him not; I have no enemy who would hire an assassin; but there let him and his deed lie buried in oblivion."

"He has no burial."

"He deserves none," said Jose.

"But, dear Jose, do you not think we ought to give him one."

"Are we his executors or heirs?"

"God forbid! -- but we saw him die, and not for his sake, but for the sake of human nature, do not let us leave him unburied like a dog. He may not deserve it, but he has answered all his offence."

"Yes, yes; I admit he has been punished -- he paid to the uttermost all he owed me, and I gave him a receipt in full. He will never make another demand upon me; we have quite done with each other, I believe."

"I shall never forget the horrible sight; it will haunt me day and night; I shall not be able to banish the terrible features from my mind. I shall, in truth, pass a sad life; I wish this had never happened."

"Why, so do I, dear Fiametta; but, surely, you do not accuse me of wrong, in having, to save my life, killed this man. I was compelled, forced to do it; it was either his life or mine; and, the truth to tell, I never was in such

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peril, from any single sword, in all my life, and but for the lucky accident that laid him open, I had not been here with you, but where he now is."

"Thank God for you deliverance, Jose; but — but what a revolting thing to remember, that in the wood Del Notti, there lies a corrupting mass of humanity, over which loathsome insects crawl; a thing that had once been a living soul like ourselves; but now, alas! what is he?"

"But, Fiametta, your grief appears misplaced; you mourn this stranger as if he was near and dear to you. Do you know him?"

"Not I," said Fiametta, sorrowfully.

"Then what have you to grieve about, Fiametta? Tell me truly. You have nothing to blame yourself with. I do not feel I have acted wrongly. Say what it is that causes you so much sorrow."

"I grieve to think that the body of that sinful and wicked man lies unburied, and that no masses have been said for the repose of his soul."

"If that be all you require to set your mind at rest — though the villain deserves it not — I will see that he is buried and masses said for him."

"Will you, indeed, Jose?"

"Upon my conscience, I will see your desire executed."

"Well, then, Jose, yonder lives a holy monk. He is a pious and good man, and will, I am sure, do all that is required — watch and pray by the body till midnight, and continue there until the sun shall illumine the wood."

"Be it so, my dear Fiametta — be it so. We will go to the holy man and tell him of our distress, and will reward him; and then I will see you in safety, and return to conduct him to the spot where you know we left the body. I would the villain had come by a less noble death than falling by the sword."

"It will be a danger that will never be forgotten by me," said Fiametta.

"Nor by me," replied Jose. "What that man meant I cannot conceive. But then there can be but one answer to the question — he meant robbery; nothing else could have tempted him to draw his sword upon me."

"But why did he not demand your money at once?"

"Because he might meet with what he has met; and he took me at a disadvantage, and, of course, gave him a better chance of killing me, and running less danger in doing so. I am not, therefore, surprised at it."

"Here is the holy father's residence. He is poor — very poor; but, withal, he is very good. He is a holy man."

"Then he will serve our turn the better; for it would, in my opinion, take something more than a saint to pray out of purgatory such a soul as his must be. It must wing its way through space very much like a bat."

"Hush, Jose — hush! Not a word about that. Here is the holy man's abode. Shall I enter with you?"

"If you will, Fiametta — if you will."

Fiametta stood by her lover's side while he knocked at the holy man's door, and, after a pause of about a minute, a deep voice said, —

"Who is it that knocks at my door?"

"'Tis one who needs your service, good father."

"Enter," said the monk, and a bolt was withdrawn. The door opened, and Fiametta followed her lover into a hovel, or rather a bare room, in which was nothing, save some straw in one corner, and some few clothes; besides which there were one or two articles of necessary use and convenience, but they were very few indeed.

"Well, my son, what wouldst thou? Dost thou require mine aid to bind thee to this maiden, and she to thee?"

"I do indeed wish so much, but she is not willing."

"Not willing! Then wherefore dost thou come to me?"

"You see, holy father, as we were walking in the wood Del Notti, which I dare say you well enough know— —"

"I do, my son."

"Well, I was talking to my companion, heedless of danger, nor dreaming any could be at hand, when my attention was attracted to a spot on the right of me whence a man rushed out upon me, with a drawn sword, and attacked me."

"I should not have had time to see him, much less time to draw and defend myself, but for the scream of her who was by my side. I looked where I saw her look, and saw him advancing, and had time to spring back and draw."

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"Did you kill your opponent?"

"As it fell out, good father, I did. He rushed on and pressed me so hard, that I had no alternative. My life was in great danger, and I could not rid myself of my enemy, or preserve my own life, except at the expense of his."

"Did you slay him?"

"I did."

"Another soul ushered into eternity," said the monk, gloomily. "How long will it be before the wickedness of men shall cease to bear such fruits?"

"But, holy father, I did but act lawfully in saving my life. It was only the law that nature has implanted in us, and can hardly be called wickedness, since Heaven itself gives us the power and impulse."

"Hold thy peace, my son, thou knowest nothing of these matters; therefore I say hold thy peace, and let me know what it is you desire of me."

"That you will say masses for the repose of his soul, and give him Christian burial. I do not like — we do not like such a portion of humanity to remain where it is; we would it were not entirely neglected, or deprived of burial rites."

"It is but just of thee, my son; but I have known many who would have neglected it altogether, and permitted the body of one of God's creatures to lie and rot like a dog. My son, you have done well, and I will, for your sake, do mine office."

"Nay, holy father, I cannot permit thee to do it wholly without giving the church some due, and here in this purse you will find all I have."

"I take it, my son, not for my own sake, but for that of the church, to whom belongs all that is offered her."

"And this, too, holy father," said Fiametta, giving a small purse; "take that, and for my sake do what may be done by those on earth for those who have departed from it by a violent and sudden death."

"I will, daughter."

"And now, holy father," said Jose, "if you will, I am ready to take you to the spot where fell this man."

"I will follow, my son," said the monk, concealing his two gifts beneath his garments, but rising at the same time — "I'll follow thee."

They all left the place, but went a circuitous route, to enable Jose to leave Fiametta in safety at the marquise's villa, where she resided in half dependence, being a distant relative of her's.

Jose led on the monk until he came to the spot where the stranger fell, and where he yet lay just as he had fallen — a ghastly corpse.

"Here, holy father, you see the caitiff, a treacherous villain, who has now been paid for his villany — for, perhaps, a life of villany."

"Perhaps so, my son. He does not appear to have been formed by nature when in one of her most kindly moods; but yet it might have been she impressed his character upon his features as a warning to the rest of mankind."

"It was so, most likely; but you see he is slain. Fiametta would never have known peace again unless the body was watched through the night by some holy man, and prayed for. That is what is desired, holy father; and now I will leave you to your task, bidding you adieu, and wishing your office a prosperous one, and a pleasant night to watch by."

Chapter CLI. THE WATCH BY THE DEAD MAN'S SIDE. -- THE DEAD ALIVE. -- THE DEATH--STRUGGLE, AND THE MURDER OF THE MONK.

The monk gazed after Jose for some moments, until he had vanished from his sight; even then he continued gazing upon the vacant space that he lately filled, as if meditating in his own mind, and quite unmindful of the present. At length he turned and gazed upon the clay-cold corse before him.

There it lay in all its hideousness -- all its horrible reality. The slouched hat was knowcked off in the fall, and the face was exposed to view.

"Ave Maria!" muttered the monk, telling his beads. "I never before saw so unfavourable a looking creature. I pray Heaven he may have been better favoured in grace than in features -- that he may make a better appearance spiritually than bodily. I would I had had time to speak with him before his spirit fled, for I misdoubt me much of his salvation -- but I will not charge him with unknown sin."

"That," he muttered, after a pause, "might, indeed, be quite unnecessary, seeing his appearance and his deeds -- at least the only one I know of is of a like character; were it otherwise, I would be loth to doubt him; but two such proofs are enough to damn the best spoken-of being in all Christendom."

He paused again; examined the features of the dead man, but could not appear at all satisfied with the success of his ministry.

"I would sooner have had some poor, but honest corpse to watch by," he said as he gazed upon the long white visage of the dead man, whose leaden eye appeared fixed upon him; "I would," he continued, "much sooner have had some early flower cut down before its prime -- I could have wept and prayed for him, then; but this, alas! was but full-grown iniquity, I strongly fear -- it cannot be otherwise."

The monk sank down upon a tree.

"Alas! what a sinner I am, for uttering such a thought -- nay, I am worse for conceiving such a thought, and expressing it must be heinous. To have such a one would be to cut off the most worthy, instead of looking at the destruction of the full grown sinner in all his pride and moral deformity, as being the full extent of the length he was permitted to go by Devine wisdom and intelligence. He has filled his measure of iniquity, and the Lord hath cut him off in the midst of his sins."

The monk now devoutly crossed himself, and muttered several of his Ave Marias and paternosters, and prayed in bad Latin for some time, nearly an hour, when he appeared to think he might be indulged in a rest from his theological labour, and that his mind might refresh itself.

The monk arose and paced about the body for some minutes in solemn and deep wonder at the place chosen for such a deed.

A number of fresh thoughts now rushed through his mind, as he assigned all possible motives for the deed that had been done, or attempted to be done; and, also, for the choice of spot; but this speculation was more curious than useful.

Time passed by, and the hours rolled on, and darkness came on apace. A heavy atmosphere seemed to hang over him, and the light gradually faded away, and the moon showed no light on that night.

"It is dark," muttered the monk, "but the Lord is my light, and darkness has no fears for me. I am in the discharge of my ministry, and am safe. The dead man lies quiet and still -- no sound comes thence."

He listened, but no sound; not the rustle of a leaf could be heard; not a breath of air stirred. All was silent and still; no one sound disturbed the stillness of the night -- all was quiet.

"It is a night of death," said the monk to himself -- "a night such as might be supposed to exist if the last man had ceased to live."

There was a weight in the air that appeared stronger, and had an effect upon the monk, and made a gloomy feeling come over him.

"What ails me?" he said to himself. "I am not strong and confident as I am wont to be -- the reverse; I am doubting, and very sad. Yet why should I be sad -- I, a minister of religion? I, at all times, am prepared to die, or ought to be.

"And yet there is the clinging after life, as in all; but I am mortal, as other men are. I have not all the motives

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for life they have. I am alone in the world. I am but a pilgrim, whose stay is short, and who leaves behind him nothing to remember, and no one to remember me. It is better it is so than otherwise."

The monk paused again, and approached the trunk of the tree, upon which he sat in deep meditation for more than an hour, without altering his posture, or uttering a single word. a whole hour passed thus.

"Now," muttered the monk, as if waking up from a profound meditation, "man is here but in a state of probation. If he were not, what would be the explanation of the chequered course he runs, what the use of all the various stages he goes through during a long life, and then to drop into rottenness at last?"

"Why are we educated and improved, if for any other purpose? Why should we spend years in improving ourselves, only to be deprived of the jewel at last, and to have it not only taken, but destroyed.

"No -- no; it is for better use."

The monk's mind was evidently disturbed in regard to some speculation which had been suggested by the solitary moments of his watch. At such times, all the strange and inquiring thoughts that could be devised by man usually arise and enter his mind, and strange doubts and fancies will supervene, when all other thoughts have been banished, and they take their place.

Man's mind is always liable to these fanciful intrusions, and will remain so, while there is a single important assertion or circumstances existing, incapable of positive and mathematical demonstration.

When all shall be clear, and when there shall be no longer any play for the mind -- any room for imagination -- any possibility of conception left, then doubt may be cleared up, and an unanimity might be raised upon such a structure that never would be raised under any other circumstances whatever.

But, as this is not likely to happen, human doubt will exist, more or less, to all; we shall none of us be freed from that great cause of all the calamities of races. But to proceed with our narrative.

The monk looked around him. He could, however, see nothing, save the few trees near him, but beyond that he was unable to see. There was a strong mist up -- one that limited vision, and left no room for any other object to shine through, and diversify the scene.

"I would," muttered the monk, "that the morning would come. There is no light; the moon is hidden; no rays penetrate the dense air; and all the while the air is close and muggy, Not a star out, or luminary visible."

He looked upwards, and found he could see the spot where the moon was striving to force its rays through some thinner stratum of the clouds; but it was doubtful, and the monk, of very weariness, began to count his beads and to repent his paternosters, between whiles and alternately, until he grew weary.

It wanted yet an hour of midnight, and the night would not be passed for many hours, and the monk thought that the nights were long.

"It is cold," he muttered; "but yet 'tis not midnight. 'Tis the moisture with which the air is loaded, and thus it is cool more rapidly than it could have otherwise happened; but it matters not to me -- if I were to lose my life, I shall only be called home in my minstry; therefore it matters not. I am in the discharge of my duty, and shall have the reward appropriate to the service."

A slight breeze sprung up, and in a short time the mist was cleared off, and not a cloud was to be seen on the horizon.

There might be seen the moon rising slowly and majestically, while a gentle and diffused light shed its influence throughout the wood. Of course its direct rays could not enter until it had risen to its full height.

"Ha!" said the monk, "now I shall be relieved of some of the terrors of my watch; it will cease to be so tedious and so long; but, no matter, I am content, quite content. Soon I shall be able to see the body, and then I will close its eyes. I had forgotten to do so before; but it is time enough."

"Pater noster," again began the monk, until he came to the last word, by which time the light was enough to enable him to discover the body plainly; then he knelt down by its side to pray, and gazed on its features.

"I see its eyes are glaring wildly -- aye, no wonder! no wonder! he met with a sudden, painful, and violent death.

"Poor erring mortality! what an end to come to; but, alas! what can men expect? He who lives by the sword will die by the sword."

The monk closed the eyes of the dead man, and pulled the cloak, which lay open, over him, and then leaned back against a tree, and shut his eyes for a moment; but they did not remain long shut, for some fancied noise drew him out of a train of speculation he was indulging in.

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"He moves not!" he muttered.

However, he knelt down by the side of the body, and began to repeat his paternoster again, and for a few moments shut his eyes, as if he had no service for them, and continued his prayers without intermission.

The moon's rays now came with their full effulgence, and the forest appeared like some enormous piece of lattice work; for the moon's rays were able to penetrate the leaves and branches of many of the trees.

The moonbeams at length fell upon the body of the dead man, and he got slowly up until he rested on his elbow with his face towards the moon; and the monk, who yet remained kneeling, was still praying with his eyes wholly shut.

"Ha!" groaned the stranger.

The monk stopped in his prayer, started, and opened his eyes, which were fixed, in an extremity of terror and horror, upon the apparition before him -- he was entranced, and had no power to remove his eyes.

"Ha!" said the figure, slowly rising to a sitting posture, but, at the same time, immediately facing the unfortunate and wretched monk, who was prostrated by fear.

"Ha!" groaned the figure, by a strange effort.

"My God -- my God!" exclaimed the monk, save me -- save me!"

He endeavoured to rise, but shook so much he could not do it, for the figure kept its horrible eye fixed upon him, and he shook violently; but after a while he contrived to say, scarcely audible though,

"Avaunt, Satan, I command thee."

The figure heeded it not, but took some ominous proceedings, by laying its hands upon the monk's shoulder; but this had the effect of releasing him from his spell, and he sprang to his feet, exclaiming, --

"The Lord of Hosts aid me!"

The figure replied not, but rising without taking his hand off, a deadly struggle ensued between the two, which lasted some minutes. The monk, being driven desperate, resisted with great strength; but he had one to deal with, whose strength was far beyond his, and he felt himself gradually sinking, till, after another effort, which ended in a wild shriek, he was forced on his knees.

In this posture the strange man seized him by the throat, which he compressed, and thrust his knees into his chest, until the unfortunate and wretched man was quite dead and senseless.

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Chapter CLII. THE DEVIL A MONK WOULD BE. -- THE DEMAND FOR ADMISSION INTO THE CONVENT OF ST. MARY MAGDALEN. -- THE FORTRESS AND THE MONK.

It was some minutes before the stranger, who had so newly risen from the dead, let go of the grasp he had of the monk's throat. He held him firmly by the throat by both hands; but as he stood grasping him, his face was turned upwards towards the moon's rays, which fell upon his breast and features, insomuch that he appeared to gain strength at every breath he drew.

But what a ghastly face he wore; what a death-like paleness spread over his forehead; the horrible looking eyes appeared to throw back the light of the moon, much the same as its rays are reflected by glass.

The unfortunate monk was partially kneeling, his back forced against the trunk of the tree, upon which he had been sitting, his face turned upwards, and his eyes almost bursting from their sockets, while his hands convulsively grasped those of his enemy; but his strength decreased as that of the other increased; his cowl fell off, and his bare head was exposed to the moonlight.

There was a death-like pause, and the figure slowly released its hold upon the throat of the monk and stepped back a pace or two to look upon his work. The monk's body retained the posture given to it by the efforts to extinguish his life, and appeared as though his muscles had rigidly set in death, but the trunk of the tree itself was a sufficient support.

"Dead!" muttered the figure; "dead!"

Again he moved about, and went into an open space, where the moonlight came uninterruptedly, without any barrier, and from this spot he surveyed the hideous work of his hands.

"Dead -- dead!" muttered the figure.

This was undoubtedly true; and yet there remained the body of the monk, which, but for the turn of the head backwards, and its face upwards, it might be easily supposed that he had died in the attitude of devotion or supplication; but, as it was, it was evident by what means he had come by his death.

"I must have a victim," muttered the stranger; "am I always to meet with the pangs of death but to renew such a life on such term! Never to obtain a renewal without the pangs of death; and why? because I have not been able to obtain the voluntary consent of one that is young, beautiful and a virgin; I might then for a season escape the dreaded alternative."

He walked round and round the body of the monk for some time, and then he came and sat down by its side upon the trunk of the tree, and appeared lost in contemplation; but at length he looked at the body, saying, --

"Ay, ay -- I have a plan. The church has furnished many a victim -- let it furnish me with one. The church will furnish the sacrifice, and will give me the means of obtaining the offering. Well and good; it shall be done."

He arose, and walked about the body once more, and then approached it; having apparently made up his mind, he came to it, saying, --

"I will become a monk, too, of the most holy order of St. Francis; yes, that will serve me well enough. I will take his cassock, it will serve my turn, and be a ready introduction to the religious world. I am the good monk Francis myself. My learning and sanctity is great; it will carry all before it, and I shall be in great request. It will indeed be strange if there be no fruit upon such a tree. I am sure I shall deserve it."

He seized the body, and pulled off the monk's clothing, and quickly apparelled himself in it, leaving the body as if fell by the side of the tree; and, having thrown his own clothes on one side, he drew the cowl over his head, and, seizing the staff he brought with him, he was about to leave the spot; but a sudden thought occurred to him, and he turned back, and began to rummage among the pockets of the monk.

"These churchmen, I have heard, never travel without something of value about them, and his gold, if he have any, may as well be mine as any one else's who may be passing this way."

He found the two purses that had been given him by Fiametta and Jose, and some that he had beside; moreover, there were some letters and papers, which he put into his pocket, merely observing, --

"These will enable me to pass for the character I assume successfully. I am and will be a monk. I will thrive and confess poor deluded souls, and send them on their eternal journeys."

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A ghastly and hideous smile crossed his face; and having burthened himself with what he thought necessary, or worth while, he quitted the spot. * * * * *

There were two convents, or nunneries, near the city of Naples, at some short distance apart from each other.

One was the convent of St. Mary Magdalen, and the other was the convent of St. Cecilia, about a mile and a half apart, or perhaps more — some said a league; and so it was by the road, but not in a direct line.

It was late one evening, when the great bell of the convent of St. Mary Magdalen gave warning from without that some one demanded admission. The superior of the convent, a woman far advanced in age, and somewhat proud of her character, and not a little disposed to personal comfort, was much annoyed at the sound which gave some promise of trouble.

"Well," muttered the portress, as she rose from before a fire, and tottered towards the gate, looking through the iron grating for the object that disturbed her in her meditations and her devotion to the good things that Providence had furnished her with, — "well, what do you want?"

"I am a poor travelling broth of the order of St. Francis; I am benighted, and I wish for a lodging and food."

"Friend, brother of St. Francis, this is at a later hour than that at which we open our gates to strangers."

"They little think at Rome," said the monk, "that, to obtain a shelter, we have to get to the gates of a holy house before a certain time; and those who most need shelter, because it is less to be had, must wait and perish in the cold."

"The gates are shut."

"I see it."

"And the abbess has got the keys."

"Will she not give me shelter and food?"

"I may not ask her."

"I must, then, remain here outside the walls until the morning, and then I will wend my way back to the holy city, where I will say their messenger could not obtain rest and shelter at the convent here."

"Do you come from Rome?"

"I do; and do you refuse to tell your abbess an unworthy brother of holy St. Francis is here, and waiting for admission?"

The portress made no reply; she was by far too indignant to make any answer, and yet too fearful to refuse to do his bidding; for he spoke in a peremptory tone, that indicated an authority beyond what was usual in his appearance.

She, therefore, found her way to the lady abbess, to whom she began with every expression of submission and respect.

"My lady," said the portress, "there is one without who wants to come in."

"Well," said the abbess, "we can't let him in."

"I told him so," replied the portress; "but you would hardly credit it what he said about a holy pilgrim from Rome, stopping outside the gate all night, and returning to the holy city and speaking of our inhospitality."

"Did he," said the abbess, "say so much?"

"He did."

"Then let him in," said the abbess.

"Let him in!" said the portress, in an extacy of surprise, opening her eyes very wide, and repeating the words "Let him in."

"Yes; do as we bid you," said the abbess.

"Yes," replied the portress, "certainly; whatever our holy superior orders, it is for me to obey. I do your bidding."

Away went the holy portress to discharge her spleen in privacy; and, at the same time, unable to account for the orders given her, she returned to the portal, and having unbarred the gate, she drew the bolts and turned the lock, and opening the door, stood for the monk to enter.

"Come in," she said. "What do you mean? — do you not want to come in?"

"Am I free to enter?"

"Wherefore do I hold the gate open — for pleasure?"

"No, sister," said the monk, "through anger, I believe; but if you can find it in your conscience to be angry

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because I am at the door and give you this trouble, what will be the feelings of St. Peter, who keeps the gates of Heaven, when you present yourself thereat a hungry being and erring sinner; but peace be upon this place."

"Amen," said the portress.

At that moment one of the nuns came from the superior of the convent, saying, --

"Holy father, when you have rested and refreshed yourself, our worthy abbess will be glad to converse with you."

"I am even now at her commands," said the holy man.

"Will you not tast food, and rest yourself?"

"I never tire or need food, when I have aught to do that in any way concerns our religion."

"But, holy father, the body needs refreshment."

"It can be supported upon spiritual food alone, if the Lord wills," said the monk, crossing himself most devoutly.

"You must have great gifts, holy father!"

"Not I, but he that sent me," said the monk, solemnly.

"Will you follow me, holy man, and I will lead you to the abbess, who will be right glad to speak with you?" She wishes to speak to one lately come from the holy city; you can tell her news of the holy father."

"I can, my sister."

"Then, come this way," said the nun, who immediately led the way to the abbess, and the monk followed her closely, till he was lost sight of by those in the waiting-room.

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Chapter CLIII. FATHER FRANCIS'S INTERVIEW WITH THE ABBESS OF ST. MARY MAGDALEN. -- THE OBJECTS AND WISHES OF THE HOLY FATHER.

After passing through a few passages, they entered into a room which had the appearance of a waiting-room, in which were placed chairs and seats; but they did not stop here, for the sister approached a door, at which she knocked, and paused a moment; but a voice from within desired her to enter; and, beckoning the monk to follow her, which he did, they both entered a comfortable room in which the abbess was seated.

"Here is the holy father," said the sister, "who demands lodging and refreshment; but he will take nothing until he has done all that may be required of him."

"Holy brother," said the abbess, "the traveller needs rest, and he that is hungered requires food. Will you partake of our hospitality?"

"I was told you desired to converse with me, and I could not let my ministry wait while I, like a glutton, ate and drank."

"No, brother, it was not for such a purpose I sent for thee, but to hear what news thou hadst from Rome, whence I heard you have come."

"I have come thence."

"But will you not take some refreshment here -- it shall be brought thee, if thou wilt have it, or in the buttery, which you please."

"Whichsoever you please, sister," said the member of St. Francis.

"Then let some of the best be brought, sister, for the good man; and stay, I ate none at the last meal, which I may amend now; let me have a small moiety of a pasty, and a small trifle of cold venison."

The sister departed, and the abbess opened a small cupboard, from which she took a bottle and two glasses, of goodly dimensions, considering the fact that the place was inhabited only by females.

"Pronounce a blessing upon us, holy father," said the abbess. "This has been tasted by no unhallowed lips; it was a present from a holy lady to me, to take myself, and to offer to such as I deemed worthy of it -- and you, holy father, I believe are worthy."

The worthy monk pronounced the required benediction, and drank as fine a glass of real Burgandy as ever went down consecrated lips.

"Thanks, worthy sister, thanks."

"Brother, I am glad to be able to give it thee; it gives me more pleasure to do so than thee to drink. I'll warrant me, that never has such wine passed through the merchants' hands, because he would never have parted with it at a price that would have made it procurable in a place like this, for we are, holy brother, poor, very poor."

"The people who live in these parts are, I fear, not so godly as they should be, to let a house like this want."

"There are many nobles."

"And they ought to pay handsomely."

"They do, I am thankful; but I should like to be able to offer the poor, diseased, and helpless men, better sort of diet than I do."

"It ought to be in your power when the rich and great are so close around you here. You ought to have rich penitents."

"But few of the rich are penitent, brother."

"Naples I was told was a sink of iniquity. I did not expect to find it in reality such as I have heard it described. But, sister, we must be thankful that we have what the times will afford; but, at the same time, when the enemy is thus about, we must be up and doing, and preach salvation to them."

"But they only answer by sending invitations for Sabbath balls," said the unfortunate abbess, in great dolour.

"That must be looked to. They must be chidden."

"And then they withhold their hands from works of charity -- from doing any good deed to us -- and we have no gifts and offerings."

"But that ought not to be any motive. When they see you in earnest, they will not resist any longer; they will,

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as they must, give in."

"Ah, holy father! you don't know the Neapolitans; they are the most sinful set of men that you ever met with."

"The holy father must know of this; he must be informed of the character of these bad people — of these facts. It is a melancholy state of things, which is a disgrace to a Christian country, and must be amended."

At that moment the nun returned with the refecton for the monk and the abbess, who cast a longing glance towards it.

When this was laid on the table, the abbess gave a signal that there was no need of the further attendance of the servitor, who quitted the room, leaving the abbess and the monk to enjoy each others society at leisure.

Some minutes elapsed before either spoke, which time was spent in mastication of no ordinary morsels, being some of the most delicious meats that could be obtained for a religious house of this character, and they were usually supplied with the best of everything that could be had.

"Holy father," said the abbess, "the fare is poor; but I hope it will relieve those calls which imperious nature demands you to satisfy."

"Yes," said the monk; "I am well satisfied."

"Permit me to press upon your notice those venison pasties; they are made by Sister Bridget, who never made an indifferent one in all her life."

"I decidedly approve of Sister Bridget's skill," said the monk. "She is no doubt a worthy woman, and a woman fit for her station."

"I would not have another to do her duties for a trifle, save as a penance," said the abbess. "I will, at all events, retain her while the convent will give her a place of shelter."

"Very right, sister — very right."

"But what news from Rome, brother?"

"Little, save the holy pontiff has been very ill."

"I heard as much; and by many it is presumed that his holiness will be translated, if he should not be better soon."

"No: his holiness is safe, as far as it is possible for any human being to be. God preserve him long!"

"Amen!" said the abbess, devoutly.

"But have you no penitents, holy sister?"

"I have several, but they are all in the way of performing their penances, save one, who is somewhat refractory, holy father, and I know not what to do with her. She has no respect for those in authority."

"Is she one of the order?"

"No, a neophyte."

"How is it, then — what brings her here?"

"She is sent by relatives who are afraid of a disgrace, and will not give her any chance of committing their family to such a disgraceful marriage. She at one time pledged herself to take the vows, but now has some objection to do so."

"On what grounds does she refuse?"

"Because she thinks she shall not be happy."

"Absurd! Where is she?"

"We must have been compelled to secure her, for she has made more than one attempt to escape, and I have reasons to believe that these efforts have been aided from without."

"'Tis a serious offence — a very serious offence to those concerned, and would inevitably lead to a terrible example, if they were detected."

"No doubt; and we should feel it our duty to make every exertion to punish any one who makes an attempt to violate the sancity of our house."

"It must be so, sister."

"Yes, certainly; and I have secured the maiden, who, if she be brought to their mind, will largely endow the convent."

"That ought to be seen to."

"I am, as you may imagine, holy father, anxious that the young maiden should become a member of our house. Who can tell," muttered the abbess, half aloud, "but she may become a chosen vessel by which much good

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may be effected?"

"She may," said the monk. "I am from Rome; you may examine these credentials which I have with me. I will take the charge of this refractory sister of yours, and will pursue such a course as will bring her round to your way of thinking."

"And the endowment?"

"Will still belong to your house, to which it will be given. I have no object, sister, save the welfare of the church; reward I seek not, save what may be given in the good words of the wise and good."

"You are deserving of all praise, holy father. I was not thinking about the endowment, holy father, because, you see, it will not belong to me, but to the church, and this house in particular, for the use of the poor lambs here, over whom I am appointed shepherdess; so I have no feeling in the matter beyond what I ought to have in the spiritual welfare of our fellow sinners."

"I have no authority to interfere in aught else."

"I see, holy father," said the abbess, "you are a wonderful man, and such a one as will do much good."

"I will make an attempt to do good, sister."

"And I will make bold, holy brother, to say you will be successful; though, I venture to say, with humility, that I have tried everything with the unfortunate young woman, which appears to aggravate the evil, rather than give any promise of the future."

"So I might expect."

"You will pursue a different course?"

"I may; but it must depend upon circumstances. If I find it necessary, I must have some place of security, where no one can have any communication with her, save when I shall order it, or deem it proper she should be so confined."

"Certainly; very right."

"Moreover, if I find she needs such severe measures, I shall not let any food be given, save what is given by me, or in my presence, which, of course, amounts to the same thing."

"Exactly, holy father."

"And," continued the monk, "I will not permit this holy house to be insulted by a recusant, for I am quite resolved that no heretick shall baffle the ministers of religion."

"Oh, very improper; it would be indeed, not only an aggravation, but a decided loss to the church, which would damnify it to that extent."

"Undoubtedly," replied the holy man, "undoubtedly; and with your aid I hope to be able to make one good effort, and I pray heaven it may be attended with grace."

"I trust so; and now, holy brother, what may I call you?"

"You will see by these presents I am called Father Francis, of the order of St. Francis; and unworthy brother, who has, perhaps, beyond his gifts, obtained the praise and good wishes of his holiness the Pope, who has been pleased specially to send me forth on a travelling commission, to report to him and to stay where I thought my services might be required."

"Holy father, we may have you stay here some time, I hope, and your favourable report of our poor endeavours; they are in the right direction, and carried on with the right spirit; but we are all weak and erring mortals, we cannot always be as successful as we would wish, and in this matter we have been unsuccessful."

"You have done all that could be expected; there are some matters that will not yield to the weaker vessel, but which would yield to the stronger; therefore you have nothing to blame yourself with; but you are to be commended for what you have done."

"Thanks, holy father; I would not be willingly found wanting."

"Nor are you, sister, according to my poor judgment."

"And when will you see this neophyte?"

"I will see her on the morrow; and in the meantime I must be chargeable to you for board and lodging, if you will so far grace me."

"Name it not, holy father; I have nothing here but what is yours; and when you choose to retire, there will be the best traveller's bed ready for you."

"Straw and sackcloth are good enough for me," said the monk, ostentatiously.

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"But it concerns our housekeeping, holy father, and our hospitality too. We must not let you lodge thus. I pray you, for our sakes, permit us to do what the credit of the place will permit us to do in the way of entertainment."

"Be it even as you will, sister; it does not beseem me that I should contend for matters like these -- be it so; I will retire."

"It grows late. I will summon Sister Agatha to show you your dormitory."

Accordingly, Sister Agatha was summoned, and the monk was, after another delicate libation of rich Burgandy, led to his room.

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Chapter CLIV. THE CELL OF THE NEOPHITE. -- THE INTERVIEW. -- THE UNEXPECTED TURN GIVEN TO THE AFFAIRS AT THE CONVENT OF MARY MAGDALEN.

The morning broke, and the matins were duly performed at St. Mary Magdalen.

This was what happened every day in the week included, for the convent was always alive to the performance of its duties from the dawn of day until sunset and after; but it was their business -- a business from the toil of which they rested not on the Sabbath.

But then it happened that there was no labour; it was all easy-going, straight-forward work, and was a mere pastime, that only occupied the lips and ears; for not half of it was understood, and the other half had long since ceased to produce any impression upon the stagnant minds of the mewed-up sisterhood.

However, there was not lack of comfort, especially for those who held any of the good offices in the convent. The holy Father Francis was met at table by the abbess, who was great and gracious to him.

"Will you inform the sisterhood, holy sister, of my stay here, lest it bring any scandal upon your house, the well-being of which is to me of importance."

"I have already done so. I anticipated your wishes on that point, holy father -- in fact, I did it on my own account, too, for we live in evil times -- in very evil times."

"We do, sister."

"So that being done, you have but to express your wishes; for of course they are the wishes deputed of the pope."

"Certainly -- certainly; it could not be otherwise."

"I knew," said the abbess; "and now I wait for your wishes; let me know them, and I will answer for it, that nothing that is desired by his holiness through you shall meet with any other than the most profound attention and willing obedience."

"You are a worthy superior, and if Heaven please to permit me, I will not fail to let his holiness know of all this devotion and obedience; and, not less, your regularity and religious observances; he will be well pleased, I am sure."

"Thanks, holy father."

"Nay, 'tis justice. But I would now see your unworthy guest."

"The probationist? Yes, she can be seen. She has had her food given her for breakfast, and will be ready to receive you."

"I am ready, then. In the meantime, what is her name and designation?"

"Her name is Juliet, and of a noble house -- that of the famous Di Napotoloni."

"Indeed! 'tis very strange."

"She desired to marry against her friends' wish, who would not hear of the iniquity that was desired to be perpetrated."

"I will see her, then. I may be able to do some good."

"You cannot fail."

"I do not know. The race is not always with the swift, nor the battle with the strong; but I will essay to try."

"If you will come this way, holy father, you shall be admitted into her cell. Shall I remain, or shall I return?"

"I will be alone, for I will confess her, and bring her mind to a calm state. Then, when I have her confidence, I will begin the object in view, and then we shall find whether there is any probability of that system being successful."

"Certainly; but if not?"

"Why, we must adopt more energetic means, and these we must continue to pursue until there is an end of hope, or life; for when coercion is once begun we must continue it on without intermission."

"No doubt -- no doubt, holy father."

"Have you any others who are in a very similar state to this unhappy being?"

"None, holy father, none; but this is her door. She will be sulky, or spiteful, as the humour may be; but, at the

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same time, she will not spare me, because I have, as you see, thus confined her to this place as a punishment."

"You have done right, sister, quite right — there is no blame."

The abbess opened the door, and at the same moment they both entered the dungeon in which the unfortunate young female was thrust by the aid of paternal authority, sanctioned by religious usage, and a presumed right they had over her actions.

"This, holy father," said the abbess, "is the unfortunate female whose case I told you of as being so desperate, that there is no remedy left but that to which we never resort, save in an extremity, and upon no other occasion whatever."

"I see, sister — I see; but I hope one so young has not been entirely won over to the enemy. I trust she will not strive against those who strive for her."

"This holy man," said the abbess to Juliet; "this holy man has travelled from St. Peter's, at Rome, and has come to examine, with the sanction of his holiness the Pope, the state of our spiritual existence. See that you give good account of yourself."

"What the lady abbess has stated to you," said Father Francis, "is no more than the truth. I am so come, and for such a purpose. Prepare, therefore, to confess, and tell me freely what it is that troublest your soul. Confess, daughter."

The monk drew a stool towards him, and having sat down, he waved his hand towards the abbess, who stood by, saying, —

"I will hear her confess; we must be alone."

There was an instant movement on the part of the abbess, and she quitted the cell of the lady, placed the key of the door on the inside, and left them alone.

"Daughter," said the monk, after awhile, "daughter, what is this I hear of you?"

The unfortunate young woman fixed her eyes upon her questioner, and took them not off him during some minutes; and a shudder seemed to pass through her mind.

"I have spoke to thee," said the monk.

"You have," answered Juliet.

"Then answer me."

"I cannot. I know not what has been said."

"Could you not guess?"

"I might, holy father; but what can that be to such as you? You must know that I have been put here according to the abbess's orders."

"I do know so much, daughter. What more have you to say?"

"Simply, that I know not what I am thus confined here for."

"Since you know it not, I will tell you. You have disobeyed the abbess's orders — that is what you are now punished for — 'tis a heinous offence."

"I am not yet one of the order, holy father; and, therefore, the abbess has no right to do this; and if she did not know that my friends were her abettors, she dare not do it; 'tis a grievous injury, and a deep and shameful wrong. Instead of religion being, as it ought to be, the safeguard of the poor and weak against the rich and powerful, it is a means of oppression against those who have no power."

"These are hard accusations, daughter."

"They will bear the proof, however, and that fairly. Where have I taken the vows? — where am I the sworn sister? — tell me that, holy father."

"I have come for another purpose, daughter; you have been undutiful to those whom nature and God gave control over you; and you have desired to live disgracefully; surely, these are things that deserve punishment, for they are great moral crimes."

"I cannot see any such, holy father."

"I am afraid your soul is in an unclean state, daughter. There is no hope for you until this is amended; depend upon it, you can never prosper while you set at naught the desires of those who rule you."

"But they have no right to force me to an alternative that my soul revolts at."

"You cannot mean you revolt at becoming one of the holy and chaste sisterhood here? — that must be a libel upon your chastity."

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"Holy father, it is not the age, nor under the circumstances, at which such a proposal can be made with any chance of success; for I am quite confident that I am born with better prospects than those which now threaten me. My father and mother had no right to send me here; they led me to believe I should inherit a fortune, and now they desire I should enter a cloister."

"And you have given them cause to change the original intention they had concerning you; you are disobedient, that is enough."

"But, holy father, there is a power stronger than a father's or a mother's — a power of which the church approves. What would you more?"

"What power?"

"The divine command which says, we shall leave a parent and fly to the arms of him whom we have chosen to become our husband."

"The devil can quote scripture when he has any object in view. But, Juliet, you are carried away by the strength of your own passion. This is a disgraceful marriage, and one you should not contract — one that would never be sanctioned by them."

"It might be so — that is, unsanctioned by them; but there is no disgrace in being married to a young officer who loved me."

"And whom you mean really to marry?"

"Yes."

"And you would, in fact, marry any one who would offer himself, instead of being a nun?"

"I would sooner die — and I will, by slow starvation — sooner than become one of this or any other order."

"I see — but who was this young man?"

"Jules di Maestro."

"How strange — how passing strange!" said the monk, changing his tone from one of severity to one of sadness and sorrow.

"Why, what ails you, holy father? Has anything happened?"

"I know not, my daughter, whether to feel most sorrow or most anger; but your case is one that requires some care. Whether to tell you all, or whether to conceal a part, or — or — in fact, to tell the whole and trust to your goodness."

"What do you mean — what do you mean? Your manner distresses me. I cannot understand you at all — speak, for the love of Heaven!"

"I can hardly do so, unless, by a solemn vow, you promise secrecy."

"I swear," said the hasty and impatient Juliet.

"Then listen."

"I do — I do. For Heaven's sake, keep me no longer in suspense!"

"Well, then, Jules di Maestro and I concocted a plan together, which we were to execute with the view of getting you out of this convent, so that you might both quit the kingdom of Naples, and get into some of the free states."

"Oh, dear Jules! and did he really take so much trouble about me — did he really mean to do so much? I can never be grateful enough to him."

"Why, you remember his last attempt?"

"I heard of it; but it did not succeed, But it must be two months ago."

"It was. We both were present."

"Both! You?"

"Yes; I was present, and wounded in the affray, though not so bad as poor Maestro."

"Hurt! but he has got over that, else you would not come here from him to plan another escape, which I see you have. I am truly sorry for his hurts; but he is, no doubt, well again."

"Stay — stay — you are much to sanguine."

"He has not forgotten me?"

"No; but you must permit me to speak. I am quite sure that had you heard the whole of the affair, you would not speak in this strain; for had I known that I had to tell you unwelcome news, I would not have undertaken this affair, even urged as I have been by him and your beauty."

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"What mean you?"

"Why, that Jules is dead. He died within a few days after the last attempt that he made to rescue you from your captivity."

"What, do I hear aright! Jules dead! Great God, impossible -- quite impossible! Nothing so dreadful can be real."

"I am sorry to say it is so," said the monk; "very sorry."

"But how did it fall out?" asked Juliet, who appeared to be too much stunned to feel anything acutely; "tell me how."

"When we made our last attempt to get you out, it failed; for we were both compelled to defend ourselves, and to fly before a numerous body of men. I should have got clear of them, but I saw that Jules was made prisoner, so I charged and rescued him from their hands."

"It was nobly done of you."

"Then, you see, I got some marks that I could not help; there were too many; but poor Jules got mortally wounded."

"Heaven be merciful to him!"

"I hope so; but he was not killed immediately. I got him quite away without any one being able to tell who he was, but that was an effort that cost me much. I took him away, as I said, and I sat by his side when he breathed his last breath."

"And what said Jules?" inquired Juliet, as she shed many bitter tears. "What said he? did he not curse her who had caused him such an end?"

"No, no; Jules did not; he wept when he knew his wounds were mortal, not because he was to die, but because he must leave you here, and you would be for ever ignorant of his fate; that is what most affected him, I assure you."

"Ah! he was of a noble, generous nature."

"I, however, promised him that I would see you, and let you know how the matter had stood with him; and he gave you his last blessing, and desired me not to tell your family that he was dead, as it would be a triumph for them; at the same time he wished, if possible, I could supply his place to you in his stead."

"No, no," said Juliet; "no, no; that can never be. I loved Jules, and can never love any one else, and will never try. No, no; Jules and Jules only, will I live for!"

"But he is dead."

"Then for him will I die, too; he died for me, and I will for him."

"But his last words were to me -- 'Go and see Juliet, tell her truly how I died, and what my last wishes were. Those I have formed with the full belief that they are for her benefit. I know how she is placed -- without a friend, and in danger.'"

"Yes, yes; now I have no one to help me."

"You have me, if you choose."

"Not at the price you spoke of."

"But you know not how clearly he expressed himself upon the matter; he knew the life you lead then -- what it will be by and by -- you know the starvation which you will have to feel, and, perhaps, be built up in a wall after all."

"Oh, God!"

"He said, 'See, and tell her you have nearly lost your life in serving me, and in serving her; that I am under an obligation to you for saving my life more than once. Thus, Juliet is the last word I pronounced, and the last I thought of -- but if I had a legacy to leave you,' he said, 'I would leave her, and die happy if I thought you would enable her to escape. Marry her, and keep all the world at defiance -- then, indeed, I could be happy -- almost as happy as if I lived to be in your happy position.'

"I will,' I replied; 'I will endeavour to obtain her escape.'

"Will you swear?"

"I do swear,' I replied; 'and at the same time I will risk my life, and lose it, if she will accept of me for a husband; but I cannot for less.'

"You have said enough,' he replied; 'I am satisfied.'"

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"And he died?" said Juliet.

"Yes; he died; but I have been long enough. I will see you again before another day is past, and then I will learn your determination. Do not let my cause be rejected because I have not urged it forward as I could have done; but the truth is, it is an honest one, and it will speak for itself. Farewell for the present; be secret and silent. They think me monk, for I have assumed this disguise, at the peril of my life, which will be taken with cruel tortures if I am discovered."

There was a pause, when the monk resumed again, --

"If you can consent to become my wife by this time to-morrow, I will endeavour to free you from bondage."

"Why purchase the motive to a good action?"

"I do not do so. I only purchase a right which, if risk of life, and all that man hold dear, be anything, why, you will not think me a Jew in the bargain. Think, lady, think upon what I have offered you."

"I do think; but 'tis a hard bargain for me to lose my liberty either way."

"Nay, you gain it, for you would be my mistress. But, hark! here comes the abbess. I must bid you adieu."

"How fares the penitent?" inquired the abbess, entering.

"I cannot gain either a satisfactory or an unsatisfactory answer to your inquiry. I will, however, see her to-morrow again, and if I find she is obdurate, perhaps the shortest way will be an application to the inquisition."

"Think of that, daughter," said the abbess, leaving the cell.

"Think of that," added the monk, "as your means of leaving the cell -- of escaping. Farewell, daughter. Benedicite."

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Chapter CLV. THE NUN'S ATTEMPTED ESCAPE FROM THE CONVENT OF ST. MARY MAGDALEN. -- THE PURSUIT AND THE DISCLOSURE. -- THE ESCAPE OF THE PRETENDED MONK.

The next day all Naples was alive to the fact that a holy man had been murdered in the wood Del Notti -- a holy brother of the order of St. Francis, who was much respected by the good people of Naples.

Jose and Fiametta both attended before the municipal authorities to give the required information they had give the monk gold to remain by the side of the dead man whom Jose had killed.

There was a general terror throughout Naples, for no one was aware of how the matter had fallen out, nor how the enormity would be punished, and who would be the sufferers in the present case.

The officers of the state were in active search after the perpetrator of so wicked a deed -- as well as the officers of the inquisition. * * * * *

The next time Father Francis called at the convent, he went straight to the lady abbess, and said to her with some earnestness, --

"I am sorry to tell you, the more I reflect upon the conversation I had with your neophyte Juliet, I have some strong doubts about the course I originally thought of pursuing towards the young person."

"In what respect, holy father?"

"I thought of pursuing a mild course towards her."

"I have done it, and failed."

"The reason I think is not that she is hardened, but that she simply does not believe we will proceed to the extremity that we have threatened."

"I think she is hardened, holy father."

"Time alone will show; but I have altered my plans respecting her."

"In what respect, holy father?"

"I think I will begin to strike terror into her soul, and at once shew her the reality of my intentions, with respect to what I shall subject her by way of punishment for her resistance to her religious superiors."

"Very good, holy brother; I think it the plan that will most likely succeed the best; if she be terrified, she will be obedient."

"And to that end," said the monk, "I have ordered the alguazils of the inquisition to be here in half an hour's time, when she will be carried there, and subjected to the first process of torture."

"You will not hurt her?"

"Not much."

"Just enough to teach what powers you can exert."

"Yes, just so. Now, when they come, let me know, and, if she consents to go, all well and good; and, if she do not, we must use force."

"And how long will you keep her at the inquisition?" inquired the abbess; "because, eventually, the parents will claim her of me."

"About three weeks, at the farthest; but, if the parents are troublesome, name the inquisition, and say holy brother Francis, from Rome, will come and confess them, and make some inquiries concerning their belief and faith in the church."

"I will, holy father."

The monk now returned to the cell where the unfortunate Juliet was confined, and, on opening the door, he found her in tears.

"Juliet," he said, "I come again."

"You are here;" she replied, "I see."

"And I am here with all the means of escape; you have but to say the word, and you are free and at liberty."

"I cannot -- I cannot."

"You cannot. Do you love life -- do you love liberty?"

"I do."

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"And yet you choose the cold, bare walls of a cloister, to a life of happiness and love; to a life that is made for such as you."

"I cannot love you."

"I love you; that I have risked my life for you more than once, is true; my persecution is another proof of that."

"It may be so."

"Then why not consent? you have no alternative that can interest you more, or that will offer you more happiness."

"I cannot so soon forget Jules."

"Nay, we will not quarrel about that; I cannot expect you. I am not unreasonable, because I know so well the circumstances of the case. All is haste and confusion; there is no time for thought or preparation — all lies in self-preservation; say at once you will have me; I will endeavour to gain your love and esteem afterwards; our happiest days, our courting-time will come after our wedding."

"It cannot come."

"But will you choose the horrors of the inquisition rather than wed one who would give life and fortune to you?"

"Who speaks of the inquisition?" inquired Juliet, terrified.

"The abbess spoke to me about it when I came here last time, and said she had your father's commands to deliver you over to them."

"I'll not believe it."

"I entreated her not to do so, but to leave it in my hands, and I would undertake to communicate with the inquisition, and bring their officers here to-day."

"And have you?"

"I have brought those who will counterfeit them, and carry you off. The plan is matured. Will you leave this place, wed me, and be a happy woman, or remain here to be tortured and disfigured by the tortures of the inquisition — perhaps to die in their hands?"

"Horrible!" said Juliet, with a shudder.

"Think on this and on that."

At that moment a tremendous uproar occurred in the convent, and a ringing of bells. The pretended monk started, and listened attentively.

"They come," he muttered — "they come!"

"Have they discovered you?" inquired Juliet.

"I know not — I care not if they have. Will you quit the convent, and leave Naples with me? Will you become my wife? You see what I have risked for you. I wait but your answer: they are coming."

Before any answer could be given, the door was thrown open, and the abbess, followed by a troop of soldiers, entered the cell, and, among them, the vampire monk saw his late adversary, Jose, and his love, Fiametta.

"There is the murderer," said Jose, pointing to the monk, whose cowl had fallen off; "and he is the man whom I believed I had killed."

"Oh, yes, it is the same horrid face!" said Fiametta.

"The murderer of Father Francis?" said the abbess.

"I know not how it was done; but I told Father Francis to watch and pray by the dead body, and see it decently buried, and he said he would do so. I gave him gold, and left him at his watch and his devotions."

"And he is dead now — his cassock and papers torn from him."

"Seize him, comrades!" said the officer.

At the sound of the officer's voice, Juliet looked up, and beheld her lover, Jules di Maestro, whom she was told had been killed. She sprang up, saying, —

"It is all false, then. You are not slain — you are still living — and you did not send this man to marry me?"

"I — who — Oh! Juliet, have I found you?"

"I am here, dear Jules. Take me hence — take me hence!"

"I will not do so now; but I have their majesties' favour, and will take care you shall be released from this vile durance."

"And that man — —"

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"Ay, look to your prisoner," said the officer.

But there was no prisoner to look to. He had slipped off his cowl and cassock, and left the convent, leaving all present immersed in their own affairs. The abbess was indignant at the imposture, and would not risk Jules's appeal, on behalf of Juliet, to the king, and at once consented to her release and immediate marriage; and at the same time Fiametta consented to wed Jose, so that all was forgotten, save the murder of the holy Father Francis, and the resurrection of the vampire monk, who was, in reality, no other than Sir Francis Varney, who was no more heard of in Naples, but supposed to roam about the world at large.

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Chapter CLVI. THE STORM. -- A SHIPWRECK AT SEA. -- THE HAPLESS FATE OF THE MARINERS.

The morning was ushered in with wind and rain; a tempest was howling over the main; the seas lashed the shores with a fury that made it dangerous for even such vessels as were moored; and great fears were entertained that many wrecks would be seen before the night set in. The roar of the ocean and the bellowing of the wind was almost deafening; and the few fishermen and sailors that now and then showed themselves; as they came towards the shore to ascertain the safety of their little barques, could scarcely make themselves heard.

The sky was too heavy, and the rain too incessant, to permit them to see very clearly or very far; they could not see any ships in the offing.

"Neighbour," said one, "did you hear the wind in the night?"

"Hear it!" replied the man spoken to; "could I help it? Who is there that could sleep, while such a tempest was blowing great guns. I never heard anything like it in all my life. God help those poor fellows who are at sea such a night as this."

"So say I, neighbour, so say I; if there be any upon this coast -- if any awake with the morning dawn and find themselves upon a lee shore, they will never get off again, depend upon it; they are all lost men."

"So they are; there's no hope for them on this shore; every vessel must, indeed, come upon it, and no aid could be rendered to them."

"You are right, neighbour. I am glad our boats are high and dry; for, if they were not, they would never be on the sea again, except as fragments; every timber in them would be broken to pieces, and scattered about the beach."

"Ay, ay, 'tis an awful day. I propose, neighbour, we should make an attempt to get our boats still higher on the beach; see, the sea comes now within a few boat-lengths of them; a few more waves heaving one upon the other will at last reach them, and, if so, we are, indeed, poor men, neighbour."

"With all my heart; we have no time to lose, neighbour -- see, the waves have got nearer yet -- come on, come on."

The two fishermen hurried down to the beach; and, with the aid of one or two more, who had hurried onwards with the same object as themselves, that of putting the boats out of danger from the waves, they succeeded; and then they returned, leaving their boats, their only wealth, high above the reach of the most tempestuous sea.

"There, neighbour, I never heard such a sea. I will go and see what can be done in-doors by the fire-side; this is not a day to be out in; you are wet through in about ten minutes, and nothing to do but to look on the black clouds."

"No, neighbour; though I don't think in-doors much better, for I expect our roof to come off, or the chimney to fall over; and must consider myself very fortunate if I do not have the whole house blown down."

"Ay, ay; but I expect to hear of a few accidents. I don't see any vessel coming in the horizon at all -- do you see any?"

"None."

"Well, I hope there may be none. I'm for the house; too much of this may be hurtful to a fisherman; so, good day."

"Good day, for the present. I dare say we shall see each other before the day's out, if anything may happen in the shape of wreck."

"Safe and sure to be out."

"If you hear a gun, let me know, if I should not be out; for the wind blows and the sea roars so loudly that I can scarcely hear at all."

"I'll be with you; and do you the same for me, if I should happen to miss it; though I can't tell how that can be, as the wind blows dead in shore."

"It's a bargain -- I'll do it."

The two fishermen parted from each other, and entered their own dwellings to escape the fury of the elements; for there was nothing to keep them outside, but there was everything to induce them to stay in-doors -- a warm

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fire and freedom from the wind and rain, though that howled and roared in the chimneys in a frightful manner. * * *
* * *

If the aspect of the affairs was bad on the land, it was much worse at sea; for there a vessel rode out the fury of the storm gallantly enough, and resisted the force of the winds and waves for some time; but she could not resist the impetuosity of the elements, though she strove hard and resisted long.

She strained, and timber after timber started, masts were gone, and the rudder became damaged, and at length no hope was left.

The crew was not a large one, and the pumps had become completely choked and useless; while the vessel was drifted hither and thither without any means of guidance whatever; she was at the mercy of wind and waves.

"We are drifting towards the shore," said the mate to the master; "we cannot keep her head out to sea at all."

"I know it," answered the master, gloomily — "I know it; she has been making land for some time now, and as we have neither rudder, nor sails, nor masts, we may as well make our peace, for the worst must soon come."

"I expect that some tiem ago, when I found that the wind was set dead on shore, and the rudder was gone."

"Surely, we haven't much time to lose; let the guns be fired, as a signal of distress; it may give warning to those on shore."

"We cannot expect assistance."

"Not here, I know."

"Certainly not; no boat would live for a moment in a sea like this."

"No, I know it would not; but it may put them upon the look out, and some of our poor fellows may get picked up; for we don't exactly know how far we may be driven towards the land, and we may be sent right on to the beach, for aught we can tell."

"So we might."

"I hope we may."

"Are the guns ready?"

"Yes, sir, they are loaded; but there is only one barrel of powder dry."

"Let it be cared for; fire the guns."

The order was promptly obeyed, for the men had left off pumping, conceiving it useless to continue it any longer; indeed; they could not, for the pumps were no longer serviceable, and they saw the land ahead, and each man made up his mind that the struggle for life was about to commence; while the firing of the guns was a measure of precaution which might, or might not, be of use; and as every one clung to hope to the last, the order was obeyed with alacrity.

The guns were fired in minute intervals, and at length every half minute while the powder lasted, and then they ceased.

There was not more than from fifteen to twenty souls on board; but there were several passengers among them; one in particular was remarkable for his height, and the singular pallid hue of his features.

He was reserved, but of gentlemanly deportment; he was well aware of his danger, but it did not appear to render him incapable of seeing and understanding what was going on; but he was grave and melancholy.

"How long, captain, do you think it will be," he said, approaching the master, "before the vessel will break up; for I see that we shall be wrecked, that is no secret at all to any of us, and certainly not to me."

"I don't know, replied the captain; "it is impossible to say."

"Cannot you form an opinion upon the subject?" inquired the stranger.

"I can; but it is only an opinion. I can give you no information," replied the captain, who did not wish to give an opinion upon such a subject.

"Certainly, I am aware of that. I asked for an opinion; if you have one, perhaps you may be good enough to favour me with it, if it be not too great a favour to expect from you, sir. I thought you had experience enough to enable you to form an opinion, and it was for that reason I asked you."

"Well, sir, we strike in five minutes, perhaps in twenty; it depends upon wind and waves, our course, and how far we may go ashore."

"I understand you; if we are forced in upon the shore in a direct line, we may expect the shortest time."

"We may."

"And if we should not meet with any obstruction, we may be thrown far on shore."

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"Yes; if we had but the means of guiding the vessel, I could steer her within fifty or a hundred yards of the shore, where she would strike, and a better chance would then be had of some reaching the shore."

"Which is now rather more than uncertain."

"It is so," said the master.

At the moment there was such a shock from the vessel striking upon a sunken rock, that they were all thrown down on the deck, and the sea made a clear breach over her, and swept away several of the crew.

The master contrived for a moment or two to secure himself to a spar, with the hope that he would be able to float off; but this was a vain hope, for a moment after he was lifted up by a sea, and dashed against the stump of the mast, and crushed in a horrible manner, his blood dying the deck for a minute, and then it was washed away, as he himself was by the same wave, and was not seen again.

The master no doubt had been killed, and there was nearly all of the crew swept away; but among those who yet survived, was to be seen the tall stranger, who stood in the storm, and held on by a portion of the vessel; he still braved the fury of the waves as they broke over the deck clearing all before them.

Each breach of the sea made away with some one of the unhappy mariners who yet clung with hopeless desperation; but yet they feared to quit their last hold, and to throw themselves into the foam that was boiling around them.

In the meantime the vessel heeled about, and every now and then, being in shallow water, a great wave would come and lift her up, and then leave her higher on the rocks, but giving her each time dreadful shocks, and breaking her keel up.

The only hope the unfortunate men had, was that some portion of the wreck upon which they might chance to be, would be floated to the shore before life was extinct; but this was more and more hopeless, for the breakers over which they would have to float would probably be their destruction, for they would be dashed to pieces.

The wind and the waves howled and roared, and drowned all noise — nothing could be heard, and nothing seen, for the waves broke over them so furiously, and raged so high above them, that they neither could do so, nor even see the shore. Nothing but a white sea of foam and spray met their eyes, whenever they could raise them, and free them from salt water.

At length an immense wave came rolling towards them; the men shrieked as the flood came onwards. In a moment afterwards they were lifted up, vessel and all, and carried a few yards further onwards and then left, with a report that seemed like that of a cannon to them; but they felt the shock, and when the wave left them, the vessel was no more; a mere mass of boards and other matters floated about; she had been utterly and entirely destroyed; no vestige of her was left, and nothing but a confused mass of planks was to be seen, with here and there a human being clinging to them for life. But, alas! their efforts were vain — they sank — they could not sustain the battle with the waves and the breakers; they were dashed to mummies, and every limb broken on the foaming, raging breakers.

Chapter CLVII. THE FISHERMEN. -- THE DESPAIRING CRY OF THE MARINERS. -- THE BREAKERS FROM THE SHORE.

On shore the day wore away; the wind blew furiously, and the oceans roared to such an extent, that no other sound was audible; and the fishermen who lived upon the coast kept within doors, knowing that nothing could be done out of doors on such a day; and each one seated by the fire, began to recount some wonderful tale of death and shipwreck, or of happy escapes from the boiling sea, until noon had long since passed, and the turn of the day showed a decided approach towards evening; but no abatement of the tempest.

The principal fisherman on the coast, a man whose poverty was less, rather than his wealth was greater than his fellows, sat by his fireside, with one or two others of his class seated with him.

"I never saw a worse storm," said one of them.

"I have," said Massallo, the fisherman.

"You have?" said one of his comrades, in his turn.

"I have, I can promise you -- one that blew me upon this coast, where I have ever since remained, and intend to remain."

"I have heard you say so; but I never heard the particulars of that story; it must have been many years ago, I fancy."

"Yes, it must have been fifteen years ago," said Massallo, speaking; "fifteen years ago at the very least, if not more than that."

"Well, I think it must be quite that time; for my old man has been dead these fourteen years, and he remembered you very well, and used to speak of you; and, as I thought, you must have known him more than a year."

"Aye, two."

"Well, it must, then, have been more than sixteen years ago since you came here."

"I dare say it was; very nearly seventeen years ago, now I come to think of it. The storm, if possible, blew harder, and the waves beat higher than they do now; the rain was heavier than it rains now; and, in addition to all, the thunder and lightning were tremendous, not a sound could be distinguished. The speaking-trumpet was useless -- no sound issued from it -- all was confusion and danger."

"It must have been a rare time, certainly."

"It was a time for devils to be abroad, and not for men; but we were compelled to pump, and cut away the wreck. Why, you see, we had been chased by the Algerines, and we had got nearer to the land than we would have gone, but for the fact that we desired to escape from a superior and formidable enemy, who knew no mercy.

"Yes, the Algerines, if they had spared us, would have made slaves of us for our lives, and there would have been little wisdom in being caught by them, if we could help it."

"I should imagine no one would ever do it."

"Well, that was the cause of our being in shore nearer than we ought; but we noticed that the Algerine sheered off at a moment when there was but little chance of our escaping him; but we could not tell the reason; but we concluded that he saw some danger, of which we were at that moment ignorant.

"Well, we had not time to haul out a little before we were surprised by a tremendous clap of thunder and lightning, as vivid as if it had been brought from all quarters of the world, and loosened at one and the same moment."

"It must have added to your terrors."

"It was the main thing that wrecked us on this coast."

"What, the lightning! why, I suppose it struck you, then?"

"Yes; we could have held off, or run the vessel bump ashore -- almost dry -- but we lost all command over her, when the lightning shivered our mast to atoms and left the stump burning in the vessel; then, more than that, it killed two of our best hands at that moment, and most of us were knocked up and unable to work at the pumps; but it was of no use; we came ashore, crash went the vessel, and we were all in the boiling sea in an instant, and a wave or two more threw me on the beach, without any fatal injury, and I scrambled up out of their reach."

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"And then you remained by us."

"Yes; I did not find means to return whence I came for some years."

"Perhaps you had reason."

"I had; I was a rival for a girl; I was then endeavouring to win money; I had entrusted some money in the vessel — all I had; and with her I lost all, and with that all I lost even hope, and never returned to my native home."

"Did the girl love you?"

"She liked me well enough to have me, if her relations would consent, but they would not, unless they saw I had more money than I could obtain; and, in default of that, they would marry her to another, who had more money than I; and I only obtained time to get money by the girl's intercession; but I was baulked."

"Well, that was bad; but I suppose you were well assured that you would be rejected if you had not money."

"I was, by her family."

"And herself— --"

"That was not so sure; and yet they had great influence upon her; but I could not have the courage to go back and ask her to wed poverty; a man without even the means of purchasing a wedding garment."

"You did right, neighbour."

"I did, and I knew it," replied the fisherman, bitterly.

"But you have prospered since; and you have been happy, if I mistake not."

"Yes, I have been prosperous, and tolerably happy; it is wonderful how men adapt themselves to the circumstances around them."

"They do; if they did not, how insupportable would life be."

"You are right; I should have been miserable for ever; I should never have recovered my feelings, and should never have been what I am now."

"The storm seems as furious as ever, neighbour," observed one of the fishermen, after a long pause, for they were meditating upon what they had heard, "and I think we shall have but a very rough night of it."

"Good; we shall have a night of it."

"I think," said another, "I must be getting near my own fireside by this time; they will expect me home, or think some accident has happened."

"And I will step out to see how the weather looks before it grows dark; there appears no change."

"Hark! what is that?"

There was a moment's pause, and in about a minute, in one of the lulls of the wind, they thought they heard a gun; but the storm increased so as to leave them in great doubt of what it was.

"It was a gun, I think," said the fisherman. "Such sounds as those I have heard before; but 'tis hard to tell them from the sounds of the elements."

"We can tell when we get outside, I dare say; but the wind sweeps all sounds past so rapidly that it is scarcely possible to tell even there; but there is yet light to see, and as the sun sets in the horizon, we have a chance of seeing a sail if there be one."

"We have, but not of helping her."

"True; there is no help for those on board."

"May Heaven have mercy upon the poor mariners," said the fisherman's wife. "It is hard times with them now. Life is dear to all, and they will cling to it. Do what you can for the poor beings."

"There's no doing anything," said the fisherman, gloomily. "Neither boat nor ship can ride through such a sea, on the ocean or at anchor."

"But they may be cast ashore, and they may not be quite dead, you know; instant aid might avail much, when even they had ceased to feel."

"We will not fail in that particular. We are going down to the beach now, and shall not neglect any means that are in our power, at all events; more we cannot do, but that much shall be done, and I hope it may be of some service."

"Hark! the same sound again," said his companion.

"I did not hear it."

"Nor I."

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"Come on; we shall now know better in the open air," said the fisherman, as he wrapped himself up in a large rough coat, and pulled his hat over his eyes. "The rain is as heavy as ever, and I think it will soon fill the sea to overflowing."

The fisherman left the hut and proceeded towards the beach; at least, they did not go down, for the waves ran so high that they beat a long way inland — more so than they had ever done before.

"What do you think of our storm?"

"It is a complete tempest — furious; and the wind blows the waves towards the shore, and that is the cause why we have the sea so high; and should the wind continue in that quarter for a day or two, even our cottages will be in some danger."

"I dare say they would; but it would be without example if the winds were to continue in that quarter for so long a time, blowing a complete hurricane without any intermission. I should almost think the world about to end."

"Do you see any vessel out in the horizon?" inquired one of the fishermen.

"Not I."

"But I can hear the gun."

There came booming across the waters the sound of a piece of artillery. There was no mistaking it — it was plain and evident to all that there was a vessel in distress somewhere, but they could not exactly tell where.

Again the sound reached them on the wind, accompanied by the roar of the elements; but it was enough to distinguish it by from the rest of those awful sounds, which spoke plainly to them of the dreadful fate of the unfortunate men who were on board the vessel in distress.

"Can you make them out?" inquired one of the fishermen of his companion. "I cannot see her, though I hear the guns, and can almost imagine her whereabouts."

"No, I can't see her," replied the man spoken to.

"I can though," replied the first fisherman; "she lies close in shore, not a mile out, nor yet that. I think she's dismayed."

"I see her now, myself. I looked about in the horizon, above her there. She labours much, and the sea breaks over her."

"She has lost her rudder, I have no doubt, and is drifting right in shore. What will become of them, I cannot well think."

"It is too easy to think."

"Do you imagine that one man among the whole crew can be saved?"

"Hardly, on such a shore as this, with rocks on all sides; every man that is swept overboard will be dashed to pieces, and disabled, even if lashed to spars."

"You are right; for if one man survives this wreck, it will be a miracle, and I can hardly believe it to be possible."

They now watched the course of the vessel. The guns had ceased to fire, and daylight was fast departing; and though she came nearer, yet she became less distinct; but still they could see her, and note her progress well through the surf that rose up around her as it dashed against the labouring vessel's side.

"She strikes," cried one of the men; "that shivering action is her first shock."

"Yes," said a companion. "Poor wretches, they have but a short time now. She will go to pieces on those rocks as sure as they are there."

"May she not hold together?"

"No; see, she heaves up again! No; as there are but bare rocks under her, and she will not settle into any place, but continue beating and bumping upon them until she will break and split to shivers, not a timber can hold."

"Too true — too true," said his companion.

The fishermen now bent their eyes upon the ocean, where this exciting scene was going on, but they spoke not. It was growing yet darker, and yet they gazed stedfastly, heedless of the beating and overwhelming rain; but they could hardly see the vessel, until at length a loud shriek came to them, borne to them upon the hoarse winds, and heard distinctly above the roaring of the ocean.

The fisherman knit his brows, and compressed his lips, as he heard the sounds, and then, clasping his hands, he said, —

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"Heaven have mercy on them! for I fear the sea will have none. It's all over, and they are dead and dying. Follow me!"

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Chapter CLVIII. THE ONE BODY WASHED ASHORE. -- THE FIRST REQUEST. -- THE SHIPWRECKED STRANGER.

The fishermen followed down towards the beach, for they had been standing upon some cliffs which commanded the sea below, which now was one dark boiling mass, in which nothing at all was distinguishable; and, therefore, they could not tell what went on below.

They soon arrived at the little bay, in which their fishing-boats used to ride; but they had been drawn up beyond the reach of the sea, though the sea now ran quite up into the land, and they stood watching the waves as they rolled upwards.

"Had we not drawn our boats higher," said one "they would have been wrecks by this time, and we should have been beggars."

"Ay; so we should, neighbour."

"Don't you see the waves beating over the very spot were they lay?"

"I do; and they ain't far from them even now, and I am in some fear lest they reach them; but they have been moored as well."

"They are doubly secured."

"Do you see anything upon the water yet?" inquired the first fisherman.

"Nothing."

"Nor I, and I have strained my eyes to their utmost. They are most likely all dashed to pieces, and they are not likely to live through such a sea."

"No, no; they must be overwhelmed with water. God help them, poor fellows! and if they are not to be saved, may they soon have an end to their tortures, for the strife after life must be dreadful."

"It is dreadful," said the other; "but you must know that the sufferings are endured under excitement, and therefore not so much felt as when they have been saved. To have passed the barrier of life, and to become insensible to all, and then to be recalled to life, is an agony not to be described. I have seen men who have been restored to life, and who have solemnly declared that the pangs of death they could encounter, and not those of a return to life."

The fisherman made no reply, but stood listening to the howlings of the storm, and watching the waves; but this was productive of nothing -- they watched for more than two hours, and yet nothing came ashore.

"I don't see we can do any good here," said one.

"Nor I. Those who were alive, must now have been dead some time."

"Yes; the sea don't wash them this way."

"Most likely," added another, "they are washed among the breakers, and dashed against the cliffs, and therefore cannot reach this place, where they can reach the land."

"It usually happens so."

"It does; but we may as well return. There is a wreck, no doubt."

"That is quite settled."

"Quite, as you say; but there are no signs of it."

"Save such as you saw."

"Yes; we have evidence enough of the fact. We saw her go to pieces, and we have heard the death-shriek of the mariners, and more we cannot have seen. When we come down here in the morning, we may indeed see the bodies, and the broken and severed planks of the unfortunate vessel, strewn over the sands."

"I shall return again after I have had an hour or two's turn in," said the fisherman.

"Give me a call," said his companion, "and I will go with you."

"And I."

"Agreed. Then about midnight we will again visit the beach, and see if any of the men are ashore." * * * * *

There was no one now by the shore, and nought save the sounds of the turmoil of the elements could be heard. What other sounds can be any possibility be distinguishable at such a time? There was nothing that could be done there that would sound. The loud roar of the breakers was tremendous; the dash of the waves against the cliffs,

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and the steady bellowing of the wind, which sounded not much unlike a steady and continued report of great guns fired at a distance, were as but one sound and that sound of a strange, awful, and furious character — perfectly dreadful.

There was one body, however thrown up by the waves, as if they would yield that one alone, and no other, or as if that one was the only one they refused to swallow; it floated about for some time, and was thrown hither and thither, now thrown on shore by one wave, and withdrawn by another.

At last a high wave came rolling onwards, and falling upon the shore, it lifted the body up, and carried it further upon the beach and there left it, and no subsequent wave came so far as that, and it was left unmolested.

That body was the carcass of the stranger, who of all the rest had been swept towards the little bay, and deposited there alone. * * * * *

The fisherman left his hut to call his companions, and having done so, they came towards the beach, while they conversed together.

"Well," said one, "I did not expect to see the storm abate so soon."

"I did not," replied his companion, "though, I dare say, it was much too violent to last much longer; and yet I can scarcely credit my senses that it is really gone, and that the deluging rain has ceased altogether."

"Yes; and there comes the moon peeping behind that mass of clouds."

"The wind blows stiffly yet; but it has greatly moderated, and I think it will continue to do so."

"I hope it may; but the sea does not abate a bit, and will not for many hours, even if the wind was to go down."

"Oh, dear, no; the waves will keep on in this fashion for some hours; and I dare say it will be useless to get our boats out; we shall not have any more fish for some days to come."

"Most likely not; but I would not venture to go out while the sea is heaving, after such a storm as this; there would be but little use in doing so, I am quite persuaded; but what is that yonder?"

"Where — I see nothing?"

"There, lying a few yards from the reach of the waves; to me it looks like a human body. It is quite quiet and still — no motion — it is, I fear, dead; there is no motion, and the attitude is that of one who has not moved after he was thrown there — I think not, however; but let us see what it is."

The fishermen now went down unto the beach, where the body lay, for such it really was; and, when they reached it, at once saw it was a human body, and they all paused before it.

"Bring it higher up on the beach; the waves may come upon you presently — they are high enough. Bring him up higher on the beach, and you will then see what state he is in; for if his limbs are broken, and his body otherwise injured to any extent, you may spare much useless labour."

The fishermen drew the body up higher; they then carried him to a dry and sheltered spot, and examined him, but found no particular injuries to speak of, but that he was apparently drowned.

"What course to pursue," said one, "I don't know; no doubt but he is quite dead; he must have been in the water several hours, besides being knocked about on the breakers, which is enough to destroy life itself."

"I should imagine so; and yet, we had better take it up to the cottage, and place it under cover; indeed, we cannot tell how long it has been thus; therefore, I say we had better make some attempt to recover him; he may yet come round, though there may be but little hope in it."

"We will try; stand out of the moonlight — we shall be able to see presently better what he is, than we can now."

The moon was now freed from the mass of deep heavy clouds that hung over it, like a curtain before that luminary, and which now shed a brilliant light upon the earth. The fishermen stood round gazing upon the body of the stranger.

"Ha! it moves," said one.

The body did move, and no sooner did the moonlight fall full and fair upon its form, than it slowly raised itself upon its elbow, and gazed around. A deep inspiration took place, almost a groan, and some sea water was vomited.

"He lives — he lives!" exclaimed the fisherman.

"Take him to the hut," said another.

They all stooped down to aid him, and began to lift him up.

"He lives — he lives!"

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"Away with him to the hut," said several of the fishermen. "Before a warm fire, and with some warm drinks, he will get better."

"A little more light — a little more light, if you please," said the stranger, in a bland but broken voice, as he attempted to move his hand.

"He speaks!" exclaimed the fishermen in a breath, and at the same time they removed a pace or two, and looked at each other with amazement, and then again at the stranger, who gradually rose up, and sat upright in the light of the moon.

"Are you any better?" inquired one of the men who had looked on in silent amazement, not unmixed with awe, as they gazed.

"Yes; much better. What a vile thing is sea water," said the stranger, turning such a ghastly face upon the men that they shrunk in horror, and yet they were not men used to fear or any like passion.

However, they soon approached him, muttering to each other, —

"What manner of man is this?"

They did not long consider what was to be done, for one of their number replied, —

"Poor fellow! he is not used to the rough usage of the waves, and therefore does not improve upon their acquaintance. But let us lend him a hand."

"With all my heart," replied his comrades.

"Will you come with me to my cottage?" said the fisherman. "You will benefit more mby a good fire than by the cold moonlight, I'll warrant. I never throve upon night air and wet clothes, and I cannot believe you will."

"We all know our constitutions best," said the stranger; "but if you will grant me the accomodation you speak of, it will be welcome."

"Come, lean upon me; never mind your clothes being wet."

The stranger rose, and, to the amazement of all, he appeared to walk as well as any of those present; and the only difference was, he was ghastly pale, and he was dripping with sea water, which left a track after him.

"Had you been long on the beach?" inquired one.

"I don't know," replied the stranger. "I was insensible."

"Can you form any idea how long you have been in the water?"

"I really cannot tell even that; for I was insensible immediately after the ship went to pieces, which she did about the close of the day; and I only remember receiving a hard blow by being struck against a rock, or a piece of timber, I cannot say which."

"You must have been insensible for some hours."

"I dare say I was."

"I never heard of such a miraculous preservation."

"Nor I."

"To come to life, too, without any aid to recover you, that is what entirely bothers me."

"Well, they do say, those that are born to be hanged will never be drowned," added one of the fishermen, in an under tone, to his companion.

They soon arrived at the hut of the fisherman, in which there was a good fire, and the wife and daughter were ready to do all that could be done for the unfortunate stranger.

"You have saved a mariner, then?" said the wife.

"We have picked up one from the wreck, wife; but we cannot call him a mariner. This gentleman was, no doubt, a passenger."

"Welcome, sir! I did not expect to see any one alive from the wreck, much less in condition to walk an speak."

The stranger paid them some compliments; but contented himself with sitting by the fire, and being entirely passive in their hands, and eventually retired to rest well wrapped up and warm.

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Chapter CLIX. THE FISHERMAN'S COTTAGE. -- THE FIRESIDE, AND THE TRAVELLER'S BED.

The fisherman's hut was large and roomy. There was no choice furniture, though there was enough of the homely conveniences that were to be found in such habitations -- much more so than is usual. There was a large fire-place, upon which some faggots had been newly laid, and which now blazed away most cheerfully.

"Our home is humble, sir," said the fisherman; "but such as it is, you are welcome to it, and may it serve you instead of a better."

"I am much beholden to you," replied the stranger; "much beholden to you, and cannot thank you enough. This change is most valuable. I do not know in what state I should have been, had you not come forward and offered the shelter of your house to me. I am very cold, indeed, and the warmth of your fire is grateful to me."

"I am glad of it, sir. You are the only one, I fear, as far as I know, that is saved. Was there many on board?"

"About twenty, I think."

"Poor fellows! they have met with a watery grave."

"Yes, they have, I fear. They have had a fearful struggle, for many were lashed to spars, hoping they might be washed, or floated, ashore. I hope I am not disturbing, though I fear I am, your wife and daughter -- that is your daughter, I presume, if I may judge from her likeness to yourself."

"Yes, sir, that is my daughter; she's a good girl, sir, though I say so, that am her father; and if a secret must be told, in another month she will exchange a father's for a husband's control and care, which will I hope, be a happy change."

"They have long loved each other," said the mother, "and, to my mind, it is cruel to keep them apart. Times will never be better, and I don't see but they may begin the world as well as others, with little more than a will to work."

"You are right," said the stranger; "you are right; it was never intended that mankind should wait till circumstances were propitious, or it would have made the desire dependent upon circumstances, too."

"You have hit the right nail, sir -- you have spoken the truth; but still we must recommend caution."

"Very right. I wish them joy and prosperity," said the stranger.

There was now a bustle in the cottage. Some of those who had accompanied the stranger into the hut, now departed, while the remainder left a few moments after, in company, leaving the fisherman and his family with their guest.

"Well," said one, "of all the odd looking fish that ever I saw come out of the sea, I think he beats all; not but what I make every allowance, but I cannot make any in such a case, because he has not been drowned."

"He was quite insensible, and had been so for a long time. Don't you remember what he said about his becoming insensible immediately after the ship struck."

"Yes; I heard it all, but hang me if I can understand it. He is as if he had been bled to death, and then came to life."

"He ain't got much of a colour."

"No; but more than that, the dreadful deathly, or ashy paleness is fearful; and then his peculiar features, his long hair, flattened to his head by the water, and the teeth in his head, which appear as if they had been set with the express intention of enabling him to catch otters."

"That would be no easy task, either; but I must say, as you say, that there have been better looking men than he, at all events." * * * * *

In the fisherman's hut the stranger was willingly attended to by the fisherman and his family, without any invidious attention; and when he had changed his habiliments, he seated himself again by the fire, when some warm drinks and other refreshment were given him.

"I did not think to find any one alive when I went down to the beach," said the fisherman. "I thought all were lost."

"And I doubt not but they are all lost, save myself," said the stranger, blandly; "and though I do not appear much hurt by the occurrence, yet I feel as if the whole mass of my blood was changed, and that I should never

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again be what I was; that, in fact, I shall always carry about me the appearance, and certainly the feeling, of a man torn from the arms of death, and made to live."

"It does affect some people strangely," said the fisherman. "I know what shipwreck is myself, and, therefore, can easily guess what it is to those who are unused to the sea. I was the only one saved out of a whole crew."

"Indeed! then your case is identical with mine."

"In that respect it is," replied the fisherman; "but I was used to the dangers of the sea; and, though that makes no difference when you find yourself in the boiling waters, yet a man who has the fear of wreck constantly before his eyes, can see the danger — take more precaution, and is not so likely to lose that presence of mind which at such times is so valuable."

"So it is; though I took it very quietly, and stood still until I was thrown down by the first shock of the vessel."

"She struck more than once?"

"She did; four or five times; she was thrown upon the rocks in shallow water, I believe, as I understand these matters."

"Yes, it was so," said the fisherman — "it was so."

"Well, it was only when the waves left us that we came down with a dreadful crashing shock, which caused the vessel to shiver as if she had been but a leaf. Well, every time a wave swept towards us, it lifted the vessel off the rock, and carried her a few yards further, sometimes scraping and scratching her keel as she went along; at other times, she was lifted clear of the rocks, and then suddenly thrown upon them with great force, and then every timber separated."

"Just what might be expected."

"And just as it occurred," said the stranger.

"And, of course, the crew were carried into the sea, and drowned."

"Yes; but what became of them — I mean where they were carried to — I cannot tell; but I suppose among the tall rocks that I saw before the wreck. But why was I not carried there and left?"

"It is something that neither you nor I can tell," said the fisherman.

"Perhaps so; but I am safe, and only so to tell the disaster to others, not for a warning; for it can be none, but I am saved."

"You are. Perhaps you would like to lie down for an hour or two before daylight comes, and then we will take a walk down to the shore in the morning, and see if there is anything washed ashore."

"I am tired, and think that it would be of some service, if I can sleep; though I dare say I shall be dreaming of what I have seen and felt, and hardly dare to sleep, so great is the disturbance in my mind."

"Sit up, and welcome, by the fire," said the fisherman; "you can do so; it may be as well, perhaps, too — you may be able to sleep that way."

"No, no, I'll lie down on the boards — I am not particular upon such an occasion; and, as it has turned out, I shall be too much in need of rest to sit up. The warmth of the fire, too, draws me off, I can find, and I dare say you feel it too."

"It has that effect, as much as I am used to it," replied the fisherman; "but do what you please; I shall turn in till daylight, unless you want anything more."

"Nothing, thank you, my good friend, but a place to lie down on, and then I am quite content for the remainder of the night."

"There is a settle up in yon corner where you can sleep; it is rough and homely, but we have nothing otherwise here."

"No apology; I am too thankful for what I have escaped from, and for what I have received, to look hard at the mercies afforded me." * * * * *

The stranger said no more, but took the fisherman's advice and walked to the settle, and then lay down with his face towards the fire.

"Good night," said the fisherman; "pleasant slumbers."

"The same to you, my friend; I hope I have not dispossessed any of your family of their means of rest. I have, perhaps, deprived them of their bed."

"No, no; sleep in peace; we are all provided for. I sleep here," he said, as he was about to open the door; "and my daughter sleeps there," he added, pointing to a small door. "So, you see, we have our appointed places, and

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that on which you now sleep is retained for the use of any strange traveller or friend that may need it."

"Then good night," said the stranger, which was returned again by the fisherman, who entered his own room, leaving his guest lying on his bed, and looking around him by the light of the fire, which burned yet for some time.

Chapter CLX. THE NIGHT IN THE FISHERMAN'S HUT. -- THE MIDNIGHT FEAST OF BLOOD. -- THE CHASE, AND THE GUN-SHOT.

The stranger, as he lay, listened to the sounds that were emitted by, and occasionally opened his eyes to gaze upon, the flames, as they ran upwards; he watched the forked tongues as they played about the faggots, and then turned his eyes towards the various parts of the apartment as it was now and then illuminated with its warm glare.

What might have been his feelings after his escape it is difficult to conjecture, for he appeared not inclined to sleep, but to gaze about him and keep watch over the fire, which every now and then blazed up afresh; and his mind appeared to be intent upon something else than merely thinking of the past -- there was too much of inquiry and curiosity about it.

"The time has come round again," he muttered; "my blood requires renewal, my strength renovation, and no aliment will do that but maiden's blood."

A horrible expression of countenance came over him that must have caused a feeling of horror to have crept through the veins of any one who might have been near to see him; but, as it was, he was alone, and there was no one to be terrified.

"Yes, yes; I must have that supply, else though the sea may give up its dead, and the earth refuse to cover me, yet I may sink into that sleep I would so willingly escape from; then, indeed, I should suffer what I cannot bear to think of.

"Yet how near have I been to that death from which I have believed it impossible to return; but yet the moonbeams have found me, and I have again been re-animated, and the horrible appetite has returned which must have its periodical meal -- its terrible and disgusting repast. It must be done, aye, it must be done."

As he muttered, his lips met, and his long tongue was occasionally thrust out, as if he were anticipating the pleasures of the feast.

"Yes, yes; this very night must renew the life that has been this night restored to me. I must make a fresh attempt. I think he said his daughter lay in yonder chamber; in another hour I will adventure upon this scheme."

His eyes were fixed upon the door, which he appeared to watch and examine with the utmost care and avidity.

He watched, however, for some time, and the flames appeared to subside, and the embers gave out a dull, red glare, and some warmth.

"Now is the moment," he muttered, as he rose softly from his bed; "now is the moment -- all are asleep, and stillness reigns around me. I will go and ascertain if all be quiet, and then to my midnight orgies -- a feast that shall restore me to my life -- my former self."

He crawled out of the bed, and stood upright for a moment, and listened, and then, with a noiseless step, he crept to the door of the fisherman's bedroom, and then listened for some seconds, and muttered as if he were satisfied, --

"Yes, yes; they sleep sound enough, and will not readily awaken."

He then took a small cord, and tied the handle of the door to a nail on the post, so as to offer an impediment to egress from the sleeping-room, and then he went towards the other which the fisherman had told him belonged to his daughter. He paused, and listened at the door for a few moments, and then he said, --

"Yes, yes; that is the maiden's chamber -- that is sure to be her chamber -- her father said so, and I have no reason to doubt he told the truth, since he had no cause to lie; here, then, is the casket that contains all my treasure -- the elixir vitae of my life -- the undefiled blood of a maiden's veins."

He tried the door, but it was secured on the inside.

This, for a moment, disconcerted him, and he took a moment or two to consider what best could be done; and at length he saw a small chink in the wall, which he approached; then, peeping in, he saw that if he could enlarge the hole, he might push his hand in, and open the door by undoing the fastenings.

This was effected by means of a chisel which happened to be lying near at hand; then he opened it, and thrust in his hand and withdrew the bolt that held the door, and quietly opened it.

With cat-like caution he approached the bed where the fisherman's daughter lay. She was a beautiful girl, scarce eighteen, and, by a consent of all, the queen of the place, in respect of beauty.

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With greedy eyes the vampyre approached the bed on which lay the form of the sleeping maiden, and gazed upon her fair white neck and bosom — heaving with the sleeper's breath; and then, as if he could contain himself no longer, he eagerly bent down over her, and then, as her face was turned on one side, his lips and teeth approached the side exposed. * * * * *

A scream ran through the fisherman's hut that awoke its inmates in an instant, and which, though it banished sleep, yet it gave not the power of thought.

"Help! help! help!" screamed the maiden.

"'Tis Mary!" said the fisherman; "surely— — "

"Hasten, and see what 'tis that ails her. She never would scream so, unless in utmost peril; hasten, and see."

"Help! help! again screamed the maiden, as she struggled in the arms of the monster, who kept her in his powerful grasp while he sought the life current that crimsoned her veins with horrible desire.

"The door is secured; d — —n!" muttered the fisherman. "What does this mean? Give me my gun down, while I force the door."

The old woman handed down the gun, while the fisherman put his strength to the door, which quickly gave way and flew open.

"Here is your gun. Be quick; but do not be too hasty in its use. See to Mary and the shipwrecked voyager."

"Who secured my door, dame, but he?"

"The door! Ay, I remember — — hasten!"

"Help — help!" again shouted or screamed Mary, but not in so loud a voice as before; she was getting weaker, and just as the fisherman emerged into the large room, the faggots fell together and gave forth a sudden blaze, and in an instant the whole place was lighted up, and the fisherman's eye sought the couch of the stranger whom he had lodged, but the bed was empty.

"Gone!" he muttered — "gone!"

He turned his head in the direction of his daughter's bedchamber, and saw the door was open, and he heard a struggle and a sucking noise.

"Ha!" he muttered, and rushed in exclaiming — "What means this noise? Who calls for help?"

The appearance of the fisherman was so opportune and so sudden, and so intent was the vampyre upon the hideous meal, that he did not hear the approach of the fisherman, and it was not until the latter shouted that he turned and saw him.

"Tracherous and ungrateful villain!" said the fisherman, who was almost powerless from terror and astonishment.

The vampyre turned and dropped his victim on the bed, while he endeavoured to pass the fisherman; but the act recalled him to himself, and he made a blow at him with the but-end of the gun; but the vampyre jumped back, and the blow missed its intended object, and they both closed for a struggle.

The fisherman, however, found that he had one to do with whose strength was even greater than his own, however great that might be; and in a moment more he was thrown down, and the monster rushed across the outer room, oversetting the fisherman's wife; and forcing open the outer door, he fled.

"I am thrown," said the fisherman, rising; "but not done for. Mary, are you hurt?"

"Oh, my God — my God!" exclaimed the poor girl. "He had begun to eat me and suck my blood! I have the marks of his teeth in me."

"I'll have revenge upon him yet."

"Nay, father. He is some monster — do not go!"

"No, no," said his wife — "no, husband, do not attempt it! Strong he is; he may do you a mischief."

"I know," said the fisherman. "He has thrown me, and he has abused my hospitality; he is not fit to live. He has not, however, any means of fighting against the contents of my gun. I have got that loaded, and will punish him. Be he man or devil, I will make the experiment of following him."

All this took place in less time than it takes to relate it, and the fisherman rushed out of his hut to follow the stranger who had acted so badly.

It was now early dawn; and, though the waves still lashed the shore in angry violence, and kept up a ceaseless roar, yet the sky betrayed none of the signs of yesterday's storm, but was serene and calm, and not a cloud was to be seen — nothing but a dim, grey night pervaded all space.

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There was just light enough to see objects moving about, and when the fisherman got outside the hut, he saw, about a hundred yards or better before him, the form of the stranger, making for the woodland at the height of his speed.

The fisherman hastened to intercept him which, however, was unnecessary, for another, coming from that quarter, turned him, and he fled towards the sea, whither he was followed, and, when upon the cliffs, the fisherman fired, and the vampyre fell over and was supposed to have been drowned.

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Chapter CLXI. THE ASSASSINS ON THE RIALTO. -- THE ATTACK AND DEFEAT. -- THE STRANGER.

On the Rialto, one evening, as the sun was sinking in the golden west, a stranger was seen walking to and fro in deep musing, apparently unmindful of what was passing around him, or of the approach of evening, an hour when the remorseless assassin is known to stalk abroad in the streets of Venice, and there the dagger finds its victim.

Several individuals looked hard at the stranger in the cloak, but no one approached him, save those who passed him, and in doing so bestowed a passing gaze upon him, which was not returned, for he heeded no one. But he was not much open to recognition even if he were known, for the cloak with which he had enveloped himself was of such ample dimensions that it completely concealed him from the curiosity of the many; indeed, his face was hardly visible, for the fur collar he wore hid all save the bridge of a prominent nose, and his eyes, which had a peculiar lustre.

The evening still grew darker and later, and the passengers were fewer and fewer, but still the tall stranger walked slowly up and down; but no one ventured to say anything, though more than one had the inclination to speak; but the tallness of the man, and the point of the long rapier which appeared beneath the cloak, checked any inclination to familiarity, and induced a more voluntary courtesy than might at all times have been accorded.

There were, indeed, a small knot of three individuals, who kept near the same place, and whose eyes every now and then directed their glances towards the stranger, as if they regarded him with impatience.

These men were of a suspicious character; they all wore cloaks and slouched hats, but they had all seen some service, and were somewhat the worse for it. They conversed together, and walked away for a short space, but they returned presently, and still found the stranger as before at the same spot.

"Well," said one of the three, as they again met at a certain spot, "what think you now -- is he a spy or not?"

"I don't know what to think, Rubino. Spy or no spy, he will interfere with our duty to-night. I wonder what is best."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, would it be better to chance his presence, or shall we put him away? He evidently intends remaining there, the devil only knows how long."

"I believe you; but it appears to me that both plans are objectionable to the last degree, though I confess I can see no alternative whatever."

"Which do you consider the least objectionable plan? -- that is what we have to consider, for there are but two plans, and we cannot fail to do our business; should we do so, we should lose something, and we should never get any more employment."

"Good. If we attack him, we shall lose our chance with our better customer. We shall lose our man, at the least, if we get clear."

"He wears a long sword, and is a tall man. If he has any skill, and I dare be sworn he has, he will prove an ugly customer."

"We are three."

"That is very true; but an encounter only makes it the worse, and even if he be killed, which, if we are true to ourselves, he must be, we shall be obliged to quit the spot, and our main object defeated."

"That is most true; but shall we risk the attempt when there are two? It will make it too many odds; we shall not be so sure of success as we ought to be."

"We have the advantage of striking when we are not seen. A blow is sure when no hand is raised to ward it off."

"Ay, we should dispose of one before he has made any resistance, and before the other can offer any opposition or attempt any assistance, should the first have life enough to call out. Come, come, let's have no fear of the result; it is all in our own hands."

"Shall we not run more danger during the encounter of being taken by others who may come up, attracted by the fray? There is much to be said about making an alarm, because numbers will then be drawn upon us, and you

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know we have little sympathy among the multitude."

"No, no; we must make all possible haste, and then we may elude all possible chance. Strike the blow home, and then we may baffle all; for if he cry, he will fall, and those who help him, will raise him, and we shall have time to make our escape."

"No doubt -- no doubt; 'tis a good plan -- a very good plan, and one that I think will succeed; at all events, it only wants a good trial to make it succeed; you see, a strong arm, quick eye, and swift foot, is all that are necessary."

"I see; and one more quality."

"What is it?"

"Good luck."

"Granted; but that often comes from the manner in which a thing is done, and sometimes from the want of skill in those who should make it the reverse. Confusion for a moment gives us our luck, and then we are safe."

"So we are."

"How goes the time, Rubino?" inquired one of the assassins, for such they were.

"Oh, it yet wants one hour of the time in which we are to meet him."

"Well, then, we have more than a chance yet of our being undisturbed here, and the stranger may leave for some other part of the city; but our plan is fixed whether or no. Shall we turn into a vintner's?"

"No; we have no time for that, as yet."

"No time! What mean you Rubino?"

"That we have no time," replied Rubino, "to quit this neighbourhood, because you will perceive he may come any time these next two hours, which is a matter of some importance; for if he reach home alive, we have miscarried, and incur great displeasure, if not vengeance."

"We care but little for the vengeance of another."

"We may not individually; but you must know, this one knows too much of us and our haunts to be a safe and pleasant enemy; besides, we shall lose a liberal patron -- one who has given us some gold and promised us more."

"Ay, ay; he's the man to serve, and we will not disoblige him; we'll deal fairly by him, and he cannot expect more."

"And he will reward us liberally."

"Amen, say I. Now we have waited long enough, let us walk down the Rialto, and when we get to the other end, we can plant ourselves in such a position to watch his advance towards us, and then we can walk to him."

"Had we better not remain somewhere nearer at hand, because we can then start on him unawares, and thus have a blow without alarming him; and, if that be a deadly one, why, then we are safe. No one will know the mischief is done."

"So much the better; but come, we will continue our walk; it will lull suspicion, and when we come again, one of our number can creep into one of these alcoves, and there wait against his coming."

"And you will be at hand?"

"Of course; we shall keep upon the look out, so as to be near at the moment you commence the attack."

"But suppose I should fall?"

"Then you must continue the attack in a sharp and rapid manner, engaging all his attention to defend himself."

"Ay; and leave me to myself to the attack of that man yonder, should he be at hand at that moment."

"Oh, no, no. Do not hurt yourself. You need be under no fear of that sort, for you see it will only be man to man, and a fair encounter."

"It has never yet been fairly done, and will not be with me in this matter, don't you see. If help arrives, I'm lost; and, if I be lost without help, it will be the worse for you. I'll take my share of danger and mishap, but I won't be imposed upon by a comrade, and so you will understand it first."

"Who was desirous you should? Shall we not be at hand?"

"At your heels, I expect; but don't you see that, by giving a minute's time, you endanger all; for, if my first attack fail, he ought not to be allowed rallying time; he ought not to be permitted to recover himself, and attempt defence, indeed, because that gives time, and we may be beat by others coming from whatever quarter we may go."

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"We do not intend it. We only are desirous that one of us should be prepared to make the attack, while we are walking to and fro, and perhaps attracting his attention, and drawing it from you. Then we aid you; but, should you be foiled, why we will hasten as if we were coming to help him."

"I see; well, let it be so."

"Good. We can then act effectively, and we are the gainers by this stratagem. Now then, Roberto, do thou hide thyself in yonder alcove."

"I will. My dagger is sharp, and you know my arm is not usually a weak one, and that I have done some service with it ere now."

"Thou hast."

"And it will again do more."

"Hush! hasten in. I hear footsteps yonder. 'Tis he, I think. We will not go far, but within the reach of your eye; fifty yards, at most, will be the distance. We will take and come towards you the moment we find he has reached you."

"Good. Begone -- he comes."

The assassin stole into an alcove, and then paused in the deep shade of the place where he had concealed himself, and the other two walked down a short distance -- about a hundred and fifty yards or so -- and then paused and looked back.

"Do you see anything of them?"

"No; I don't at this moment. It is getting very dark."

"We had better return and see what happens. We shall get up in the very nick of time, and be able to take part in the fray."

"Well, be it so," replied the other. "I'll go with you; but we run some risk in encountering the stranger in the rapier and long cloak."

"Most true; but we shall not have taken any part in the affair; that will clear us of anything that may tend to inculpate us. We are right; and, if we find our comrade hardly pressed, we can aid him, and that at a time when it is unexpected by the other party. Hark! they are at it already."

"Come on."

They both hastened towards the scene of combat, towards which they both ran, for they knew their comrade's voice.

The other villain awaited the coming of the stranger, whom he was waiting to assassinate, as soon as his comrades had left him.

The unconscious stranger walked down the Rialto with a slow and steady gait, humming an air from some opera as he walked along, well pleased in his own mind. He wore his cloak open in front, and his sword dangling at his side, and altogether most unsuspecting of an attack.

Scarcely, however, had he passed the assassin's hiding-place, than the fellow rushed out and made a desperate blow at him with his dagger, which, however, miscarried, on account of the loose manner in which he wore his cloak; the blow was foiled by the folds of the garment, and the wearer turned round.

"Villain!" he exclaimed, "thou shalt have thy deserts;" and, as he spoke, he drew his sword, and became the assailant in his turn.

"Help! help!" shouted the villain, who found himself beset by one who would quickly make him repent his temerity.

At that moment the rest of the assassins came up, and commenced a furious attack upon the single stranger, who, of course, from being almost a victor, was immediately compelled to give ground to the three.

"Help! help!" shouted the stranger, as he was forced on one knee, and that with a wound; but at that moment help was at hand, and the tall stranger stepped up to his side, and casting his cloak on one side, and drawing his rapier, he ran one of the assailants through the body and he fell backwards dead.

A furious combat ensued between the stranger and the other two assassins, who were compelled to fight, so closely were they pressed by the stranger; however, after a few moments, they turned and fled.

The stranger then turned towards the wounded man, who was rising from the ground by the help of the pillar that was supporting the sides of the alcove, and then endeavoured to stanch the wound he had received.

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**Chapter CLXII. COUNT POLLIDORI'S PALACE. -- SIGNORA ISABELLA,
THE COUNT'S DAUGHTER. -- THE INTRODUCTION.**

The stranger walked up to him and offered his services, saying, --

"Are you hurt, signor? -- you bleed!"

"But slightly hurt, signor, thank you for that; you have saved my life. I had been cold meat, indeed -- a bloody corpse for all Venice to look upon to-morrow, but for your valour and stout assistance."

"Name it not, signor; but the rascals have been well paid. There lies one of them -- the others have escaped; but permit me, signor, to say, that the sooner you get away from this spot the better, for the knaves may return in greater force than before, or they will wait till you leave; by that time they will have rallied, and dart out upon you as you pass along."

"I do not fear that, signor, much; but the fact is, I am almost too weak to walk unaided."

"Permit me to render you the assistance you require. I am a stranger in this place, and therefore unused to your ways; but -- "

"Say no more, signor; I will accept of your services if you will accept of a lodging at my poor home. I have that which shall make you welcome -- heartily welcome; and the signora, my daughter, shall make you welcome, too."

"Signor, if I can be of service to you I will do so with pleasure. Lend me your arm, signor; but your wound is not stanch'd -- let me bind it more carefully and securely; you ought not to bleed from such a wound when bandaged."

"Perhaps, signor, you have had more to do with these matters than I. I am a peaceable Venetian of rank, and neither afraid nor unwilling to draw a sword in a good quarrel, shrinking not from some odds, but I have had no practice in these matters; times and circumstances have not been propitious."

"It matters not," replied the stranger; "you shewed what you were when you had nearly defeated one, and afterwards kept at bay three. He must be a man who can behave thus, sir; he must have the heart and conduct of a soldier -- you would be one did occasion serve -- no man can be more; but I have seen many climes, and have therefore some knowledge in these matters beyond the mere inward power and courage. I have, from sheer necessity, been compelled to mix in melees, and not from inclination."

"I thank you for your skill as a surgeon, for truly you have stopped the bleeding, which I had not been able to do myself."

"Lean on my shoulder, signor; it will enable you to walk better. Have you far to go?" inquired the stranger.

"No, signor; but we will take a gondola, it will be the easier travelling, and, moreover, it will land us at my house, where you shall be most heartily welcome. If we turn down here, we shall soon obtain the aid of a gondolier. I had intended walking, but I have enough of that for one night, even if I were able to walk, which I am not."

"As you please, signor."

As the stranger spoke he walked towards the place indicated by the wounded man, and in a few moments more they reached the grand canal, and finding a gondolier sleeping in his gondola, the stranger left his wounded companion to wake the sleeper to his duty, by shaking him.

"Hillo!" said the stranger, "will nothing wake you -- get up instantly, and about your duty. Do you always sleep here?"

"No, signor," said the man, sleepily.

"Well, then, are you engaged?"

"Yes, signor, if you engage me."

"Well, then, I do."

"Where to, signor?"

"Come with me to bring a wounded gentleman into the gondola, and he will tell you where to. Come, quick -- have you not yet awakened?"

"I'm awake, signor, and willing," said the gondolier, following the stranger to the spot where the wounded

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man was standing, and, by direction of the stranger, he aided the wounded signor into the gondola.

"Now, signors, I have but to know where you desire to go to."

"Row on until I tell you where to stop. Follow the course of the grand canal, and you will go right enough."

There was some time spent in silence, while the gondolier rowed as desired up the grand canal, until they came to a large mansion, which the wounded man gazed upon, and, after a moment's pause, as if he had a difficulty in speaking, he said, as he pointed to the building, --

"There, row up to yonder steps; there I will land -- that is my house."

The gondolier immediately obeyed the injunction, and pulled for the stairs, and when they reached the place, the gondolier stepped out and secured the gondola.

"Call out some of my people," said the wounded man, "call them out. I am very stiff, and not able to get out."

The gondolier obeyed, and in a few minutes more several men, all in livery, ran down the steps to the gondola, and lifted their master out, who appeared to be unable to do so of himself.

The gondolier was rewarded according to his deserts, and the stranger followed the wounded man into his own house, which was a most extensive building, and filled with servants, and furnished in the richest manner, displaying magnificence and wealth to a degree that was scarce to be surpassed in Venice.

They were shown into an apartment replete with every appointment that wealth or luxury could suggest, and the wounded man was placed on a sofa, and his attendants stood round him as if waiting his orders.

"Signor and stranger," he said, "welcome to my house, as the preserver of my life. All I have here is at your service."

"I am obliged," replied the stranger, with a dignified acknowledgement of the courtesy -- "I am obliged; but I cannot recognise on my part any such right. If I have done you service -- as I will not affect to believe I have not -- still you overrate the amount of it. But I will accept of your hospitality for this night; for I am a stranger in Venice, and have little or no knowledge of the best course to pursue."

"Remain here."

"But you had better dispatch some one for aid," interrupted the stranger. "You are in pain, at this very instant; send for some assistance. You require the aid of a leech immediately."

"I am faint -- very faint," he replied.

"Hasten," said the stranger -- "hasten some of you to fetch a leech, instead of losing your wits in silent astonishment."

The servants immediately bustled about, and seemed to have awakened from a trance, and were seen running in different directions. The room was soon cleared, and the tall stranger seated himself by his wounded host.

"In me you see the Count Polidori."

The stranger bowed.

"I am not a native of this city, though now one of her favoured citizens. I have left the land of my birth because I and my rulers could not agree, and I ran some danger in staying against their will, and I have settled and married here."

"Our adopted country is that which demands our care and preference," replied the stranger. "That, at least, is my opinion."

"No doubt. I am now," he continued, "a widower."

"Your lady is dead?"

"Yes; I am sorry to say so. I have, however, one child living at home, and one who is serving his country in her fleets, an honour to our house; but my greatest comfort is the dear image of my lost wife -- my daughter."

"Is she here now?"

"Yes; in this palace. Signora Isabella is devoted to her father, and would not for the world do aught that would give me a moment's pain; indeed, she would die for me rather than I should feel displeasure."

"Such a daughter must be a treasure."

"She is a treasure."

"And what an inestimable jewel would she be as a wife."

"She will be when the day comes when she will mate, which I hope will be before I die; for I should be too anxious respecting the worth of the man who was to be her husband, to permit me to die happy, unless I saw and approved of the choice, or chose the individual myself."

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"I see you are more anxious," said the stranger, mildly, "in providing future happiness for your daughter, rather than in hoarding wealth or titles for her."

"I am," said the count.

"And a most laudable ambition, too; an ambition that few parents do not neglect in the pursuit of one of a different character -- either some young love, or some one who is endowed largely with worldly goods or titles."

"My Isabella will have enough of both; and, therefore, she will not need to seek for them; but she will not throw herself away upon any nameless adventurer who may love her fortune better than herself."

"That would be as cruel a neglect as the other," replied the stranger; "and, in my opinion, more culpable of the two."

"So it would."

At that moment the door opened hastily, and a light step was heard, and before the stranger could turn round, a lovely young female rushed to the side of the count, throwing herself on her knees, saying, --

"Oh, heavens! my dear father, what has happened? Are you hurt? For Heaven's sake, my dear father, what is the matter?"

"Little or nothing, my dear Isabella."

"But you are wounded. Ah! there is blood! My God! my God!"

"Hush, Isabella. I am wounded, but not hurt seriously."

"I pray Heaven it may be so. But what sacrilegious hand could be raised against you? You have wronged no one."

"I am not aware of having done so, certainly," said the count; "but that does not always give any security to the wealthy. They will sometimes destroy them from motives apart from individual revenge."

"The monsters! But have the villains been secured?"

"One has paid the forfeit of his life for his temerity and villany; the rest fled."

"Ah! what will these assassins not risk?"

"Well, my dear Isabella, I have answered your inquiries, and now, perhaps, you will see if you be alone with me."

"Alone with you!" repeated Isabella, not quite comprehending the words; but she looked up, and her eyes encountered those of the stranger, who was gazing earnestly upon her, and she started, as she rose and said, --

"Excuse me, signor, excuse me -- I knew not any one was present."

"Nay," said the stranger, "filial love and respect need no excuse, signora. Do not think so badly of me as to imagine I can think otherwise than you were actuated by the tenderest impulses."

"Your kindness, sir-- -- "

"Isabella," said the count, interrupting her, "but for this gentleman's timely and efficient aid, I should at this moment have been a corpse in the streets of Venice."

"You, my father?"

"Yes, my child. This signor came up just as I was wounded and beaten down, and saved me from death. He killed one of my assailants, while he put to flight the other two, who left their dead companion in the streets. Thank him, my child, for he is my preserver, and he deserves thanks for the deed as well as for the bravery with which it was done, for he ran great risks in such odds."

"He must. Signor, I know not how to thank you or what to say; the greatness of the obligation paralyzes me, and I have not words to tell you how grateful I feel for your goodness and courage; but 'tis an obligation that can never be forgotten or ever repaid -- it is impossible."

"My dear signora, permit me to say you rate my services too highly."

"Nay, that is quite impossible; for my father's life I prize far before my own -- before anybody in the world; and to save that is to lay me under the heaviest obligation it is possible to impose upon me."

"Say no more, signora; I will not underrate it after what you have said; but you must say as little about it as you will. I am happy, however, to have done any act worthy of your thanks."

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Chapter CLXIII. THE OPINIONS OF DOCTOR PILLETTO. -- THE STRANGER'S ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF. -- THE WELCOME OF THE SIGNORA.

At that moment the door opened, and a servant announced the arrival of a leech, the famous Doctor Pilletto, who forthwith entered the apartment, and advanced towards the couch on which the wounded man lay.

"Oh, doctor, do what you can for my father," said Signora Isabella.

"I will, signora," replied the doctor. "I will; but what are these hurts or his disease? for I see he has been taken very badly; but why this paleness? You appear to have lost blood."

"I have bled, doctor, and I want you to dress my wound. I am hurt in the side here, and but for my friend here I should have been hurt mortally."

"It was not a duel then?" said the doctor.

"No, no, doctor, no, no; it was an attempt at assassination, and I have escaped the death some one with more enmity than courage had doomed me to; but, at the same time, I am free, and one of his agents has perished."

"Tis but just," said the doctor; "but I must now see the wound; with your good leave, we'll strip the wounded part and apply bandages to it, so as to secure it; after which something else must be done."

The wounded Pollidori was stripped, and, after some exertion, the wound was dressed, and all bleeding stopped.

"What is your candid opinion concerning my wound, doctor?" inquired the count, "What do you think will be the result? I would be truly informed of whatever probability of danger there may be remote or immediate, as the case may be; tell me, I beseech you, doctor?"

"I will, count."

"I have those things to do which are important, and the execution of them depends upon your answer; so do not mislead me."

"I will not; I cannot form so clear a judgment of your case as I can in a few days hence, when I may see the progress of the wound towards healing; though at present I see no signs of danger, yet some may come."

"You do not consider the wound dangerous of itself?" said the stranger.

"No, not of itself; but it is so close to a mortal part that it cannot be considered free from danger; indeed, it may become so. A little more on one side would have made it quickly fatal; but, as it is, if it heal well, there will be no danger. You must keep your couch for some days."

"That will be a lighter evil than any other," replied the count.

"You have lost much blood, and that alone will make you very weak, and it will take some time before you will be entirely recovered from your present state, and then your wound will probably be healed."

"And what you appear to think may be dangerous, is only any possible interruption from the wound itself."

"It does so happen sometimes from bodily infirmity, it shews itself in healing, and the wound, which now appears healthy, may turn to gangrene, and then the worst may be apprehended."

"It may," said the stranger; "but these things are only the worst that may happen in extreme cases."

"Exactly," said the leech.

"And you have seen nothing in this case to induce you to anticipate any such result as this -- it is only what may happen."

"That is all. It appears to me that all is well at present."

"Then I think the count had better be left to himself in quiet, and he may have a good mind upon his recovery."

"It will be best," said the doctor.

"I am fatigued and sleepy," said the count; "I would be alone. Daughter, you must entertain this gentleman as I would do were I able to do so. Signor, the signora will do the office of hostess -- excuse so cold a welcome."

"Name it not," said the stranger. "I am well cared for. A welcome from such a one is well worth the acceptance of a prince, much less that of a stranger unknown in Venice. I thank you for it."

"Say no more on that head," said the count. "I came here almost a refugee, and quite a stranger myself."

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"Will you come this way, signor," said Signora Isabella; "we will leave my poor father to himself, he will sleep."

The stranger rose, and Doctor Pilletto also, both following the signora, who led them into a separate, but splendid apartment, and entreated them to sit down, and apologised for her own want of spirits to entertain them suitably.

"For that matter," said the doctor, "I am by no means surprised; for such a mishap can never be heard of without producing lowness of spirits."

"And such a misfortune is always productive of grief," said the stranger. "Signora, say no more, I would not interfere with your grief. I do not wish to stop it, and shall feel myself a bar to your own feelings if you say any more. I am made welcome, and feel myself so."

"You are, sir — your kindness deserves no less; but I pray you tell me how this affair occurred, in which you have been of such signal service to my father, in saving his life?"

"To tell you that, signora, I must first tell you who and what I am."

"I do not wish to be thought unduly curious," replied signora.

"Not at all. I am bound to acknowledge you have a right to it, for you have no introduction with me which usually supplies the place of an account of who and what we are; therefore I'll tell you, though I cannot boast of being more than a simple chevalier of now no fortune, having left my country because I raised my voice against the abuses of state; therefore I am but a nameless and fortuneless stranger."

"Many a worthy gentleman has been in such a plight before now," observed the doctor. "I have known many such."

"And I am one. Not that I am without means," added the stranger; "I have been lucky enough to provide against such a calamity as that which has befallen me, though not to the extent I could have wished."

"You are fortunate, chevalier."

"I am so far. I came but this morning to Venice; I landed here, and agreed to meet the captain of the vessel, who promised to meet me on the Rialto, to conduct me to some quiet and respectable changehouse where I could lodge."

"And he met you not?"

"No. While I was waiting for him, I heard a cry for help, and found, upon running up, the Count Pollidori beaten to the earth, beset by three villains, who had already wounded him in the manner you have seen; and I at that time stepped up, and, being unexpected, the men were confused, and one of them fell, mortally wounded; and, after a little further desperate fighting, they all fled."

"It was fortunate you yourself were not beaten down too with such odds; for these men are usually desperate."

"True; but, you see, one was gone, and they could not tell how it might be with the count — they did not know how far he might be able to join in the fray again, and if he were to do so, there would immediately be an equality between us, and such men do not seek such a fight."

"Truly not, chevalier," replied the signora — "truly not. When they are safe and secure in their deeds of blood, they will perpetrate them; but in fair contest such men never shine — their deeds are of darkness."

"Most true — most true."

"But they have a deal of ferocity," said the stranger; "and, when they can, will pour out blood like water; but what amazes me is, that one like the count, your father, should have been beset by such villains. They must have had some object to accomplish in getting rid of him by such means."

"Private enmity."

"Indeed! It must be a bad state of things."

"It is, chevalier. It is a sign of great degeneracy in the state; but it is so. For gold you can procure the death of any man in Venice."

"Horrible!" said the stranger. "I have heard of such things; but I deemed them fabulous, or, at least, overrated."

"No, no — I fear not; and yet, who could have an enmity so deep as only to be healed by blood? and yet, the good and great have as many enemies as the wicked, for they are always opposed to each other."

"Undoubtedly," said the doctor; "good and bad are always antagonists."

"Exactly. What, however, is the worst in these cases is, the bad very often get the better of the good, which is the reverse of what ought to be done; because, you see, if we are to suppose that there is a power above that rules

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men's actions, surely we might expect to see goodness manifest in the majority of cases; whereas, we usually see, to a much greater extent, the success of evil."

"Not always."

"Not always, certainly," said the doctor; "but the exception proves the rule. Goodness ought to be the great object of men's lives; but it is not; yet it ought to rule, and we must endeavour to be ruled by it, despite the way of the world, which is often, as we daily see, the reverse of what it ought to be."

"But," added the chevalier, "when ambition rules the minds of men, you will find that all other principles give way."

"It is so; but why, I cannot see."

"Because 'tis the master emotion of the mind," said the stranger.

"And ambition appears to possess the souls of those who govern, whether for good or for evil," said the signora. "Some are ambitions of being rulers — some of being conquerors, and some of politicians; but they are all moved to it by ambition."

"Aye," said the stranger, "the lover is ambitious of the smiles of his mistress, though ill fortune will, now and then, deny him the good luck to win them."

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Chapter CLXIV THE COUNT POLLIDORI'S RECOVERY. -- THE INTERVIEW WITH THE SIGNORA ISABELLA. -- THE CONSENT.

A few days' confinement placed the count beyond the reach of danger. His wound healed rapidly and favourably, but which was more than anticipated by the cautious leech, who abstained from saying so, but took his daily seat beside his patient's bed, and, with his prosy and imperturbable gravity, he continued to give his advice.

"Count," he said, " your wound is healing."

"I feel it is so," said the count.

"But you must be cautious. I would not have you be too sanguine, or trust your feelings too much."

"I do not; but I may take wine?"

"Indeed, I would recommend you not to do so; for wine is inflammatory, and you are likely to suffer for it."

"And yet I took a bottle last evening."

"Last evening, count?" said the physician.

"Yes; I speak truly."

"I doubt it not; but it was very imprudent -- very imprudent, indeed; for, though half a bottle may do no hurt to a man in full health, yet a whole can do him no good, even if it do him no harm; but, in your case, it is dangerous."

"It might be; but surely the danger is past now?"

"If you have taken it over twelve hours -- though four--and--twenty would be better."

"It is over twelve hours."

"'Tis well; but it was hazardous; you are fast getting well, and, as it happens, you have no fever, or other evil changes about you; therefore, you may continue your wine, but not in such quantities."

"I will be more cautious; but, Piletto, what is your opinion of my guest?"

"Your preserver?"

"Yes; the same."

"He is one of the most learned men I ever met with; even professed scholars have not been found so full of knowledge."

"That speaks something for his youth."

"Most undoubtedly."

"But what think you of him as a man of the world?"

"I think he has a vast fund of information; he has had an enlarged experience of society, and has visited, I think, all the continent of Europe; he understands their languages and manners, too, and has the appearance of a traveller, and a man used to the best and most distinguished society."

"That is just my opinion of him."

"I understand he is from France."

"Yes."

"A refugee, in point of fact, I suppose, without means."

"No, he appears to have means, and hopes that times may so alter to permit his return, and the resumption of his former fortune."

"I understand as much, and he has spoken of people whom I know well in France, that would not associate with any beneath their degree; and he has told me things they would have divulged to none, save their equals and families."

"It is my opinion of him."

* * * * *

The doctor took his leave, and the count was again left to himself, and he began evidently to ponder over something in his mind, which appeared to demand his attention, and he, for some time, sat immoveable.

"My daughter," he murmured, "is a rich reward even for such a deed. I do not pit my life against her's; no, no; she is by far the most valuable; she I love more than life, and would provide for her in a manner that shall procure

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her future happiness, rather than her immediate approval.

"The dear girl does not well understand these matters; she does not know that present pleasure may be followed by future pain. She knows not that we should forgo the present, to ensure future happiness."

He paused a moment, and then he continued, --

"But I cannot be mistaken in this man. No, he has done a deed, which, though I value it not at so high a price, yet gratitude impose upon me the necessity of showing the highest consideration. She is fancy free; and I do not see there will be any difficulty in the way whatever."

At that moment the door opened, and Signora Isabella entered, and advanced towards the couch on which he lay.

"My father!"

"Ah, Isabella, I was but then thinking of you."

"Of me, father? I come to see how you are. Our good guest and preserver had been telling me he is quite sure you are much better than Doctor Pilletto will admit; for he is slow and cautious to a degree."

"My dear, he is quite right -- I feel it."

"Oh, how joyful I am!"

"What think you of our guest, Isabella? Do you not think him a man well worthy of our warmest esteem and gratitude?"

"Indeed he is, father -- he is noble."

"I think so -- the true nobility of soul can be seen in him; to such a man as the chevalier, would I see my Isabella united; to such a man could I confide my daughter's happiness, for he would secure it."

"What mean you, father?"

"That the stranger, of whom you speak so highly, is to be your future husband; the preserver of the father will not act unkindly by the child."

"My father, I am stunned."

"Yes, my dear daughter, I have fully settled this matter in my own mind; he has asked your hand -- go see him -- you have my blessing. I am sure he will be happy. Isabella, you never disobeyed your father; such an act would be the cruellest stab that ever was planted in my bosom."

"But when," said Isabella, almost trembling; "but when will this be? When am I to be given away, father, as you would a present of flowers?"

"Isabella, when have I deserved, when have I had such an answer from thee? Let me have no more of this."

"But when have you fixed as a time upon which I am to be sent away from home to strangers?"

"You will not leave this palace, Isabella; you and your husband will always be here, and I shall have the satisfaction of seeing the happiness I have planned and made. He will be a father to the child, as well as a husband."

"I do not wish for any such change. I am happy, but shall be otherwise, if I am compelled to wed."

"Compelled, Isabella, compelled! Do you speak of being forced, when I wish it? Now that I have settled it in my own mind, love and duty to me, and gratitude to this gentleman, all conspire to point out how you should act."

"But when, father, when?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow!" repeated Isabella, in mournful accents.

"Yes, my child; 'tis better done at once -- 'twill, at all events, save any of those unnecessary thoughts that might disturb you."

"My father! my father!" said the young lady, as she sunk upon her knees before him.

"Well, my child?"

"Pardon me for once begging a favour of you."

"What mean you by such words?"

"I wish a longer interval to be allowed me before I am -- I am -- "

"Married," said her father.

"Yes, father; that is the dreadful word."

"Isabella, mind, my love, what my wishes are."

"I have heard them, father; but give me a week -- indeed, you cannot decently bring this matter to a

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conclusion before the end of that time. I have had no previous warning from you, or this stranger, that such a thing was in contemplation."

"If I grant it you, my Isabella, I must be obeyed."

"You shall be obeyed, father," said Isabella, with an effort, "if it cost me my life, and it will be near it; but let me keep my room until that period is up, and then do with me what you will."

"Be it so, Isabella; though it will look ungracious to our guest, yet I will endeavour to excuse you with the best grace I can."

The Lady Isabella was deathly pale, and, as she rose, she staggered, and could scarce support herself out of the apartment.

Chapter CLXV THE WEDDING MORNING. -- THE NEW ARRIVAL. -- THE DISAPPERANCE OF THE VAMPYRE BRIDEGROOM.

The signora retired to her own chamber, and remained there for many hours; but during that time two messengers had left the mansion secretly, and then all was still. The lovely and beautiful Isabella, however, was not to be seen in her usual walks, or at her father's board, as was her wont. She was only seen within the precincts of her own apartments, pallid, sad, and sorrowful.

"Your daughter, count," said the stranger, one morning, "does not appear as usual. I trust she is quite well?"

"Yes; quite well."

"I hope I have given no cause of offence if so, I hope I may be informed of my error, that I may speedily amend it."

"There is none, chevalier; but my daughter, Isabella, has asked a week's preparation for the nuptials -- which week she will pass in her own apartments secluded, and at the end of which time, she leaves them for your protection, and which will, I trust, be to her happiness."

"It shall be my business to make her happy, and, for want of good will and hearty endeavour, she shall never lack content and bliss. I have every presage of a most happy and felicitous life in the future. I am sure she will be happy."

"It is my great hope, chevalier; it is the one object of my life. I would it were settled, and the affair over. I should die unhappy if I thought poor Isabella in the hands of any one who would not use her as she deserved to be. She is of herself a treasure."

"She is -- she is."

"And when she is once a wife, she will not look for a father's protection, neither will she need it. My death, when it does happen, will be a great and heavy blow; but it will be less when she has the comfort and consolation of a husband to console her for what would otherwise be irreparable."

"Yes, it would have the effect of deadening the blow, and of shortening the duration of its intensity, though it will be by no means prevented."

"I cannot say I should desire it."

"No, certainly not; and Signora Isabella never could forget such a parent."

"I have done my duty, I hope."

"And many congratulate yourself, count; but then, with regard to Isabella, she will meet me as usual here on the day of the ceremonial"

"Most assuredly."

"And I am to be denied her company till then?"

"Yes; she will meet you on the morning at the altar."

"Be it so -- but I could have been happy in her society. At any rate I must be so, by reflecting that I shall soon be the favoured, happy husband of Isabella, for with her my happiness will be complete."

"And my happiness will be complete, in knowing her's is so."

"I could have wished that some of those who have known me in France had been here to see my happiness; but that cannot be."

"Could you not send to them?"

"There would not be time for their return. And, moreover, if there had been, I question whether I ought to hold any communication with them, lest I bring them under the ban of the government, and I may not do that."

"Truly, you have the same feelings as I used to have; but I have long since ceased to feel any of that kind of interest."

"Time cures that."

"It does; and you will find it will heal all those wounds which such a separation from your country causes you."

"I hope so. My offences there they will never forgive." * * * * *

Thus conversed the stranger and the count, and thus six days passed, during which time the Signora Isabella

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was seen by none save her attendants, who were few, and most of her time was spent in tears and prayers.

She had a heart full of grief, but she dared not disobey her father, he whom she loved so well, and whom she had never thought for one moment as being opposed to her own ideas of propriety and her own wishes. She had always been taught to suppress her own, and submit to his.

Thus it was now, at the eleventh hour, she had no means of fortifying herself in any preconceived liking she may have had.

Submission was all she had learned — a blind and willing submission to a fond and doating parent. She knew no other course of action.

Her heart, however, had other yearnings. She had loved another; but she knew not how to act. She dared not even entertain the thought of throwing herself at her father's feet, and imploring him to save her from perpetual sorrow — much less did she think of opposing him; but she had done this much.

In the first moment of her terror and anguish, she had written off to her brother, informing him of her danger; but, at the same time, she had advised nothing, and expressed no wish — only told him the fact and her fears. * * * * *

The wedding morning arrived, and the house of the count gave indications of the festivity; and, with the day, came guests richly dressed, and the bells rang a merry peal upon the occasion, and the count was in high spirits; but the bride was not seen.

"How is Signora Isabella, your daughter?" inquired one of the guests.

"She is as well as maiden modesty will permit."

"I have not seen her."

"Nor I."

"Nor you!" replied the guest, astonished.

"No; she has secluded herself, but will appear presently, when the bell rings for the service. The fact is, she cannot leave her father, even for the arms of a husband, without feeling a grief for the change."

"I hope she will be happy."

"I have no doubt of it; the man is worthy of her."

"And capable of making her happy, I hope."

"I have no doubt of that."

"Hark! the bell sounds; is that the signal?"

"Yes; follow on. I will bring my daughter forth;" and, as he spoke, he left the guests, who hurried to the chapel, and found the stranger awaiting his bride with some impatience.

He acknowledged the courtesy of those who came to him, and looked towards a small door, which presently opened, and the count and his daughter appeared. She was of marble paleness, and no signs of happiness were seen in her face. She trembled, and her whole soul seemed to be intent on something afar from her presence.

She lifted her eyes and gazed upon the throng; but apparently saw none — or not those whom she wished. Her father spoke to her; she heaved a deep sigh, and appeared to be resigned to her fate. * * * * *

The ceremony commenced, and Isabella stood; but her eyes occasionally sought the chapel door; and in a few moments more, before the important part was concluded, a bustle took place near the door, and, immediately afterwards, some officers, in the Venetian uniform, entered the chapel, among whom was the young count, Isabella's brother, and with him a young officer, into whose arms she instantly threw herself, and fainted.

"Father," said the young count — "father, this must not be."

"Why not, my son?" said the count.

"Because my sister loves another, and yon man is a monster."

"What mean you, sir?" said the chevalier. "If you were other than what you are, your words would beget a different answer."

"You are a vampyre," replied a young Neapolitan, who stepped forward. "I knew you before. Know you not the holy father whom you murdered?"

"'Tis false. I'll bring one to prove it."

As the chevalier spoke, he crossed the chapel, and left the place; but he did not appear again; and, upon inquiry, he had quitted the palace in a gondola, and never reappeared.

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Chapter CLXVI. THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN. -- THE MURDER AT THE GIBBET'S FOOT. -- THE RIDE TO THE GOLDEN PIPPIN.

The evening set in a stormy mood; sudden, gusty showers rattled against the traveller; whilst the wind swept over the country, bending the tall trees, and whistling round the peasant's cot, and making the chimneys appear as if they were the residences of imprisoned spirits, which moaned and groaned most dismally to hear.

The clouds came rapidly across the sky; now darkening the earth, and now they had fled past, leaving the moonbeams pouring a flood of light upon the fields and roadways; but this was soon followed by another darkness, a cold rain, and rushing wind, the night being inclement and very boisterous -- not to say a night too bad to permit travelling.

It was late on such a night, when down a lone cross-road a single horseman might be seen to ride slowly and carefully. He was wrapped up in a large cloak, and rode a powerful horse, and appeared to be somewhat tired.

There was much difficulty in travelling over a bad road, that was loose and shifty, with here and there a slough of some magnitude.

In a very wild and desolate spot stood a mound of stones that had been heaped at the foot of a gibbet, and had been collected there in consequence of the unpopularity of the occupant of the instrument of punishment.

On the gibbet, swinging to and fro, was the body of a malefactor, hung in chains -- an awful and disgusting spectacle -- whose death no one regretted, inasmuch as he was the terror of the whole neighbourhood.

It was the body of a highwayman, or of a robber, who had committed all kinds of depredations, and several murders. He was the son of a person of property, but addicted to vicious courses, and, to support them, he had recourse to robbery and murder.

Several of his former friends were robbed, and at length his own father fell by his hands, when he refused to give up his purse in the road at this spot. His own son shot him through the heart.

This was the last crime he ever committed; for he was taken and tried, when enough was proved that would have hung a hundred men; and there was not one man who could, or who would, speak one word in his favour. He was executed; and so detested was he by all, that every one who came by this spot threw a stone, until it grew, by these means, a goodly heap, which remained a memento of their hate.

It was this spot the stranger was nearing, and to which he appeared to look up with some degree of either curiosity, or interest; but, before he got there, there was another horseman riding along the country lane, and who would arrive there about the same time as the first; but when he came there, it was easy to perceive that he was not alone, but another horseman was in waiting beneath some trees, and hidden from the traveller.

In a few moments more, the traveller reached the spot, and, looking up at the dead body that was swinging to and fro in the night air, the other horseman rode up; upon which the traveller was about to push his horse forward at an increased speed, when he found that there was not space enough.

"Which side do you take?" he inquired of the stranger.

"Stand and deliver!" was the reply.

"That is uncivil," replied the stranger, "and a request that I do not feel at all disposed to consent to."

"Deliver your money and a pocket-book, or you are a dead man."

"Nay," said the stranger; "I have means of defence, too."

And, as he spoke, he pulled out a bright, double-barrelled pistol, which he levelled and cocked, saying, as he very leisurely did so, --

"Beware! you are playing with a determined man. I am not disposed to play. Get out of my way, or you are a dead man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the other, and made way at the same moment, thus bringing himself alongside the traveller, leaving him room to go on. "You are not to be frightened -- well, well, go on."

The traveller put his spurs to his horse, but at the same moment received a bullet from the treacherous highwayman.

"Ha!" cried the traveller, putting his hand to his side, and in a moment more he staggered and fell over the side of the horse on to the ground.

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"Ha, ha, ha!" said the highwayman, who immediately dismounted; but before he could search the body, the other horseman came up at a gallop.

"Well, Fred, have you quieted him?"

"I have."

"Resisted, then?"

"Yes. Have you got your lantern?"

"Yes; but it is not yet lighted. But that is soon done."

"Then let us have it as quick as you can; for he has fallen down here in a slough, and I should like to get the money without more mire than I am obliged to put up with."

"Here it is," said the other, handing the lantern -- a small one, which he had lighted by means of some chemical matches.

The highwayman took the lantern, and, after some examination, he secured the pocketbook and the purse, and having done this, he examined the fingers, but saw no rings and no watch, and he said to his companion, --

"Just come here. Did you ever see such a set of features as these? They are truly strange and singular; I could never forget them."

"Indeed! I must have a look at them," said his companion, dismounting and bending over the body; and when he looked at them, he said, --

"I saw that man to-day where I dined, and thought he took the other road, and there waited for him."

"Did you, though?"

"Yes, till I was tired; and then I came across the country in search of you, but did not expect you to have any quarry."

"Did you ever see such a countenance? it is most strange and ghastly."

"Yes, it is; but he has died a violent death, you see, and therefore there is much to be done by way of allowance."

"Yes, yes, I know all that; but the nose, mouth, and teeth-- --"

"They are not the most agreeable in the world, certainly. Well, well, it don't matter; you have done all your business with him, have you not?"

"I have got all, I believe," said the other. "He has no watch or chain -- not even a ring has he got on his finger."

Perhaps you'll find enough in his purse and pocket-book to console you; though I must say, Ned, that he dined very sparingly. But no matter the amount; ride on, for you know it is not a good plan to stand longer here than necessary; for we may have other riders down upon us."

"Not very likely, on this road, and as this hour; but 'tis bad. I'm off, and he will remain behind till found by some frightened peasant or other, who will go to the nearest market town, with a frightful account."

"Ride away; I hear horses' feet, I think."

"I am ready; forward! ho!"

The two highwaymen rode off at a rapid rate, conversing as they went; but yet it was in suppressed tones for some distance; and after some riding, one of them pulled up his horse, partially, saying, --

"Well, I don't think it wise we should thus wear our steeds out; there is no need of our riding for life; our horses never ought to be put to their mettle, unless there be plenty of occasion, which there is not."

"No -- all is right, to-night."

"Have you done much lately, Ned?"

"No; I have been rather upon the seek than find; I have been looking out brightly, but have not been successful."

"I have myself only done moderately; but I have done better than I should have done, because I was fortunate enough to come across a fat grazier who had more money than any three or four persons I have met lately."

"Your fortune is somewhat like mine."

"You have met with little good then, Ned."

"Indeed, I have not; but it is a long lane that has no turning,"

"Yes; indeed, it is."

"However, I hope this queer-looking customer will reward one for one's pains; if you can but keep the game a

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going, you are sure to succeed in the end; 'tis only two years or better since I first began to ride."

"That is, put a period to other people's rising."

"Exactly."

"Well, then, where do you intend to put up for the night? for I suppose you do not intend to stay out all night any more than myself."

"No; I think of going on until I come to 'The Golden Pippin,' where I intend to stay for the night. The landlord can wink hard at his friends, and not know they are in the house, or he can tell them a thing if they want to know anything at all to their interest."

"He's the sort of man; I know him. I was thinking of going there; I don't know better or snugger quarters than are to be had at his hostel."

"Then we'll have a good supper and a bottle at 'The Golden Pippin.'"

"With all my heart; but you don't think there'll be any danger of our being pursued for this matter."

"Oh, dear, no; the direct road lies another way, and we shall be quite fifteen miles from the spot where the body lies."

"So far."

"Yes; we have come over the ground very rapidly, and have gone more than two-thirds of that distance. When we get there we shall be safe, easy, and comfortable; and right good wines are there to be had at 'The Golden Pippin.'"

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Chapter CLXVII. THE HORRORS OF THE NIGHT. -- THE DISCOVERY IN THE ROAD. -- CONTENTION BETWEEN MAN AND HORSE. -- COMFORTABLE QUARTERS IN THE GOLDEN PIPPIN.

The malefactor's body swung to and fro on the gibbet, and the chains squeaked and groaned as the wind impelled the body's motions. The wind itself whistled heedlessly by, and the transient, but heavy shower passed on, heedless of the deed of blood that had been perpetrated beneath its monitory shadow.

Now and then there was a little light, and then the body might be seen heaped up, and lying in the mud and mire, which was all discoloured with the blood of the fallen man -- he was motionless. The rain fell on him, but it mattered not -- the body felt it not. The wind blew the cloak about, but the body remained quiet, and nothing appeared to spare the body.

There was no one nigh; that was a lonely spot, and that was tenanted by two dismal gypsies. The body of the malefactor swang to and fro while the body of the murdered traveller lay quit enough.

The clouds travelled across the face of the moon, and intercepted her light from the earth; but yet it was light enough at intervals to enable the traveller to see his way on foot, or on horseback.

About two hours after that in which the traveller had been stopped and murdered, there came another individual riding towards the scene.

This was a countryman -- a grazier, who was well-mounted, and came along at a rapid rate, having a stout trotting nag under him.

When he neared the spot where the murder had been committed, he gave a look up at the disagreeable object -- the gibbet, and when he had done so, he put the spur to his horse's side, with the intention of going by at a quickened pace, exclaiming as he did so, --

"This is no pleasant place at nine o'clock at night. I wish I were at the Golden Pippin, instead of here."

As he spoke, he pushed his horse, as he manifested a design to stop; but the animal, instead of going past, reared up.

"Hilloa! brute. What art after now, eh?"

The spur was again applied, but the animal only became more and more unmanageable, and the rider near losing his seat; but he was, nevertheless, the more anxious to get onward, for the neighbourhood was not pleasant; added to which, it was a wet and dismal night, and late for a cross-road.

"Curse you!" muttered the grazier; "what the deuce is the matter with you? -- did you never see the gibbet before? If thee hadn't, I should not have been surprised at thee shying at the man swinging on the gibbet; but thee hast done so, and now thee art frightened. Whoa! d -- n thee."

He made another attempt to force the horse by, but it was fruitless, and he was at length unseated into the mire.

"D -- n!" muttered the man; "the first time I have been thrown these ten years, drunk or sober, and now I am sober."

This was apparently the first reflection that came to his mind after the first effect of the concussion; he then scratched his head, adjusted his hat, and was getting up, when for a moment his eyes rested on something dark lying in the middle of the road, and at which his horse had in reality shied.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, with a visible alteration in his demeanour; "that's what Peg shied at, eh? What the devil is it?"

As he muttered these words, his hair began to stand on end; and the more he looked, the greater his apprehension; for he began to think what he wished was further from the fact, though his notions were far from being definite, and he did all he could to dispel the rising terror.

"Why -- it ain't -- no, it can't be -- and yet it must be! What makes 'un lay there -- he must be dead, surely!"

Thrice he scrambled to his feet, and then walked a little towards the object against which his horse stood smelling and snorting with evident signs of fear.

"Woa, brute! What's the matter with thee? -- confound thee! But I suppose thee wast frightened."

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As the man spoke, he walked up to the animal, and, taking the bridle, he passed it over his arms, and then approached the body.

"Aye, sure enough, he's insensible — if not dead, poor fellow! What can be done — there's no one near at hand to lend assistance?"

He paused to consider what was to be done, when it occurred to him as being the most likely thing that could be done was to probe the unfortunate man; he could not say whether he was dead or alive, from his position in the middle of the road.

"If 'un ain't dead," he argued, "he would come to no harm; for it wasn't every horse that cared as much for a man as Peg did; they might get run over, or cause some desperate accident."

Having made up his mind what to do, he secured Peg, and turned his attention to the body of the stranger, which had been left on its back, with its face upwards, but the wind had blown the cloak over it, and it was not seen by the grazier, who now essayed to move the body.

After some trouble, he succeeded in dragging him there, and propping him up against the bank, upon which grew a stunted hedge, and, when there, he opened the cloak, and looked upon the features of the dead man.

"Well," he muttered; "I never yet saw such a face! I am sure I can never forget that. Of all the ill-looking thieves, he is the worst! but much, I suppose, must be set off on the fact that he is a dead man, and a murdered one, to boot."

There was a strange markedness in the style of features in the dead man, that gave no pleasing impression to the mind; it was one that could not easily be forgotten, especially accompanied by all the horrors of their place and circumstances.

"He has been shot, no doubt," he muttered. "This must be all blood. Aye! in in the breast, or thereabouts. Oh! he is dead. Well, I'll ride to the Golden Pippin, and then I'll give them notice of it."

He was just about to turn and mount his horse, when the clouds parted, and the moonbeams, for a few moments, came upon the body, without any hindrance, and the grazier thought he saw a movement.

"It must have been gammon," he muttered. "I'll be off — I'm quite cold and shivery here. I'll go to the Golden Pippin, and get some good cheer, for I'm terribly shaken. Eh! what was that? The devil!"

The latter exclamations were uttered in consequence of the figure turning towards the moon's rays, and then opening its eyes, which had such an effect upon the unfortunate man, that he staggered back terrified.

"Lord have mercy!" he ejaculated. "What's — what's that? He — he's coming too — hilloa, friend! — how are you?"

The figure turned his large motionless eyes upon the terrified man, and they had such an effect upon him, that, despite all he could do to rally himself, he sprang involuntarily to his horse's back, and galloped off furiously. * * *

It was scarce an hour before this occurred, when the two highwaymen rode up to the Golden Pippin.

"Hilloa! hilloa! ostler — here!" shouted one of them, and in a few moments more the ostler came out, willing enough.

"Hilloa, Jem! you are sharp to-night. How is it you are not asleep?"

"I was just going to roost, master; but I shall have a job instead, I can see."

"You will; but not an empty handed affair, this time; take care of the nags, and there's a crown for you."

"Thank you, master — you are always generous."

"When I can, Jem; but what company have you in the house?"

"Little to speak of," said the ostler; "about three or four people, as lives about here; but nobody that I know — anybody or anything — only people that have to earn their own living; they are in the kitchen."

"Good fire?"

"Yes."

"Then we will go there, too," said the highwayman; "it's a raw cold night, and one in which a good super and a good fire will do one good."

The two highwaymen then entered the house, and walked into the kitchen, which was a large room, with beams across the top, and a variety of utensils proper to the place; but the grand feature was the large fire-place, in which burned brightly some good logs, and threw a glowing warmth and bright light over the whole apartment, in which, however, was one candle, as if to be mocked by the light of the fire. The use of this solitary wick was to

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enable the smokers to light their pipes without stirring, and also to be taken away at a moment's notice for any purpose that might be needed.

The three guests turned their attention to the new comers, without, however, exchanging one word, and the landlord himself arose.

"Oh, landlord," said one of the highwaymen, "I'm glad you have a good fire; 'tis one of the best things, after a cold ride, a man can have met with."

"Except a good hot supper, and a cup afterwards," said his companion.

"All these are very good things in their way, gentlemen," said the landlord, emptying the ashes of his pipe out into the fireplace by tapping the pipe on the toe of his shoe, and thus dropped the ashes out of danger.

"You are right, landlord," said the other.

"But I always, think, gentlemen," said the landlord gravely, "that they are always a great deal better when they can be had together — they are better for their company's sake — the one helps the other."

"So they do."

"Well, then, let us have them all, old cock, as soon as you please, for we are both cold, tired, and hungry."

"And they are the best accompaniments you can have as a preparatory for all that is to follow."

"Amen! and about it," said the highwayman.

The two new guests sat themselves down in one quarter of the kitchen, and near to a table facing the fire, where they could enjoy its genial warmth, which they appeared to do with much gusto.

Having opened their coats, and taken off their shawls, removed their hats, and sat down in a comfortable manner, they began to look about them.

"Well, Ned, we have made a good exchange."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, we have exchanged the road to comfortable quarters, which, you will, at least, admit, is all the better."

"Yes, much better; though I have ridden many a long and weary a night before now, with the runners at my heels."

"Ay — ay, so have I; but hush — say no more of that there. I have no idea of letting these blacks suspect anything; they are what you call honest men, and men who would give a clue in a moment, if they thought it was wanted."

"I dare say it is so, Ned; but what are you going to have for supper?"

"I don't know. Landlord, what can we have for supper — anything hot?"

"Why," said the landlord, "I can kill a couple of chickens and brander them, or there is some chicken pie, and a cold ham."

"Well, what do you say, Ned?"

"Can't you make the chicken pie warm?"

"It is warm now," said the landlord. "I can't make it quite hot without doing too much; 'tis uncommon good, and has not long been put by from supper; it was made for supper, but there's a good half left."

"Eh? What do you say to chicken pie, Ned?"

"With all my heart; chicken pie let it be, then," replied Ned.

"Well, then, landlord, put the chicken pie on, flanked by the ham — some of your foaming October, you know."

"Ay — ay, sir; some with a head on, that would take a blacksmith's bellows to blow off, it is so strong."

"Ha — ha — ha! that's the strike for us."

The landlord now arose, and set about getting the necessary articles, and spreading them upon a table before the two guests, who were nothing loath to see the expedition that he had made to please them.

"I think," said the landlord, "you will say you never eat such chickens; they are my hatching, and have been well fed; they have been well killed, cooked, and I hope, will be well eaten."

"That is our part of the business, landlord; and if they are such as you speak of, why, you may depend upon our doing our duty by them."

"And the ham is my own breeding and curing."

"Better and better, — and the October?"

"Why, I am just going to get that. What say you to a tankard?"

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"Yes, a foaming tankard."

"Yes, gentlemen, I will obtain what you want; it is in beautiful condition, and when chilled, will give you a cream as thick as new cheese; and as mild as new milk,

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Chapter CLXVIII. THE GRAZIER'S RELATION, AND HIS FIRST TERRORS. -- THE EFFECTS OF GOOD CHEER AND THE SUDDEN INTERRUPTION TO A PLEASANT PARTY.

The landlord was not long gone for the October; he came back with a placid smile and a smacking of his lips, when he shut the door behind him, and then deliberately placing the candlestick down, he said, handing them the tankard, --

"There, gentlemen, if you find any better brewed than that in the three adjoining counties, why, you may take measure for my coffin, for I won't live after I am told there is any so good anywhere else."

"We will not take your word, landlord," said one of the highwaymen, putting the tankard to his lips, which act produced an approving nod from the jolly landlord, who said, with much encouragement, --

"That's right; never trust nobody; that's my motto, and I chalks it up over the fire-place, and acts upon it -- try for yourself, and then you won't be deceived. What's your opinion upon that now, sir?"

"Never drank its equal, ever here."

"I thought you'd say so; it comes out of a particular cask -- one as I puts by for myself; but you have ridden hard, and I thought a brew of an extra strike would be an acceptable drink."

"You are right. It is cold and very wet. I'm as tired as if I had ridden far -- the wind has blown me about so."

"Ah, don't you hear how it roars in the chimney?"

"So it does. What do you think of the brew, Ned -- ain't it first rate?"

"Indeed it is: I never had any equal to it. I tell you what, landlord, it will make an excellent night-cap, for a man who has taken a glass or two of this, would not be better able to keep his saddle."

"No; it's lucky we intend putting up for the night here; you have beds."

"Yes, good, and well aired."

"That is capital. Well, your chicken-pie is good, landlord, your ham good, and the October excellent; and now -- what's that?"

At that moment there was a sound of horses' feet galloping furiously towards the houses; and they had not listened long before they came close to the door, and then there was evidently a sudden pull up.

"Hilloa! what is that?" said his companion.

"I think it is somebody pulled up at the door," said the landlord; "whoever they are they have come in haste."

The two highwaymen half rose, but a look at each other caused them to resume their seats, and in another moment there was a loud shouting, and a call for the ostler; but there was no one at hand.

"Where is that Jim got to -- I must go and see after him, at all events -- he won't come if I don't."

So saying, he walked away whilst the guests remained silent watching the actions of the two highwaymen.

"It is but a single horseman," said the first.

"No," said the other; "but still he may be mischievous; and yet I can hardly think he would venture here at such a time; besides, it can't be known; we are much better here than anywhere else."

"I think so; we have nothing to fear."

"Nothing."

At that moment the landlord retired; and, at the same time, the door was suddenly opened, and the grazier entered the kitchen. He glanced around him, much confused. The fire and light, no doubt, had some share in that; but he stared, and appeared terrified, and all splashed over.

"Where's the ostler?" he cried out.

"Here I be," said the worthy behind.

"Look after my horse; he is very hardly ridden. See to him, that's a good fellow," said the grazier."

"Yes; I'll see to 'un," said Jem, who departed with the animal.

"Landlord -- landlord!"

"Yes; here I am, Master Green -- here am I!"

"Give me something strong; I'm half dead. I'm cold, and I'm frightened, and that is the truth. Where's the fire?"

"Why, Master Green, I never saw you in this state before. Give me your hand, Master Green. I'll show you the

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fire," said the landlord, holding out his hand to Green. "Why, you are cold — what has happened?"

"You shall hear — you shall hear," said the half-terrified Green. "Only give me a toss of brandy, and get me a supper, and then I shall be able to tell you more about it. At present I can say nothing."

"Well, that is pretty well for a man that can't speak," said the landlord. "You are getting better, Mr. Green."

"I hope I shall; the fire is comfortable."

"Here's some good brandy; take a gill, man. It won't hurt you on such an occasion as this. I have seen you do as much before; but, as for supper, why I can't say much. These two gentlemen have had the only thing I had in the house, and, save the ham, I doubt much if there will be any left."

"If the gentlemen will join us, he is welcome to take a share of what we have," said one of the highwaymen. "Here will be enough for us all, I dare say, sir, if you do not object to our company."

"Thank you — thank you," said Green. "I will accept of your offer gladly; for I have had a long ride, and have had much that is uncomfortable to put up with, to see and to fear. Lord have mercy on me say I!"

"Well, what is the matter, Mr. Green?"

"Why," said Mr. Green, as he, between his words, poked in large mouthfuls of food, and now and then washed it down by the aid of the October. "You all of you know the highwayman's corner, about fifteen miles from here?"

"Yes," said the landlord, "I know it well; there's a chap hanging up in chairs there, now, at this present day, that is, if nobody hasn't run away with it, or it hasn't been blown down."

"Exactly. Well, that's the spot; there's been another dreadful murder been done there. Oh! it was dreadful."

"Well, did you see it?"

"Yes; I did."

"What! the murder!" said both highwaymen at once.

"No; the body — I only saw the body."

"Where was it lying?"

"Stop, stop a bit — not so fast," said Mr. Green, who was eating very fast indeed, but paused a moment. "You must not ask too many questions at once, because I have one way of telling a tale, and you'll spoil it."

"Well, go on your own way."

"Well, then, listen. I was coming along at a rattling pace, I can tell you, for I was late, and tired, as it was. When I had reached the gallows, I looked up at the body swinging in the wind, and creaking and screaming on its rusty swivels; but I had scarcely done so, when my horse shyed, and very nearly landed me in the mud, but I contrived to keep my seat, though not without trouble."

"What! at the dead man?" inquired one of the highwaymen.

"Aye," replied his companion. "I am sure they ought not to put men up there like scarecrows, to frighten horses with; for my part, I never pass it but my horse snorts and bolts, and I am obliged to be wary."

"I don't know much about that. I have come by without my nag being any the worse. At all events, I thought there was something in his shyng at the gallows, and I tried to push him by, but he would not go."

"What did you do?"

"Why, I was obliged to get down," said the grazier.

"Thrown?"

"No, no."

"Forced to get down, you mean," said the highwayman.

"Why, in some sort of way I did feel myself compelled to get down, because the brute wouldn't go a-head, and I saw something on the ground as the clouds cleared away a little, and showed me that there was something suspicious in the middle of the road, very much like a bundle of clothes."

"Indeed!" said the landlord, "what was it?"

"I'll tell you, in course. Now, you see, I saw the animal would not move, so I got off to see what was the matter."

"Forced off," adde the highwayman.

"D — n it, man, what can it matter; then I got off," said the grazier, getting into a passion, and then, after a pause, which he employed in taking a long pull at the October, and then wiping his lips, he continued, —

"What is the matter now?" thought I; "so I went to the object, and found it was a man rolled up in a cloak in the middle of the road, dead."

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"Dead?"

"Aye, dead as a door nail."

"Lor!" said the highwayman. "Why, then he must have been murdered, I suppose?"

"You may take your davy of that," said the grazier; "but I tried to wake him up, but he was not to be disturbed, so I dragged him to the bank, where I left him."

"Where was he hurt?"

"Shot right in the side, or stabbed, I don't know which, but that's where the blood came from, so I was sure he was dead; but when I removed the cloak from his face, I saw he had as ugly a set of features as a man can desire — a long, peculiar face, large, but thin nose, an awkward set of teeth, with one or two projecting in front, and oh! such eyes, that is when he opened them."

"Opened them," said the highwayman; "both?"

"Opened them," repeated the landlord; "why, did you not tell me he was dead?"

"Aye; but when the moonlight came upon him, he opened his eyes. Oh! what eyes — why, they were like a pair of enormous great fish eyes — cod's eyes, that had become suddenly lighted up, or the moonlight reflected back from the bottom of a new tin saucepan, and then you have 'em."

"The devil," said the highwayman; "and what did you do?"

"Why, I came away as fast as I could. I wasn't to be done by a dead man. I didn't wait to see more than that. He turned round and stared at me. He was so horrible, that I got upon my horse the best way I could, and came on here as fast as the animal would come."

"The body, I dare say, rolled over, and you thought it moved of itself."

"I know better; besides, it opened its eyes."

"The moon shone on them, and you thought he looked at you. You were terror-stricken, and that is the truth of it."

"Then I know better," said the grazier, doggedly; "it ain't anything of the kind. I know it ain't a matter that happens every day, and that's why you don't believe it, and don't understand it, but I know I'm right."

"House, here, house! ostler!" shouted a loud, authoritative voice without the door of the inn, which caused them all to start and listen for a repetition of the same sounds to prove that they were not illusory.

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Chapter CLXIX. THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER'S ARRIVAL. -- THE CONSTERNATION OF THE GUESTS. -- THE GRAZIER'S TERRORS, AND POWERS OF IDENTITY. -- THE LANDLORD'S DAUGHTER.

"Hilloa! house! house! shouted the strange voice on the outside, but in a tone that seemed unearthly; whether it were merely a fancy, or reality, yet it had its effect, and the landlord sat staring vacantly with his two hands resting on either knee, leaning forward as if he was staring some imaginary object out of countenance.

"Well," said one of the the highwaymen, "ain't anybody going to the door."

No one answered, but Jem the ostler was hastening by another passage to the door, and then they heard some confused speaking, as if the stranger was giving some directions for the care of his horse.

The grazier was fixed in his attention to what was going on, and appeared petrified, and held a morsel on the end of his fork, halfway between his mouth and the plate, with his eyes directed towards the door.

In a few moments more they heard the steps of some one approaching the door, and one of the highwaymen said to his companion, --

"Ned, there are people late on the roads to-night."

"Yes; it appears so, but it is very uncomfortable travelling; the night is bad, and the roads no better. Who's this, I wonder?"

"We shall now see," said the other, but their backs were turned towards the door, and they could not see who entered the door so well as the grazier, who sat in the same attitude, without a motion or movement, even to wink his eye, when the door opened, and in walked a tall man, wrapped in a horseman's cloak.

The expression of horror in the grazier's face, and the swelling of his eyes almost out of his head, at once showed them there was something extraordinary, and they both mutually turned round, and to their extreme terror they perceived the very man, or his double, they had left dead upon the spot where the grazier had seen him.

Neither were they alone surprised, for all present were able at once to recognise the same man without any difficulty.

"It's the same man -- I'm d -- d!" said the grazier, as if he had made an effort to speak, and when he had so, he couldn't help himself. Oh, Lord! -- who would have thought it? -- it's -- it's the -- the -- what do ye call it?"

"The devil," suggested the landlord.

"No," said the stranger, "no. I am merely a traveller, somewhat weary and tired -- do not disturb yourselves. I am cold -- very cold -- the fire will do me good; it is a very cold night -- the roads are bad very unsafe."

"Very," said one of the highwaymen, involuntarily.

"Did you speak?" inquired the stranger, suddenly turning to the highwayman who had spoken with a look of such a peculiar character, that he caused the bold roadster involuntarily to start; but he suddenly recovered himself, and said, --

"I did."

"What did you say, sir?"

"The same as you," replied the highwayman.

The stranger made no reply to the highwayman, whose natural effrontery, and the necessity he always had or presence of mind in circumstances of peril, gave him a greater superiority than most men possessed under such circumstances.

"I'm not well," said the stranger.

"Perhaps you've ridden far."

"I have," replied the stranger. "Landlord, will you have the goodness to let me have some supper; I am weary."

"I have only the remains of the chicken-pie and some ham," said the landlord, looking black at the already referred-to chicken-pie, which, thanks to its being made of great size, had already supped three hungry men, -- "and there is but little of that."

"It is not much that I want -- a small matter will suffice -- a little ham, and something warm, and then I will to-bed -- 'tis late."

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"Very well, sir," said the landlord; "here's some good October; will you like that? or is there anything else? I have French spirits."

"Then let me have some brandy."

"Yes, sir, I'll fetch my daughter down stairs," said the landlord; "she's young, and her hand is steadier than mine. I shall upset the bottle; my --- my hand, you see, is always unsteady after I've drawn the October; somehow or other I always get out of order."

"What is the reason of that?" inquired the highwayman.

"Why, it's so strong; I believe it's nothing else whatever."

As the landlord turned to go, he gave another look at the guest, and appeared greatly disturbed, and certainly thought him a strange and unaccountable man; for he believed that he was in truth the very man spoken of, who had been left for dead on the bank, near the foot of the gallows.

"Mary," said the landlord, when he had ascended half a dozen stairs, which led out of the kitchen, "Mary."

"Yes, father," was the ready answer, in a clear, pleasing voice.

"I want you, my dear. Bring the brandy down --- the French --- the sealed bottle; the other's out; I took the last this morning before breakfast."

"Ho! ho!" said the highwayman; "hark at our landlord, how early he must begin --- no wonder his hand shakes."

"Ah!" said the landlord, as he came back with a wink; "when you have been a father and an innkeeper as long as I have, you'll do many things you don't now dream of; but, no matter, I ain't as young as I used to be."

At that moment a very pretty and genteel girl, about eighteen, descended the stairs with a spirit bottle in her hand, and advanced to the table.

"How will you take it, sir?" inquired the landlord.

"Mixed."

"Make a glass, my dear," said the landlord.

"Is that your daughter?" inquired the stranger, fixing his eyes upon her, --- and they were such leaden eyes, that the girl shrank from him in dismay.

"Yes," said the landlord.

"Any more?"

"None," replied the landlord, and then there was a pause of some moments, during which the stranger watched the young girl's motions with a greedy jealousy, as if he feared to lose one movement, and in a manner that especially annoyed the old landlord, who, however, could say nothing, he having been quite cowed by the stranger's superiority in station and demeanour; besides which, there was something very strange and peculiar, not to say superhuman, about him that gave weight, and caused a kind of awe to pervade all present, and they looked upon him as something fearful or terrible.

It was not long before the stranger ate his supper --- it was soon done; he ate but little, and, when that was done, he turned to the brandy and water; but there appeared an air of compulsion, upon his part, as if everything he took was taken under the feeling that it was absolutely necessary to take something, which did not escape the discerning eyes of all present, especially the landlord, who felt it a slight upon himself and his cheer.

"If I had known you were coming here," said the landlord, "I would have got something ready for you, but, as it was, I had nothing but 'pot-luck' for you."

"What is that?" inquired the stranger. --- "What is that? --- I never heard of such a dish before. I am a stranger in these parts."

"Oh, it only means you could have anything what is in the house."

"It will do," said the stranger, quietly.

"Will you have anything more that we have in the house?"

"Nothing. I came by the gibbet, not far from this place; and I met with an accident there that has left me but little stomach."

"By gosh, I should think not," muttered the grazier; "it would have settled my stomach altogether, and anybody else's."

"Well," muttered one of the highwaymen, "it would have left me no stomach, save what would be in a fair way to become food for the worms."

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"What kind of accident was it, sir?"

"A terrible blow in the side; it seemed to go through me."

"Well, well, I imagine there would be but little comfort in a man's bowels after he had anything go through his side."

"It depends upon the constitution," said the stranger, "quietly."

"The what?" inquired one of the highwaymen, incredulously.

"The constitution," replied the stranger, quietly.

There was a pause for some minutes, during which the strangers exchanged glances at each other, when one of the highwaymen said, --

"Perhaps a bullet put in your side might be no hindrance to your animal economy, and would in the course of nature become digested."

"Why, I dare say it would not hurt me so much as many; but it would take me some little while to recover the shock, which would be great; but I am unwell, and perhaps had better retire. Will the young female, your daughter, act as my chambermaid and show me my room?"

"Yes," said the landlord, mechanically; "here, Mary, show the gentleman into No. 6, and leave the light."

"Good night," said the stranger, rising, and walking away erect, but slowly, from the group, who gazed after him with amazement.

"Good night, sir," said the landlord, which was echoed by those present; and, when the stranger was gone, there was a general release in their conversation from the constraint which the presence of the last comer occasioned.

"Well, what do you think of him, Mr. Green?" inquired the landlord.

"The very same man I saw on the bank at the gallows corner."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

There was a general pause, as if there was something for them all to think over; and their thoughts appeared to be so unsatisfactory, that those who lived close at hand left the house, and those that remained there went to their respective beds, and in half an hour the house was quite silent.

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Chapter CLXX. THE MIDNIGHT CRY OF ALARM. -- THE VAMPYRE'S MEAL. -- THE CHASE ACROSS THE FIELDS. -- THE DEATH OF THE LANDLORD'S DAUGHTER.

The old inn was in a state of repose; its various parts were no longer vexed by the busy tramp of men, the noisy voice of the toper, or the untiring hands of the housewife, who does not spare any part of its edifice from her ablutions. The brush and the broom are sad intruders and disturbers, and yet they are in perpetual requisition. However, the inhabitants were all steeped in slumber.

Among those who lay in that house, there was not one, except one, indeed, who did not lie down to rest, and fall into a deep sleep; but that one exception was the stranger, who appeared to have other views.

He threw himself into a chair, and there appeared to meditate upon the clouds which passed across the sky, in endless variety of shape and form. He sat motionless, and still his large, lustreless eyes were fully opened, and he was gazing earnestly for nearly an hour without motion.

At length, as if his attention was of itself wearying to continue so long, he moved, then sighed deeply, or rather groaned.

"How long is this hated life to last?" he muttered. "When shall I cease to be the loathsome creature I am?"

There was some reflection in this that was very bitter to him. He shuddered, and buried his face in his hands, and remained in that state for some minutes; but then he lifted his head up again, and turned towards the moon's rays, muttering, --

"But I am faint; I feel the want of my natural slumbers. Blood alone will restore me my strength. There is no resisting the dreadful appetite that goads me on. I must -- I must -- I will satisfy it."

He arose suddenly, and drew himself up to his full height, and threw aloft his arms, as he growled out these words with frantic energy; but in a few seconds he became more calm, and said, --

"I saw the maiden enter the room next to mine. I can enter it by the same door, for I have the key, and that will place her at my mercy. Good fortune for once avail me, and then my wants will be satisfied."

He walked softly to his own door, and undid it stealthily, and listened for some minutes.

"They are all asleep," he said -- "all, save one. I alone walk through the place. All are in peaceful slumbers, while I, like the creatures of prey, seek those whom I may devour. I must on."

He crept into the passage, and advanced to the door of the young girl, who lay soundly sleeping in innocence and peace, little dreaming of the fate that awaited her -- much less did she think that the destroyer was so close at hand.

She might, indeed, have dreamed that there was some one in the house who was scarcely of her nature -- one that was loathsome and dreadful -- one who, in fact, lived upon the blood of the innocent and fairest.

"She sleeps," he muttered -- "she sleeps!"

He listened again, and then he gently put the key into the door, and found that it was not locked, and then, turning the handle, he found there was some impediment to its opening; but of what character he could not tell.

"'Tis unlucky; but this must be moved."

He placed his hand and foot close to the door, and pressed it gradually and hardly against it, and he found that it gradually gave way, and that the impediment gave by degrees, and that, too, with hardly any noise.

"Fortune favours me," he muttered; "she does not hear me. I shall win the chamber, and shall, before she can wake up, seize upon the dear life-stream that is no less precious to me than to herself."

He now had succeeded in effecting an entrance into the room, and found that it was only an easy chair that had been placed against the door, because there was no other means of securing it, the key having unaccountably disappeared, and left her without any other means of securing her door.

"I will lock it," he muttered; "if I be disturbed, I shall be better able to escape, and I shall be safe. My meal will be undisturbed; at least not before so much has been taken as will revive my strength."

He now approached the bed, and with eager eyes devoured the fair form of the youthful and innocent sleeper.

"How calm, and how unsuspecting she lies," he muttered; "'twere a pity, but I must, I must -- there is no help."

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He leaned over her. He bent his head till his ear almost touched the lips of the sleeper, as though he were listening to the breathing of the young girl.

Something caused her to start. She opened her eyes, and endeavoured to rise up, but she was immediately thrust back, and the vampire seized her fair flesh with his fanged teeth, and having fleshed them, he was drawing that life current from her which ensanguined them both.

Horror and fright for a moment deprived her of strength, or the power of uttering a sound of any kind; but when she did do so, it was one wild unearthly shriek, that was heard throughout the whole house, and awakened every human being within it in a moment.

"Help! murder, murder!" she shrieked out, as soon as the first scream subsided, and she regained breath.

These cries she uttered rapidly, as well as attempting a desperate resistance to her persecutor; but she was growing gradually more and more faint. * * * * *

The landlord had just got out of an uncomfortable dream about some strange adventure he was having with some excisemen when he was young, when the heart-piercing shriek of Mary came upon him.

"God bless me," he muttered, "what's that? I never heard anything so horrible in all my life. What can it be?"

He sat up in bed, and pulled his nightcap off, while he listened, when he heard the cries of help issuing from his daughter's room.

"Good God! it's Mary," he muttered, "What can be the matter?"

He did not pause a moment, but huddled on his clothes, and then rushed out of his room with a light, to his daughter's bedroom.

"What is the matter?" inquired one of the highwaymen, who had been disturbed by the dreadful shriek.

"I don't know; but — but help me."

"Help you to what?"

"To burst open this door; 'tis my daughter's room, and the noise comes from that place. Hark!"

"Help, help!" said a faint voice.

"Damnation!" said the highwayman, "something's wrong there; somebody's sucking; surely the stranger is not there?"

"Burst the door open."

"Then lend a hand; it must give," said Ned; and they all three made a rush at the door, and in it went, for their weight carried it all before them, and they all three went into the apartment without any hindrance, for the frail lock gave immediately, and the other impediment only served to add to the noise.

Though they went in easily, yet they did not do so quickly enough, for they all rolled over each other, and before they could rise they distinctly saw the figure of the stranger start up and rush out of the room with Mary in his arms.

"Help! help! mercy!" she shrieked out.

"'Tis she," said the landlord.

"Mary— —"

"Yes, after her boys — after her; for Heaven's sake, after her."

"We will not leave her," said the highwaymen in concert, and at the same moment all three rushed after her.

"The stranger has made his way down into the kitchen, and I think he has her with him," said the landlord.

"I will after him," said Ned; "I saw her in his arms. She was all over blood. Good Heavens! what can he mean? does he want to murder her?"

"Help! help! murder!" shouted the girl, and at that moment they heard the stranger attempting the kitchen door below. In a moment they all three ran down stairs as fast as they could, to seize the villain before he could escape; but they had hardly got into the kitchen before they saw the door swing to after him.

"He's gone," said the landlord; "he's gone."

"We'll after them; come on, never mind a chase; she's in white, and the moon's up, so we shall have them in sight."

"Away after them, lads; save my girl — save my Mary!"

Away they went with great speed, but the stranger somehow or other kept ahead of them; his great height gave him an advantage in length of stride; but then he bore the landlord's daughter in his arms, which was more than enough to balance their powers; for though she was not heavy, comparatively speaking, yet she was heavy to be

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borne along in this manner; but the stranger appeared to possess superhuman strength, and moved along safely until they lost sight of him among some hay-stacks, for which they made.

"There, he's gone into Jackson's rick-yard," said the landlord; "get up; push on; we may be yet in time to prevent mischief."

The highwaymen ran hard; they had been out of breath for some time, and could hardly move their feet, but they made a sudden effort, or spurt, and away they ran, and, in less than a minute, came up to the rick-yard."

They rushed into the yard, and then beheld the stranger seated upon some partially cut hay with the helpless maiden on his lap, but his fanged teeth were fleshed in her fair neck, and he was exerting himself in drawing the life stream from her veins.

As soon as he saw the highwaymen he arose, and the unfortunate girl rolled to the earth, and he started up and fled, the highwaymen firing a parting shot after him, with pretty good aim, yet it took no effect. The landlord's daughter was picked up warm, but lifeless. Whether it was in consequence of her wound and loss of blood, which was doubted, or from sheer fright, is not known, but the latter was considered most probable.

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Chapter CLXXI. THE HOTEL. -- THE FASHIONABLE ARRIVAL. -- THE YOUNG HEIRESS.

Can it be true, and if so, how horribly strange, that a being half belonging to a world of spirits, should thus wander beneath the cold moon and the earth, bringing dismay to the hearts of all upon whom his strange malign influence is cast!

How frightful an existence is that of Varney the Vampyre!

There were some good points about the -- man, we were going to say -- and yet we can hardly feel justified in bestowing upon him that title, -- considering the strange gift of renewable existence which was his. If it were, as, indeed, it seemed to be the case, that bodily decay in him was not the result of death, and that the rays "of the cold chaste moon" were sufficient to revivify him, who shall say when that process is to end? and who shall say that, walking the streets of giant London at this day, there may not be some such existences? Horrible thought that, perhaps seduced by the polished exterior of one who seems a citizen of the world in the most extended signification of the words, we should bring into our domestic circle a vampyre!

But yet it might be so. We have seen, however, that Varney was a man of dignified courtesy and polished manners; that he had the rare and beautiful gift of eloquence; and that, probably, gathering such vast experience from his long intercourse with society -- an intercourse which had extended over so many years, he was able to adapt himself to the tastes and the feelings of all persons, and so exercise over them that charm of mind which caused him to have so dangerous a power.

At times, too, it would seem as if he regretted that fatal gift of immortality, as if he would gladly have been more human, and lived and died as those lived and died whom he saw around him. But being compelled to fulfil the order of his being, he never had the courage absolutely to take measures for his own destruction, a destruction which should be final in consequence of depriving himself of all opportunity of resuscitation.

Certainly the ingenuity of such a man might have devised some means of putting such an end to his life, that, in the perishable fragments of his body there should linger not one spark of that vitality which had been so often again and again fanned into existence.

Probably some effort of that kind may yet be his end, and we shall see that Varney the Vampyre will not, like the common run of the world's inhabitants, be changed into that dust of which is all humanity, but will undergo some violent disruption, and be for ever blotted out from the muster-roll of the living creatures that inhabit the great world.

But to cease speculating on such things, and to come to actual facts, we will now turn over another leaf in the strange eventful history of Varney the Vampyre. * * * * *

One stormy, inclement evening in November, a travelling carriage, draggled with mud, and dripping with moisture, was driven up to the door of the London Hotel, which was an establishment not of the very first fashion, but of great respectability, situated then in Burlington-street, close to Old Bond-street, then the parade of fashion, and, as some thought, elegance; although we of the present day would look with risibility upon the costumes that were the vogue, although the period were but fifty years ago; but fifty years effect strange mutations and revolutions in dress, manners, and even in modes of thought.

The equipage, if not of the most dashing character, was still of sufficiently aristocratic pretensions to produce a considerable bustle in the hotel; and the landlord, after seeing that there was a coronet upon of the panels of the carriage door, thought it worth his while personally to welcome the guests who had done him the honour of selecting his house.

These guests consisted of an oldish man and woman, a young man of frivolous and foppish exterior, of about twenty-two years of age, and a young lady, who was so covered up in a multitude of shawls, that but little of her face could be seen; but that little was sufficient to stamp her at once as most beautiful.

The whole party evidently paid great court to this young lady, but whether they did so from affection, or from some more interested motive, it would not be proper just now to say, as those facts will come out before we have proceeded far in this little episode.

"Mind how you step, Annette," said the old gentleman, as the young lady descended the carriage. "Mind how

you step, my dear."

"Oh! yes, yes," said the old lady, who was not so very old either, although entering upon the shady side of fifty. "Yes. Oh! mind my dear, how you get out."

The young lady made no reply to all these kind injunctions, but pushing aside the proffered arm of the younger gentleman, she tripped into the hotel unaided.

The old lady instantly followed her.

"Now, Francis," said the old gentleman to the servant, who got down from the rumble of the travelling carriage. "Now, Francis, you perfectly recollect, I hope, what my brother, Lord Lake, said to you?"

"Yes, sir," said Francis, but there was not the most respectful intonation in the world in the voice with which he returned the affirmative.

"You remember," continued the old gentleman; "you remember, Francis, that my brother told you, you were to wait upon us just the same as upon himself, with the carriage."

"Oh, yes."

"Oh, yes! what do you mean by saying 'oh, yes!' to me?"

"Do you want me to say, 'oh, no?'"

"Francis, this won't do. You are discharged."

"That for you, and the discharge, too," said Francis, as he snapped his fingers in the face of the old gentleman. "I never meant to serve you, Mister Lake; I'm Lord Lake's groom, but I ain't a going to be turned over to a canting fellow like you, so you have only took the words out of my mouth, for I meant to discharge myself, and so will George. I say, George."

"Yes," replied the coachman; "what is it?"

"Are we going to be at the beck and call of Jonathan Lake?"

"See him d -- d first," was the laconic reply of the coachman.

"Now, Mister Lake, added Francis, "you knows what we thinks of you. You is a humbug. We only came so far, because we wouldn't put Miss Annette, our young lady, to the inconvenience of a post-chaise, while my lord, her father's carriage here, was so much more comfortable. We shall take that to the coachmaker's, where my lord's other carriages are standing, till he comes to England, and then you won't see us no more."

"You rascals!"

"Oh, go on. You're a humbug; ain't he, George?"

"Oh, a riglar one -- a numbug he is," aid the coachman; "and what's more, we don't believe a word of all what's been a going on. Lady Annette is Lady Annette, bless her sweet eyes. Come on, Francis, I'm wet."

"And I'm damp," said Francis, as he shook himself, and made as much splashing round him as a great Newfoundland dog, who has just had a bath. "I'm ready now, mister, and you knows our minds, and we ain't the sort of folks to alter'em. We serves our master; but we doesn't serve a humbug."

Some of the waiters at the hotel had come to the door to hear this rather curious colloquy, and not a little surprised were they at it. At all events, whatever other effect it had upon them, it did not increase their respect for the new arrivals, and one of them, named Slop, ran after the carriage, and called out to Francis, --

"I say -- I say!"

"Well, what?"

"I say, young fellow, just tell me where you will be staying, and I'll come and see you, and stand a glass."

Francis leant over the roof of the carriage, and said, --

"George -- George!"

"Here ye air," said George.

"Here's one o' the waiters at the hotel wants to make an acquaintance. It won't be a bad thing to know him, as you see he can tell us all about Lady Annette, and what the ladies are doing. What do you say to it, George?"

"A good idea, Francis."

"Very well. Hilloa! what's your name, old fellow?"

"Slop -- Solomon Slop, they calls me."

"Well, if you come any evening to the King's Head, in Welbeck--street, you'll find either me or George; and we always likes good company, and shall be very glad to see you whenever you like. Suppose you say to-morrow?"

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"I will, — I will; to-morrow I can come easily at eight o'clock, so you may expect me. Good night."

"Good night, Slop. Pleasant evening, ain't it? Drive on, George; I shall be in a ague presently; drive on, good luck to you, and let's get a change of things, whatever you do I never was so wet, I do think, in all my life."

"Nor me, nor me," said George, who it will be perceived was not very particular about his grammar; but that didn't matter much. He was paid for a knowledge of horses, not of moods, tenses, and cases.

Leaving the servants, then, of Lord Lake, as they had announced themselves to be, let us return to the hotel, where the family party had by this time got into comfortable enough quarters.

As far as the landlord of that establishment was concerned, Mr. Lake had won him over completely, by ordering the best rooms, a supper, as good as the house could afford, regardless of the price; the best wines, and altogether showed a right royal disposition as regarded expenditure.

But the waiters, who had often found by experience that the most extravagant people were not the most liberal to them, did not forget what had passed at the door, and many a whispered surmise passed from one to the other regarding the circumstances that had induced the coachman and groom to treat the family so very cavalierly, and so obstinately to decline serving them.

When Slop returned, he got some of his companions round him in the hall.

"I shall know all about it," he said; "I'm to go and take a glass with them to-morrow night, at the King's Head, in Welbeck-street, and you see if they don't tell me what it's all about. I wouldn't miss knowing for a trifle."

"Nor me — nor me."

"Well, I'll of course tell you all when I come back. You may depend upon it it's something worth knowing. Have you seen the young lady any of you. I caught just a look of one eye, and the end of her nose, and I should say she's a out-and-outer, and no mistake."

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Chapter CLXII. THE SECOND ARRIVAL AT THE LONDON HOTEL. -- THE MYSTERIOUS GUEST.

Scarcely had the bustle of the arrival we have noticed subsided at the London Hotel, when another travelling chariot dashed up to the door, and the landlord made a rush out to welcome his new arrival, considering himself quite in luck to have two such customers in one evening.

A gentleman, on whose head was a fur travelling cap, was at one of the windows of this carriage, and he called to the landlord, saying, --

"Are your best rooms occupied?"

"Not the best, sir," was the reply, "for we have several suites of apartments in all respects equal to each other; but we have a family just arrived in one suite. The Lake family, sir."

"Well, it don't matter to me who you have; I will get out if you can accomodate me."

"Oh, certainly, sir; you will find here accomodation of the very first character, I can assure you, sir. Pray, sir, alight. Allow me, sir, to hold an umbrella over you. It's a bad night, sir; I'm afraid the winter is setting in very strangely, sir, and prophetically of- -- "

"Silence. I don't want your opinion of the matter. If there's one thing I dislike more than another, it's a chattering man."

This rebuff silenced the landlord, who said not another word, although probably he thought the more; and those thoughts were not of a very kindly character as regarded the stranger, who had so very unceremoniously stopped his amiable remarks.

Indeed, when he got into the hall, he consigned the new comer to the care of the head waiter, and retired to his own apartment in great dudgeon.

"I hope everything is quiet here," said the stranger to the head waiter.

"Oh, dear, yes, sir; the house is as quiet as a lamb, sir, I can assure you. We have only three inmates at present, sir. There's the Lakes, -- highly respectable people, sir. A brother of Lord Lakes, sir, I believe, and the- -- "

"I don't want to hear who you have. What the devil is it to me? If there's anything I dislike more than another, it's a d -- d magpie of a waiter."

The head waiter was terribly offended, and said not another word, so that the gentleman was left in the sole occupation of his apartments, and then to fling himself upon a couch.

"Ah, ah! God knows how it will all end. Well, well, we shall see, we shall see. They have arrived, and that's one comfort; I am now, then, I think so well made up, that they will not readily know me. Oh, no, no, I should hardly know myself, now, shaven clean as I am, after being accustomed on the continent, to wear beard and moustache. Well, well, we shall see, how it will all end. Thank the fates, they have not gone somewhere where I could not find them." He rung the bell.

"Waiter, let me have the best the house affords, will you? and remember my name is Blue."

"Sir! Bl -- Blue, sir?"

"Yes, Diggory Blue."

"Yes, sir, -- yes sir. Certainly. What an odd name," soliloquised the waiter, as he went down stairs to tell his master. "I say sir, the gent in No. 10 and 11 says his name is Diggory Blue."

"Blue, Blue." said the landlord, "it is an odd name for a Christian."

"Perhaps he ain't a Christian," said the very identical Mr. Blue himself, popping his head over the bar in which the little discourse was going on, between the landlord and the waiter. "How do you know he's a Christian?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, really I -- I -- a--hem! a thousand pardons sir."

"Pshaw!"

The strange gentleman went to the door, and gave some directions to the servants belonging to his carriage, which sent them away, and then Mr. Blue started up into his rooms again, without saying another word to the landlord, who was terribly annoyed at being caught canvassing the name of one of his guests, with one of his waiters.

"Confound him," he muttered, "he has no business to have such a name as Blue and good God! if his surname

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was Blue, what the devil made his godfathers and godmothers call him Diggory? Sam, Sam!"

"Yes, sir."

"Put down in the book, Diggory Blue."

"Yes, sir."

"Bless us! why there's somebody else as I'm a sinner." The landlord could not have sworn by a better oath.

He ran to the door, and there beheld another travelling carriage, out of which stepped a gentlemanly looking man enveloped in a rich travelling cloak lined with fur.

"Can you accommodate us?" he said.

"Yes, sir, with pleasure."

"Who have you here, landlord?"

"A family named Lake, sir, and a Mr. — a — Blue, sir."

"Quiet people I dare say, I shall most likely remain with you a week or two. Let me have the best apartments you have unoccupied at present."

"Yes, sir. This way if you please, sir — this way."

The last arrival seemed to be in bad health, for he walked very slowly, like a man suffering from great bodily exhaustion, and more than once he paused as he followed the landlord up the principal staircase of the hotel, as if it were absolutely necessary he should do so to recover breath, and moreover the landlord heard him sigh deeply, but whether that was from mental or physical distress he had no means of knowing. His curiosity, however, was much excited by the gentleman, and his sympathies likewise, for he was the reverse of Mr. Blue, and listened with a refined and gentlemanly courtesy to whatever was said to him by any one apparently, although it was evidently an effort to speak, so weak and ill did he seem to be.

"I am sorry, sir," said the landlord, when he had shewn the gentleman into his rooms, "I am sorry sir, you don't seem well."

"I am rather an invalid, but I dare say I shall soon be better, thank you — thank you. One candle only, I dislike too much light: charge for as many as you please, but never let me have but one, landlord."

"As you please, sir, as you please; I hope you will make yourself comfortable here, and I can assure you, sir, that nothing shall be wanting on my part to make you so."

"I am sure of that, landlord; you are very good, thank you."

"What name shall I say, sir, in case any gentleman should call to see you, sir?"

"Black."

"Black, sir!" — "Black." — "Oh, Mr. Black! — Yes, sir, certainly, why not? Oh, of course. I — only thought it a little odd, you see, sir, because we have a gentleman already in the house called Blue. That was all, sir. Mr. Black, thank you, sir."

The landlord bowed himself out, and Mr. Black inclined his head with the look of a condescending emperor, so that when the landlord got down stairs, he said to his wife, —

"Now that is a gentleman. he listens to all you have got to say, like a gentleman, and don't snap you up as that Mr. Blue did. Mr. Black, it is quite clear to me, is a man of the world, and a perfect gentleman. Hilloa, what's that? Eh? What! why it's Mr. Black's bell, and he must have almost broken the wire. Sam, Sam! run up to 8, and see what's wanted."

Sam did run up to 8, and when he got there, he found Mr. Black lying upon the floor in a fainting fit, and wholly insensible.

The alarmed waiter ran down stairs to his master with the news, and the nearest medical man was sent for, but with as little parade as possible, for the hotel-keeper did not wish to alarm all his other guests with the news of the fact that there was a sick person in the house, which he knew was not pleasing to many persons, and might induce them to change their quarters.

When the medical man came, he was shown up stairs at once, when Mr. Black had been lifted on to a sofa, where he lay without any signs of consciousness at all, much to the horror of the landlord, who began to think he was dead, and that there would be all the disagreeableness of having a corpse in his house.

The surgeon felt the pulse and the heart, and then he said, —

"He is in a swoon, but he must be in a desperately weak state."

"He looks it, don't he, sir?"

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"He does indeed. How dreadfully emaciated he is!"

By dint of great exertion and the use of stimulants, the surgeon succeeded in restoring Mr. Black to consciousness, and when he was so restored, he looked around him with that strange vacant expression which a man wears who has newly come out of a trance and whose memory is in a state of abeyance.

"Well, sir, how are you now?" said the surgeon.

He made no reply.

"I should advise that he be put to bed, landlord," added the medical man, "and something of a warm nourishing quality given to him. I will send him some medicine."

Mr. Black now made an effort to speak, and his memory seemed to have come back to him as he said,

"I fear I have been a deal of trouble, but the fatigue of travelling fast -- it is that has unnerved me -- I shall be much better to-morrow. Thank you all."

"I will call to-morrow" said the surgeon, "and see how you get on, if you please."

"I shall be much obliged; I feel myself quite strong enough to retire for the night without assistance, thank you."

He made no opposition to the landlord sending him up by Sam some spiced wine, and when it came, he said,

"I hope no one sleeps near me who will come in late and disturb me, as I require a full and clear night's repose."

"Oh no, sir," said Sam, "it's a young lady sir, as belongs to the Lake family sleeps in the next room but one to you, that is to say, No. 9. The very next room aint occupied at all, sir, to night, so you will be as quiet as if you was in a church, sir."

"Thank you, thank you, good night, Samuel."

Chapter CLXIII. THE NIGHT ALARM -- A SCENE OF CONFUSION. -- MR. BLUE SUSPECTED.

It is midnight, and the landlord of the hotel suddenly springs out of bed on to the floor as if he had been galvanised, carrying with him all the bed-clothes and leaving his wife shivering.

"Good gracious! what was that?" he cried.

And well he might, for the repose of the whole house was broken in upon by two loud shrieks, such as had never before sounded within those walls, and then all was still as the grave.

"Murder! murder!" shouted the landlady, "somebody has stolen all the bed-clothes."

"Bother the bed-clothes" cried the landlord, as he hurried on his apparel by the dim light of a night lamp that was burning on the dressing table. "There's something wrong in the house, or else I have had one of the strangest dreams that ever anybody had, and one of the most likely reality too. Did you hear them?"

"Oh, those horrid screams!"

"It's not a dream then, for two people don't dream the same thing at the same moment of time that's quite clear. Hark -- hark! what's that, what a banging of doors to be sure. Who's there? Who's there? Wait a bit."

The landlord lifted the night bolt of his bed room, and then there dashed into the room in only one garment, which fluttered in the breeze, no other than the young man who had come with the ladies. He made but one spring into the landlord's bed, crying, --

"Oh! take care of me. Oh, save me! There's thieves or something and I shall be hurt. Oh, save me, save me, I can't fight, I never did, spare my life, oh, spare my life."

"Oh, the wretch!" shrieked the landlady, and the landlord, justly enough enraged at that intrusion, seized upon the intruder and shot him out of the room *vi et armis*, and that with such force too that he rolled all the way down the stairs, upsetting Sam who was rushing up with a lantern, it having been his turn to sit up all night, as one of the establishment always did, in case of fire or anything happening which might make it necessary to arouse the inmates of the house.

The landlord, however, had completed enough of his toilette to enable him to make a decent appearance; so out he sallied, having lit a candle, and the first person he met upon the landing was Mr. Blue, fully dressed and with a pistol in his hand.

"Good God, sir," cried the landlord, "what is it all about, what has happened sir?"

"I cannot tell you, and am as anxious as you can be to know. This way, this way. It was the young lady who screamed. For God's sake, lend me a light!"

The landlord resigned his light mechanically, and he saw to his surprise, that there was a black patch now over one of Mr. Blue's eyes, and he thought his face was painted. At all events, he was so much disguised that it was only by his voice that the landlord knew him.

Before however, they either of them got across the corridor to the door of the young lady's room, Mr. and Mrs. Lake half-dressed, made their appearance, both eagerly inquiring what was the matter.

"I don't know," said the landlord, "I only heard a scream."

"Which came from the apartment of that young lady," said Mr. Blue.

"What young lady?" said Mr. Lake sharply. "It's rather odd that you, a stranger, should know so precisely which was the apartment of that young lady. Mrs. Lake go in and see if anything be the matter with Annetta; I hope to Heaven, nothing is amiss with her."

Mr. Lake looked suspiciously at Mr. Blue, and so did the landlord, for when Mr. Blue had spoken in the presence of the Lakes, his voice was completely altered, so that the landlord no longer could have recognized him by it, and he was more puzzled than ever.

"Oh! come in, come in, Mr. Lake," cried Mrs. Lake, appearing at the door of Annetta's room, "she is dead."

"Dead!" cried Mr. Blue with a shout, "Oh! no, no, no!"

He dashed past Mr. Lake, the landlord, and Mrs. Lake, and was in the room in a moment. They went after him as soon as they had recovered sufficiently from their surprise to do so, and they saw him with his hands clasped, and bending over the form of the beautiful young girl as she lay in bed.

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"No, no, no," he said, "she is not dead. She has fainted. God knows what the cause may be, but she is not dead. Thank Heaven!"

He turned from the bedside, and without saying another word to the parties present, he walked away to his own room, and left them staring at each other in surprise. The young lady now opened her eyes, and looked wildly about her for a few moments, and then she spoke quickly,

"Oh, help! help! help! away, away. Oh, horror — horror — horror!"

"Annetta, my dear Annetta," said Mrs. Lake, "what is this? Pray, sir, retire," to the landlord. "My dear Annetta, what has alarmed you? My dear, go away, Mr. Lake. I will let you know all about it. It's a mystery to me at present. Go away, I'll be back soon."

Mr. Lake left the room, and in the corridor he found the landlord, who was looking as bewildered as any mortal man could well look, for he could make neither head nor tail of the whole affair.

"Landlord," said Mr. Lake, "who is that party who behaved so strangely just now?"

"His name is Blue, sir."

"Blue — Blue. An odd name, and an odd man. Where can I have seen him before. Just as he cried out, and went into the room, I thought there was a something in his voice that came familiarly to my ears, and yet I don't know him; I suspect landlord, that he has had more to do with this midnight disturbance than he would care to own."

"Well, sir, I don't know," said the landlord, whose interest it was not to disoblige, or throw suspicion upon any of his guests. "It really ain't very likely, sir. I should say the young lady has had a bad dream, sir, and that's almost all that can be said about it."

"It may be so."

"You may depend that's what it will turn out to be, sir."

"I hope so, I hope so. These things are not at all pleasant, and if anything of the kind should happen again we should have to quit directly, you know, but I can say nothing now about it until I have heard from Mrs. Lake what account Annetta gives of the affair. That alone must guide us in the whole business. In the morning we will talk about it, sir."

There was a great deal of austerity in the manner of Mr. Lake; indeed he might well enough be excused for not being over pleased at what had taken place, and as for Mr. Blue there certainly was sufficient in his behaviour to induce a large amount of suspicion, that he was in some way connected with the affair. Moreover the efforts he evidently made in the way of disguise were extremely suspicious in themselves. He evidently had a something to conceal, and when the landlord was now left alone in the corridor, he was strongly induced to make one of his first acts in the morning a notice to Mr. Blue, that he would much prefer his room to his company at the London Hotel.

And then it all of a sudden came into the landlord's head, how poor Mr. Black must have been distressed at what had taken place; for Sam had told him what Mr. Black had said about wishing to sleep quietly, so that he felt quite a pang at the idea of so civil a gentleman having been so awfully disturbed, as he must have been, and he had no doubt but that in the morning he would go away.

"I wonder if he is awake?" thought the landlord; "if I could but make some sort of apology to him to-night, and soothe him, all might be well. I'll first go and listen at his door; it may be that he really wants something, and if so perhaps it would look attentive to knock and see him; I think I will. It's quite out of the question that he should have slept in the middle of all this riot."

He approached Mr. Black's door, and listened.

All was still as the very grave.

"What a horrid thing it would be if the shock, in his weak state, has been the death of him!" thought the landlord, and the very idea made him quake again.

After a few moments passed in this state of painful thought, he found that it would be quite out of the question for him to go to his own room again, without ascertaining how Mr. Black was, and accordingly he knocked at the door, first gently and then louder, and then louder still, but received no answer.

"Oh, this won't do, I must get in somehow," thought the landlord.

He tried the handle, and found in a moment that the door was not fast; a light was burning on the side of the table which was close to the bed, and there lay Mr. Black fast asleep, and looking so calm and serene, although he

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was an ugly man, that the landlord was truly astonished to see him.

"Well," he said, "that's what I call sound sleeping, at all events. It's a mercy however." Oh lor! he' going to awake."

Mr. Black opened his eyes, and looked up.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the landlord, "I earnestly beg your pardon, but as there had been a litle noise in the house I came to see, first, if you had been disturbed, an then if you wanted anything, sir."

"No, no, thank you. Has there been a noise, do you say."

"A -- a little, sir."

"Well, I was fast asleep and did not hear it. However, I do sleep so sound that I think a cannon going off at my ear would hardly awaken me. I am much obliged however for your attention, landlord."

"Can't I get you anything, sir?"

"Nothing until the morning, thank you."

"Thank you sir, good night sir, good night." -- "Well," said the landlord, as, finding all quiet, he took his way now back to his own room, "well, he is a gentleman, every inch of him, that he is. How very mild and polite. -- He hasn't been disturbed, well that's a comfort."

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Chapter CLXIV. THE WAITER TELLS THE STORY OF THE LAKES' DISTURBANCE TO GEORGE AND FRANCIS.

Nothing further occurred during the night to cause any alarm to the inmates of the London Hotel, but we may as well give Miss Annetta'a account of the night's transaction; and account which she gave to Mrs. Lake at the time, and which soon spread all over the hotel, with, no doubt, many additions and embellishments as it was carried.

She said, that having retired to rest, she, being fatigued by her journey, soon dropped off asleep. That she, to the best of her belief, fastened her room door, although she certainly could not absolutely swear to having done so, she was so very weary. She did not know how long she had slept, but she had a frightful dream, in which she thought she was pursued by wolves who ran after her through a large tract of country until she took shelter in a wood, and then all the wolves left her and abandoned the pursuit, except one, and that one caught her and fastened his fangs in her throat just as she sunk down exhausted upon a great heap of dried leaves that came in her way in the forest.

She then went on to say that in the agony of her dream she actually awoke at that moment, and saw a human face close to her, and that a man had his mouth close to her neck, and was sucking her blood.

It was then that she uttered the two screams which had so alarmed the whole house; and then she stated that the vampire, for such she named the apparition, left her and she fainted away.

Now this story so far as it went, might all be very well accounted for by being called a dream, and the change from a wolf to a man might be but one of those fantastic changes that our sleeping visions so frequently undergo, but — and in this case this was a serious but — but she showed upon her neck the marks of two teeth, and there was a small wound on which even in the morning was a little portion of coagulated blood.

This staggered everybody, as well it might, and the whole hotel was in a state of confusion. Mr. Blue kept his room. Mr. Black got up and declared that he was much better than the day before, attributing his indisposition to bodily fatigue; and the Lakes were in a state of consternation difficult to describe.

The landlord, too, was nearly out of his senses at the idea of a vampire being in his house, and a grand consultation was held in the bar parlour between him, Mr. and Mrs. Lake, and Mr. Black, who was asked if he would step down and give his opinion, which compliment was paid to him on account of his being such a gentlemanly and quiet man.

They took it in turns to speak, and the landlord had the first say.

"Gentlemen," he said, "and you madam, you can easily conceive how grieved I am about what has taken place, and I can only say that anything in the world that I can do to find out all about it, I will do with the greatest possible pleasure. Command me in any way, but — but if I have a suspicion of anybody in this house, it is of that Mr. Blue."

"And I too," said Mrs. Lake.

"I don't know what to say further," remarked Mr. Lake, "than that my suspicions of some foul play on the part of Mr. Blue, are so strong, that if he is not turned out of the Hotel, we will leave to-night."

"That's conclusive," said the landlord. "But if you Mr. Black, would favor us with your opinion, I'm sure, sir, we should be all much obliged."

"I am afraid," said Mr. Black in his quiet, gentlemanly way, "that my opinion will be of very little importance, as I know nothing of the whole affair, but just what I have heard from one and another; I slept all the while it appears. But there is one circumstance that certainly to me is an unpleasant and a suspicious one, and that is that Mr. Blue, as he calls himself, was up and dressed, and that, with the exception of your night-watchman, he was the only person in the hotel who was so."

"That's a fact," said the landlord, "I met him."

"Then that settles the business," said Mr. Lake, "send him away. God knows if there be such things as vampires or not, but at all events, the suspicion is horrid, so you had better get rid of him at once."

"I will — I will."

"Stop," said Mr. Black. "Before you do so, is it not worth while to make some effort to come at the precise

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truth, and that in my opinion, would be very desirable indeed."

"It would — it would," said Mr. Lake, "you must understand, sir, that the young lady is especially under my care, and in fact I esteem her greatly — very greatly I may say, for a variety of reasons, and therefore anything that I can do, which may have the effect of securing her peace of mind and happiness will be to me a sacred purpose."

"Then I should recommend," said Mr. Black, "that this lady and your wife, landlord, keep watch in the young lady's chamber to-night."

"Oh, I couldn't — I couldn't," said the landlady.

"Nor I," replied Mrs. Lake, "nor I, I'm sure, I cannot think of such a thing, I could not do it, I should faint away from terror.

"And so should I," cried the landlady. "I feel quite ill even now at the thought of the thing."

"Then I can say no more, ladies. Of course, gentlemen cannot very well, unless they are very near relatives, undertake such a job. I tell you what we can do, though; suppose we watch in the corridor, you and I, Mr. Lake, and leaving the door of the young lady's chamber just closed we shall hear if there be any alarm given from within and effectually secure her from intrusion without. What say you to this, as a plan of proceedings? There is your son too, might keep watch with us."

"I'm afraid he is too nervous."

"Yes," said the landlord, "and he might pop into my bed again, as he did last night in his fright. Oh don't have him gentlemen, I beg of you. I would go myself, but I am so sleepy always, that I never can keep my eyes open after twelve o'clock. Not that I am at all afraid of anything, but its downright sleepiness you see, gentlemen. I am on my feet all day, and — and so you see I'd rather not on the whole."

"I am willing," said Mr. Black.

"Sir," said Mr. Lake, "I am quite ashamed of giving you so much trouble, but I can only say that I shall be very much obliged indeed, by your company, and I do hope that we shall have the pleasure of catching Mr. Blue if he be guilty."

"Or acquitting him if innocent," added Mr. Black. "Let us be just even in the midst of our suspicions. It would be a terrible thing to stigmatise this gentleman as a vampire, when perhaps he may have as great a horror of such gentry as we possibly can."

At this moment young Lake made his appearance. He looked rather pale as he apologised to the landlord for his unintentional intrusion into his room over night.

"The fact is," said he, "I am as constitutionally brave as a lion, and so whenever anything occurs I run away."

"Indeed, sir, an odd way of showing courage," said Mr. Black. "Why do you run away?"

"For fear, sir, of doing something rash."

"Well, I certainly never heard a better excuse for an undignified retreat in one's shirt, before in my life. But you will not be called upon to do anything to-night. You had better shut yourself up, and let you hear what you will, you need not come out of your room, you know."

"Well, do you know, sir, I think that it would be the best way, for if I came out I might do something rash, such as kill somebody, which I should afterwards be sorry for, you know."

"Certainly."

"Then that's understood, father, that let what will happen I won't come out. I have been speaking to Annetta, but I can't somehow or another get her to be pleasant."

"Hush!" said old Lake, and he bent his brows upon his son reprovingly, as if he fancied that he was letting out more of the family secrets than he ought to have done. The young man was silent accordingly, for he seemed to be in great dread of his father, who certainly if not a better man, was a man of much more intellect and courage than the son, who was but a very few degrees removed from absolute silliness. He was fool enough to be wicked, and the father was cunning enough to be so. How strange that vice should usually belong to the two extremes of intellect, that folly and talent should lead to similar results, a disregard of the ordinary moral obligations; but it is so. We may pass over the rest of the day, and we do so the more willingly, because we are anxious that the reader should be possessed of some particulars which George and Francis, the servants of Lord Lake communicated without any reserve at all to Slop, the waiter.

Indeed, far from having anything like a wish to conceal anything, they seemed to glory in saying as much as

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they could with respect to those matters that were uppermost in their mind.

This was just the frame of mind that Slop would have wished in his prayers, had he prayed at all upon the subject, to find them in; for although Slop was quite remarkable for neglecting his own affairs, he never neglected anybody else's and curiosity had been the bane of his existence.

Upon arriving at the King's Head, in Chiswell-street, he found that the servants of Lord Lake were there, according as they had said they should be, and glasses of something uncommonly hot and strong having been ordered, they and Slop soon grew quite happy and familiar together.

First, though, before they would commence a history of anything they had to tell of the Lake family, they resolved upon hearing from Slop all that had passed at the London Hotel, and you may be quite sure, that it lost nothing in the telling, but was duly made as much of as the circumstances would permit. No doubt the fumes of the something hot materially assisted Mr. Slop's invention and general talents upon the interesting occasion.

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Chapter CLXV. THE COMMUNICATION OF THE SERVANTS RESPECTING THE LAKE FAMILY.

The coachman and groom, evidently listened with great interest to what Slop had to relate. For a wonder, they were completely silent while he spoke; and when he had concluded, they looked at each other, and nodded, as much to say, — Ah! we can draw some conclusion from all that, that you Mr. Slop, really know nothing at all about.

"Is that all?" said George.

"Yes," said the waiter, "and sufficient I think."

"More, a good deal," remarked Francis. "But howsomdever, as you seem a proper sort of fellow, we don't mind telling you what we think of the matter."

"No, no," interposed George, "not exactly that."

"And why not?"

"Because you see, Francis, we have never known yet, my boy, what to think about it."

"Well there's some truth in that at all events. But we will tell Mr. Slop what happened once before that wasn't much unlike what has taken place at the London Hotel."

"Well, but tell him first who she is," said George. "Then he'll understand all the rest better, as well as taking more interest in it."

"Very good. Then listen, Mr. Slop."

"With all my ears," said Slop.

At this moment a bell rung sharply, and Slop on the impulse of the moment, sprung up, —

"Coming — coming — coming."

Both George and Francis burst into a great laugh, and Slop was quite disconcerted.

"Really, gentlemen," he said, "I'm sorry, very sorry, but I'm so used to cry, coming, when a bell rings, that, for the moment, I forgot there was no sort of occasion to do so here. I begs you won't think no more of it, but tell me all as you have got to tell."

"Don't mention it," said Francis, and then after taking another draught of the something strong, and settling himself in his seat, commenced.

"Lord Lake, you know, is our master, and a very good sort of a man he is, only he's a — a — a; what did the doctor call him George?"

"Oh, I know, a — a — a, what was it Frank?"

"Well, I asked you. It was a wallytoddyhairyhun, I think."

"Something like it. Odd wasn't it?"

"Wery."

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," said a gentlemanly looking man who was seated in an obscure corner of the room, and who was desperately ugly — at least so much as could be seen of his face, for it was much muffled up. "I beg your pardon, but the word you mean I suppose is valetudinarian."

"That's it, that's it! I knows it when I hears it. That's it; well they say that in consequence of being that ere he was rather cross-grained a little when there wasn't no sort of occasion for it, and barring that, which, poor man, I suppose he could not help, he was about as decent a master as ever stepped in shoe leather, wasn't he, George?"

"I believe you, my boy."

"Well, the Countess of Bhackbighte was his mother-in-law, you see, a wicious old woman as ever lived, and when Lady Lake died it was she as brought the news to Lord Lake that his wife was dead, and the virtuous baby as she had just brought into the world was dead too, was'nt that it, George?"

"I believe you my boy, rather."

"Well, Lord Lake was inconsolotable as they says, for ever so long, and he made friends with his brother who would come next into the property; they all went abroad together."

"All who?" said Slop.

"Wery good, I'll tell you, Lord Lake, his brother, his brother's wife and son. Them as is now at the London

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Hotel. Now you knows, don't you?"

"Go on, I knows."

"Well they hadn't been there above a matter o' fourteen years when the old Countess of Bhackbighte dies, and then there comes a letter to my lord as says that the precious baby as his wife had brought into the world just afore she went out of it herself, wasn't dead at all, but had been smugged away by the old Countess, nobody knows what for, and that she was alive and kicking then, and ready to come to her papa whenever he said the word, and so come she did, you see, and thats our young lady Annetta, you see, as is at the London Hotel."

"Well, but I don't understand," said Slop.

"Of course you don't"

"Oh."

"But you will if you goes on a listening; you can't expect to undertand all at once you know. Just attend to the remainder and you'll soon know all about it; but George is the man to tell you, that he is."

"Oh, no, no," said George.

"Why, you heard it, and told it to me. Come, don't be foolish, but tell it at once, old fellow."

"Well, if I must, I must," said George, "so here goes; though when I has to tell anything, I always feels as if I was being druv with a curb half-a-dozen links too tight. But here goes."

"I am very much amused," said Slop, "and should certainly like to hear it all. Pray go on?"

"Well, you must know we was at an old tumble down place in Italy, as they call's Rome. Horridly out o' repair, but that's neither here nor there. In course we had stables and riding out; and there was a nice sort o' terrace where Lord Lake used to walk sometimes, as well as his brother, while the carriage was being got out, so that I could hear what they said if I chose to do so.

"Well, one day the brother, Mr. Lake, or the Honourable Dick Lake as he was sometimes called, was walking there alone, and I seed as he was all of a tremble like, you understand! but I could not have any idea of what it was about. Once or twice I heard him say, -- 'It will do -- and it will do'"

"Presently, then out comes Lord Lake, and he says, giving the other a letter, 'Good God, read that!' Give us a trifle more sugar?"

"What?"

"Why, what do you mean," said Francis. "Is that the way to tell a story, to run into what people says what you happens to want yourself? Here's the sugar, and now go on."

"Well, the brother reads it, and then he says; 'Gracious Providence,' says he 'this here says as the Lady Annetta, aint your daughter, but a himposter.'

"'Yes,' says Lord Lake, 'oh, what will become of me now?'

"'Calm yourself,' says the brother, 'and leave this affair to me. Let her go with me to England, and we will clear up the mystery. I love her as I would a child of my own; but still this here letter' says he, 'seems to contain such a statement;' says he-- -- "

"Well? Well?"

"That's all! After that, they walked off the terrace and I didn't hear no more at all. After that, in a day or two Lord Lakes comes to me; and says, 'George, my brother and his family, with Lady Annetta, are going to England. I wish you and Francis to accompany them and to attend upon them, just the same as you would on myself,' says he, and in course I didn't like to say anything; so we came, but as our idea of the brother is that he's a humbug, we wouldn't have no more to do with him, after we got to London, you see; and so off we went as you heard."

"Well, but," said Slop; "there was a something else you was to tell me;"

"So there was," said Francis "and this was it. While we were staying at a place called Florence, and sleeping all of us in an old palace, there was an alarm in the middle of the night, and we found it came from the chamber of the Lady Annetta; who said that a man had got in by the window, and she just woke in time to see him; and when she screamed out away he went again, but nothing could be seen of him; the oddest thing was that the window was so high from the ground, that it seemed to be quite out of the question that he could have got at it without a ladder; yet the deuce of a ladder was there to be seen."

"And who was it?"

"Nobody ever knew, but the night after it was said that a vampire had visited a cottage near at hand, and fastened on the throat of a little girl of about seven, and sucked half the blood out of her, so that she was lying at

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the point of death; and the description the child gave of him was so like what the Lady Annetta said of the man that had got in at the window of her bedroom, that my lord got very uneasy about it, and moved away from Florence as quick as he could, and no wonder, either, you will say."

"It was odd."

"It was, and what you have told me of last night, put me in mind of it, you see."

"No doubt; Lord, I'm all of a twitter myself."

"Why, what need you care? those who know about vampires say that there are two sorts, one sort always attacks its own relations as was, and nobody else, and the other always selects the most charming young girls, and nobody else, and if they can't get either, they starve to death, waste away and die, for they take no food or drink of any sort, unless they are downright forced."

"But who told you?"

"Oh, an old Italian priest, who spoke English."

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Chapter CLXVI. THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.—THE NIGHT WATCH.

At this moment, the stranger who had put the coachman and groom right about the word valetudinarian, rose from the seat he had occupied in the corner of the room, and uttering a deep, hollow groan, walked towards the door.

The party looked at him with awe and astonishment. He was of great height but frightfully thin, and the slight glance they could get of his face, showed how perfectly ugly he was. In another moment he had left the place, and there was a silence of several minutes duration after he had done so, but it was at length broken by the coachman, who said, —

"I say, Frank, my boy."

"Here you is," said Francis.

"Don't you think if you never seed anybody as looked like a vampire before, you have seed one now."

"The devil," said Francis, "you don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do though, and it strikes me wonderful as we have been a telling all we had to tell afore the very individual, of all others, as we ought'nt to a told it to, that's a vampire. If a hoss is a hoss, that's a vampire, Frank! I knows it — I feels it."

Frank looked aghast.

"Why, why," then he said, "we have just told him where to find the Lady Lake if he wants her. Lor — what — suppose it's the same one as got in at the window at Florence! I'll have him, he can't have got far, I should say, by this time, and hang me if I don't stop him and know what he is, afore he goes any further. I shan't sleep if I don't."

Without waiting for any reply, although the coachman, and Mr. Slop both seemed to be upon the point of saying something, out rushed the valorous Francis into the street. But in about three minutes he came back, and sat down with a disappointed look.

"He's off," he said.

"In course," said the coachman, "through the air like a sky rocket, you might a know'd that; but arter all, Frank, he mayden't be a vampire. Do vampires come into public houses, eh? Answer me that will you; I rather think that's a settler, Frank."

"Do you" said Frank. "It might be, old fellow, if you could prove it. It would be an odd thing for a vampire to come into a public house and drink, but I don't see, if he has anything again by it, anything to prevent him coming and ordering and paying for something, and then leaving it. Look there!"

Frank pointed to the brimming glass of something which was on the table just where the mysterious man had sat, and this to the coachman and to Slop was such proof positive that they both looked at each other with the most rueful expression of their countenances.

"I think you are convinced now, you old ump," added Frank.

"Rather, rather."

"I'm all over of a cold inspiration," said Slop.

"Well," added Frank, "it's not never of no use, you know, putting yourself out of the way about it, and that's the fact, and all I've got to say is that I've got nothing to say."

"Wery good, wery good."

"But if you, Mr. Slop, will give us a call to-morrow and let us know if anything wrong has took place at the London Hotel, we shall be very much obliged to you; for its natural for us that we feel an interest in what's going on there on account of our young lady, who we won't and don't think is anything else but our young lady, and if she was not, she ought to be; and I tell you what, just keep an eye on the spooney, young Lake."

"I will."

"He wants to be be quite sweet with the Lady Annetta, but she can't abide him. But you tell us if he tries to pitch it too strong, and we shall perhaps hit on some scheme of operations."

All this Slop promised faithfully, and with his own nerves rather startled at the idea of having been in the same room for the better part of an hour with a vampire, he walked back to the hotel, and as he had not been

enjoined to any secrecy he gave the landlord a full and particular account of all that had taken place.

This was listened to with no small degree of interest, but as mine host of the London Hotel could make nothing of it, he could do nothing with it.

"Slop," he said, "I don't like the state of things at all, I assure you, Slop, and I rather shake than otherwise about what's to occur to-night. You know there's to be a watch kept in the corridor by the young lady's room, or else poor thing no doubt she wouldn't get a wink of sleep, and I'm quite sure that I sha'nt at all events, let what will happen or what won't; I'm all in a twitter now as it is, I've broke nine wine glasses already; and all I can say is, I wish they would all go away.

The landlord did not like to give good guests notice to quit his house, but he had a consultation with Mr. Black, whom he considered to be quite his sheet-anchor in this affair, for if that gentleman had not offered to sit up and watch for the vampire, he, the landlord, certainly would, despite all profitable considerations, have requested guests who brought with them such questionable connexions to leave.

The night had now come on, and as hour after hour passed away, the anxiety of all concerned in the affairs that were taking place at the London hotel increased. But we need not occupy the time and attention of the reader with surmises and reflections while facts of an interesting and strange nature remain to be detailed.

Suffice it that at eleven o'clock the Lady Annetta retired to rest.

Two chairs, and a table on which burnt two candles, were placed in the corridor just outside the room in which the fair girl who had the previous night had such a visitor reposed, and there sat Mr. Black and Mr. Lake, both determined to do their utmost to discover the mystery of the vampire's appearance, and to capture him should he again show himself.

During the first half hour's watch, Mr. Lake related to his companion the particulars of the affair at Florence, which as it has already been told by Francis, we need not again recapitulate, suffice it to say that the narration was listened to by Mr. Black with great interest.

"And did you," he said, "make no discovery of who this midnight visitor was?"

"None whatever."

"'Tis awfully strange."

"It is, and has given her abundance of uneasiness."

"And well it may, sir, I shall be very happy if through my means any elucidation of these mysteries and truly terrific visitations should take place."

"You are very good sir. What is that?"

"Twelve o'clock, I think, striking by some neighbouring church time-keeper. Hush! is it not so? Yes, twelve."

"It is. How still the house is. I was told this was a very quiet hotel, and so indeed I find it, but yet, I suppose upon this occasion there is more stillness than usual."

"Doubtless. Hush, hush! what was that? I thought I heard something like a window opening slowly and cautiously. Hark! There again. Do you not hear it. Hush, hush. Listen now."

"On my life I can hear nothing."

"Indeed your sense of hearing then is not so sharp as mine. Look there."

He pointed as he spoke to the door of Mr. Blue' chamber, which was opened a very short distance, not above a couple of inches, and then he added in a whisper, "What do you think of that?"

"By heaven! I suspected him before."

"And I — and — be still, whatever you do. But yet perhaps it would be better. Go down stairs and bring up the hall porter, we may as well be in force you know. The door at the head of the stairs is open. You can depend upon my keeping a good watch while you are gone. Now, now, quick, or we may be pounced upon and murdered before we are aware."

Thus urged Mr. Lake ran down stairs for the purpose of rousing up the night-porter, and he found that that individual did indeed require rousing up.

"Hilloa, my man," he said, "get up!"

"Eh? eh? what? fire!"

"No, no, they want you up stairs, that's all. You are a pretty fellow to consider yourself a night-watch here and to be fast asleep. Why, with the exception that you have your clothes on you, you are no more ready than anybody else in the house."

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"I beg your pardon sir, I always sleeps with one eye open."

"Well well, come up stairs!"

A loud scream at this moment came upon their ears, and the night-porter staggered back again into his great leathern chair, from whence he had just risen, and looked aghast! while Mr. Lake turned pale and trembled fearfully.

"Good God!" he said, "what's that?"

A bell was rung furiously, and then ceased, with a sudden jar, as if the wire had broken, which was indeed the fact. Then Mr. Lake, mustering all the courage he possessed, ran up stairs again, leaving the night-porter to follow him, or not as he felt inclined; but when he reached the door at the top of the staircase, he found that it was fast, nor could he with all his strength force it open.

"Help! help! help!" he heard a voice cry.

Chapter CLXVII. THE VAMPIRE'S FEAST. -- THE ALARM AND THE PURSUIT.

A general ringing of bells now ensued in the hotel, from all the bedrooms that were occupied, and the din in the house was quite terrific.

Mr. Lake hammered away at the door leading to the corridor, and he was soon joined by the hall-porter, who having now recovered from the first shock which the scream had given him, showed more courage and determination than any one would have given him credit for. He was rather a bulky man, and without any more ado, he flung himself bodily against the door with such force that he dashed it open and rolled into the corridor.

All was darkness.

"Lights! lights! lights!" shouted Mr. Lake. "Lights! -- Mr. Black, where are you? Mr. Black! Mr. Black!"

A door, it was that of Mr. Blue, was now dashed open, and that gentleman appeared with a candle in his hand, and a pistol firmly grasped in the other. It was very strange but he wore an artificial masquerade nose of an enormous size, and had on a red wig.

"Who locked my door?" he cried, "who locked my room door on the outside and forced me to break it open -- who did it?"

"Where is the vampire?" said Mr. Lake.

"Lights! lights! Lights!" shouted the night-watchman, and in another minute the landlord and several waiters, half-dressed but carrying lights, and each armed with the first weapon of offence he could lay his hands on at the moment, made their appearance on the scene of action.

"What is it? What is it?" cried the landlord. "Oh what is it?"

"God knows," cried Mr. Lake, and he darted into the apartment of the young lady. In another moment he emerged, and tottered towards one of the seats.

"She is covered with blood," he said.

Mr. Blue and the landlady of the Hotel both made a rush then into the room, and the former came out in a minute, and going to his own apartment shut the door. They thought that they then heard him fall at full length upon the floor. All was mystery.

"I'm bewildered," said the landlord, "What is it all about?"

"And where is Mr. Black?" asked Mr. Lake.

"Here," cried a waiter as he pointed to an insensible form lying so close to the table, that nobody had as yet noticed it. "Here he is. He looks as if he was dead."

Poor Mr. Black was lifted up, his eyes were closed as well as his mouth, and he seemed to breathe with difficulty. He was placed in a chair, and then held, while water was dashed in his face to recover him, and after a time, just as one of the waiters who had been sent for the surgeon again who had before attended the young lady, made his appearance with that gentleman, he slowly opened his eyes.

"Oh! mercy, mercy! Where am I now?"

"What is all this about?" inquired the medical man.

"Nobody knows sir," said the landlord, "that's the beauty of it. But the young lady is very bad again; will you, wife, show the doctor into her room. Good God, I shall go out of my wits, and my hotel that has a character forming one of the quietest in all London -- yes, the quietest I may say. I'm a ruined man."

"Mr. Black," said Mr. Lake, "I implore you if you can to tell the meaning of all this."

"All -- all I know," said Mr. Black faintly. "All I know, -- "

Everybody gathered round him to listen, and with looks of fright and apprehension, and a trembling voice, he said: --

"I -- I was sitting here waiting for Mr. Lake to come back with the night porter, for we had some cause to wish for further help, when somebody came suddenly up to me, and struck me down. The blow was on the top of my head, and so severe, that I fell as if shot."

"And then? and then?"

"Nothing. I don't know anything else till you recovered me, and then, I seemed as if all the place was scouring

round me; and then -- "

"But, Mr. Black, cannot you tell us who struck you? What was he like? Could you identify him again?"

"I fear not. Indeed I hardly saw more of him than that he was tall."

"Well," cried Mr. Lake, "all I can say is that I have had my suspicions since last night, and now I am certain, that is to say circumstantially certain. What say you, landlord? Is there not one person in the house who may not fairly enough be suspected."

He looked towards the door of Mr. Blue's room, as he spoke, and indeed all eyes were turned in that direction, and the landlord mustering up courage advanced to the door and said, as he did so, "We will have him out. He shall not stay another hour on my premises. We will have him out, I say. This sort of thing won't do, and it shall not do. We will have him out. I say gentlemen we will have him out."

One thing was quite clear, and that was that the landlord wanted somebody to come forward, and assist him in having out Mr. Blue; but when he found that nobody stirred he turned round at the door, and looked rather foolish.

Under any other circumstances, perhaps, this conduct might have excited the risible faculties of all who were present; but the affair, take it all in all, was of too mysterious and serious a character to indulge in any laughter about.

"I," said Mr. Lake, advancing, "will have him out, if nobody else will!"

It would appear as if Mr. Blue had been listening to what was going on; for on the instant, he flung open his door, and said, --

"Who will have me out, and what for?"

"Vampire, vampire," cried a chorus of voices.

"Idiots!" said Mr. Blue.

"Detain him!" said Mr. Lake; "detain him, we shall never be satisfied until this affair is thoroughly and judicially enquired into. Detain him I say."

"Let him who sets no value on his life," said Mr. Blue, "lay but a hand upon me, and he shall have to admire the consequences of his rashness. I am not one to be trifled with; it is my fancy to leave this hotel this moment let any one dare to stand in my way."

"Your name is not Blue," said the landlord, "you are not what you seem."

"Granted."

"Ah! you admit it," said Lake. "Lay hold of him, I will give ten pounds for him dead or alive; I have often heard of vampires, and by Heaven, I now believe in them. Seize him, I say, seize him."

He dashed forward himself, as he spoke, and was on the point of seizing hold of Mr. Blue, when one well-directed blow from that individual sent him sprawling. After this nobody showed any very marked disposition to attack him, but he was allowed to walk calmly and slowly down the staircase of the hotel; while Lake gathered himself up, looking rather confused at the tumble he had had. But his passion was not subdued, for he made a rush still after the supposed vampire, but he was too late. The hotel door was closed with a bang, that reverberated through the house, and Mr. Blue was gone, vampire, or no vampire.

"Landlord, I shall leave your house," said Lake.

"I'm ruined," said the landlord. "This affair will get into some Sunday paper. Mr. Black, what is to be done?"

"Really, the top of my head is so hurt," replied Mr. Black, "that I can think of nothing else."

"A plague upon the top of your head," muttered the landlord.

The Lakes now, that is Mr. and Mrs. Lake found their way to the young lady's chamber, when they found her in a state of great alarm. The story she told amounted to this: --

She was asleep, she said, having perfect confidence that no harm could come to her, while the door of her room was watched in the way it was. She had a light burning in her room, but it was one that gave a very faint light, as she had usually an objection to sleeping otherwise than in profound darkness; but she had no notion of how long she had been asleep, when she was awakened by a hand being placed over her mouth, which prevented her from breathing.

She struggled to free herself but it was in vain. The monster attacked her on the neck with his teeth, and all she remembered was getting sufficiently free to utter one scream, and then she fainted away.

"My dear," said Mrs. Lake, "I must have some serious talk with you upon a subject which I have before urged. Go away, Lake."

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Lake left the room, and then, Mrs. Lake continued.

"This is a very dreadful affair, Annetta. You know that it is fancied you are not the child of Lord Lake, and that we have the care of you. Now we so much love and admire you, -- "

"Stop madam, stop," said the young lady, "I know what you are about to say, you are going to urge me again to marry your son, which I will never do, for I have the greatest aversion to him."

"You will not? who will protect you from a vampire better than a husband."

"Probably no one, but at least I reserve to myself the right to choose to whom I give that task, I am ill now and weak, I pray you not to weary me further upon a subject concerning which it is quite impossible we can ever agree. I only wish I were dead."

"And that you may very well soon be if your blood is all sucked away by a vampire."

"So be it. Heaven help me!"

"Pshaw! you may die as soon as you like."

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Chapter CXVIII. THE MEETING IN ST. JAMES'S PARK.

Another day passed over at the London Hotel, and as Mr. Blue had been kind enough to take his departure, and that departure seemed to be final, for he did not show himself again, Mr. Lake rescinded the resolution he had made to leave.

Probably it was much more convenient for him to stay, although he pretended that he did so out of consideration for the landlord, who ought not to be punished for innocently harbouring so suspicious a character as Mr. Blue, whether he were a vampire, or not.

But the day, as we say, has passed away, and it is about half-past eight o'clock in the evening, and quite dark, for the moon did not rise for an hour afterwards, when Mr. Lake might have been seen making his way towards Saint James's Park.

He entered it by the narrow mode of ingress by Spring Gardens, and made his way towards the palace of Saint James, that is to say, the wall of its private gardens that look upon the park; and then, under some shady trees, he paused and looked inquiringly about him.

"He was to have been here a little before nine," he muttered. "Hush!"

The Horse Guards clock chimed three-quarters past eight.

Mr. Lake draw back, as two men came at a slow pace towards where he stood, and then he muttered, —

"It is Miller, but confound him, who is that he has brought with him? Hang the fellow! I did not give him leave to make a confidant in this ticklish piece of business."

One of the men only now advanced, leaving the other about twelve paces from him.

"Mr. L — —, I think," he said.

"Yes, Miller, it is I; but who in the name of all that's infernal have you brought with you? Are you mad to trust to anybody but yourself?"

"Oh, don't trouble yourself about that, sir. The fact is, he has been with me for a number of years; he is my managing clerk, and as great a rogue as you would wish him to be. I cannot keep anything wholly from him, so the best way, I find, is to make a confidant of him at once."

"I don't half like it."

"You may thoroughly depend upon Lee, that is his name, and you never knew such a rogue as he is, sir; besides, somebody, you know, must have been trusted to personate the father, and he will do that, and then, you know likewise, sir, that — —"

"Hush, hush! speak lower! will you? bring this accomplished rogue this way, since I must do business, it seems, with him! Call him here, Miller, and we will talk as we walk on, that is always safer than holding a conference in one spot, near which any one may hide; but it is a much more difficult thing for a spy to follow and overhear you at the same time."

"You have a genius, Mr. Lake."

"Bah! I don't want any compliments from you, Miller; we want downright business."

By this time, Mr. Miller had made a sign to his clerk, Lee, to come up, which that individual did, and at once saluted Mr. Lake, and made some trivial remark about the weather, in an off-hand way.

Mr. Lake made rather a distant reply and then he said, —

"I presume, sir, that Mr. Miller has made you acquainted with the affair in which, it seems, I am to purchase your kind co-operation?"

"Oh no," said Miller, "I have certainly given him a brief outline, but I always prefer that the principal himself should give all the directions possible to every one, and tell his own story."

"Well, sir, I think you might as well have told him, and not given me the trouble. But, however, if I must, I must; so pray attend to me sir."

"I will," said Lee.

"My brother then, is Lord Lake. It's a new title rather, as our father was the first who had it, and he left large estates to my brother, and to his son if he had one, or his daughter, if he had one. The title descending to heir males, I must have the title by outliving my brother, if I do, but hang it all, she has a daughter, and she will have

the estates."

"I comprehend."

"The old countess of Bhackbighte smuggled the child away at its birth, and took care of it for a consideration that used up two-thirds of my income, but the old cat on her death confessed that the child was Lord Lakes's, but luckily, you see, without criminating me. Now Mr. Miller was her solicitor, and so between us we have forged a letter supposed to be found among the old countess's papers, in which she states that she intends to palm off a child as the Lord Lakes when she is dying, but that his child really did die, you see."

"Oh yes."

"Now this has had an effect upon Lord Lake, who to some extent had repudiated the girl, and what I want is to clinch the matter, by providing some one who will actually own her."

"I understand," said Lee, "but it will be an awkward affair if found out."

"I want to provide against any consequences of a disagreeable nature, by getting her to marry my son, but I don't think she will. Absolute distress to which I am determined to bring her, if I can, may move her to that step, and then all's right. The secret is in my hands to play with, as I think proper."

"A very good plan."

"You see, there's a lover of hers too, a young officer in the Guards, but he will be off as soon as he finds that she's the daughter of a lawyer's clerk instead of a lord — ha! ha! ha!"

"Likely enough. I'll father her."

"Thank you; and now about money matters. Miller gets a thousand pounds — what do you want? Be moderate."

"I ought to have five hundred pounds to pay me."

"The deuce! Well, I don't want to stint you. But you will bear in mind that that is very good pay; and now we must get up a first rate story, so complete in all its parts that there shall be no sort of doubt about it, you see — a story that will stand the test of examination and criticism."

"That can be better done in my chambers," said the attorney; "I think now we understand each other perfectly well, and that we need hardly say any more just at present. Money matters are settled, and as Mr. Lee has once undertaken the business, I am quite satisfied, for one, that it will be well done."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Miller, and I am quite reconciled, which I must own I was not at first, to Mr. Lee having a finger in the pie."

"Thank you," said Lee, "thank you; we shall manage it all right, no doubt. Indeed now that you have fully explained it to me, it seems quite an easy and straightforward affair."

"You think so."

"I certainly do think so."

"Then you take off my mind a load of anxiety for thought it would be a difficult thing to arrange, and require no end of chicanery and trouble, but you quite reassure — you quite reassure me, Mr. Lee."

"Oh, these things are done every day, my dear sir."

They had walked to and fro as they spoke till now, by the time they had settled their affairs thus far, they stood by the centre of the principal mall. The park was very quiet, and had quite a deserted aspect. Indeed, it was near the time when there would be more difficulty in traversing it in consequence of the extra vigilance of the night sentinels.

The moon faded gradually away, or seemed to fade away as the light fleecy clouds swept over its face, and the parties who had held this interesting dialogue separated. Mr. Lake walked hurriedly towards his hotel, and the attorney and his accomplice stood for a few moments conversing in whispers. They then turned towards the Green Park, and as they did so, they were crossed by a tall, spectral-looking figure wrapped up in an immense cloak, but who did not seem to observe them, for his eyes were fixed upon the moon, which at that moment again began to emerge from the clouds.

He stretched forth his arms as if he would have held the beautiful satellite to his heart.

"An odd fish," whispered the attorney.

"Very," said his companion. "I should like now to know who he is."

The attorney shrugged his shoulders, as he said, "Some harmless lunatic most likely. They say that such often wander all night about the parks."

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"That's strange; only look at him now. he seems to be worshipping the moon, and now how he strides along; and see, there is another man meets him, and they both hold up their arms in that strange way to the moon. What on earth can be the meaning of it?"

"I really don't know."

"Some religious fanatics, perhaps."

"Ah! that's as likely as not. We have all sorts of them, jumpers and screamers and tearers, and why not a few who may call themselves Lunarians. For my part I would rather worship the moon than I would, as most church and chapel going women do, worship some canting evangelical thief of a parson, who has -- oh dear! such elegant hands, and such whiskers, and speaks so soft and impressive. Of all the rougues on earth, I do detest those in surplices!"

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Chapter CLXIX. THE CHURCHYARD AT HAMPSTEAD. -- THE RESUSCITATION OF A VAMPIRE.

It wants half an hour to midnight. The sky is still cloudy, but glimpses of the moon can be got as occasionally the clouds slip on before her disc, and then what a glorious flood of silver light spread itself over the landscape.

And a landscape in every respect more calculated to look beautiful and rowantic under the chaste moon's ray, than that to which we would now invite attention, certainly could not have been found elsewhere, within many a mile of London. It is Hampstead Heath, that favoured spot where upon a small scale are collected some of the rarest landscape beauties that the most romantic mountainous counties of England can present to the gratified eye of the tourist.

Those who are familiar with London and its environs, of course, are well acquainted with every nook, glade, tree, and dell in that beautiful heath, where, at all and every time and season, there is much to recommend that semi-wild spot to notice. Indeed, if it were, as it ought to be, divested of its donkey-drivers and laundresses, a more delightful place of residence could scarcely be found than some one of those suburban villas, that are dotted round the margin of this picturesque waste.

But it is midnight, nearly. That time is forthcoming, at which popular superstition trembles -- that time, at which the voice of ignorance and of cant lowers to whispers, and when the poor of heart and timid of spirit imagine worlds of unknown terrors. On this occasion, though, it will be seen that there would have been some excuses if even the most bold had shrunk back appalled at what was taking place.

But we will not anticipate for truly in this instance might we say sufficient for the time are the horrors thereof.

If any one had stood on that portion of the high road which leads right over the heath and so on to Hendon or to Highgate, according as the left hand or the right hand route is taken, and after reaching the Castle Tavern, had looked across the wide expanse of heath to the west, they would have seen nothing for a while but the clustering bushes of heath blossom, and the picturesque fir trees, that there are to be beheld in great luxuriance. But, after a time, something of a more noticeable character would have presented itself.

At a quarter to twelve there rose up from a tangled mass of brushwood, which had partially concealed a deep cavernous place where sand had been dug, a human form, and there it stood in the calm still hour of night so motionless that it scarcely seemed to possess life, but presently another rose at a short distance.

And then there was a third, so that these three strange-looking beings stood like landmarks against the sky, and when the moon shone out from some clouds which had for a short time obscured her rays, they looked strange and tall, and superhuman.

One spoke.

"'Tis time," he said, in a deep, hollow voice, that sounded as if it came from the tomb.

"Yes, time," said another.

"Time has come," said the third.

Then they moved, and by the gestures they used, it seemed as if an animated discussion was taking place among them, after which they moved along in perfect silence, and in a most stately manner, towards the village of Hampstead.

Before reaching it, however, they turned down some narrow shaded walks among garden walls, and the backs of stables, until they emerged close to the old churchyard, which stands on high ground, and which was not then -- at least, the western portion of it -- overlooked by any buildings. Those villas which now skirt it, are of recent elevation.

A dense mass of clouds has now been brought up by a south wind, and had swept over the face of the moon, so that at this juncture, and as twelve o'clock might be expected every moment to strike, the night was darker than it had yet been since sunset. The circumstance was probably considered by the mysterious beings who sought the churchyard as favourable to them, and they got without difficulty within those sacred precincts devoted to the dead.

Scarcely had they found the way a dozen feet among the old tomb-stones, when from behind a large square monument, there appeared two more persons; and if the attorney, Mr. Miller, had been there, he would probably

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have thought they bore such a strong resemblance to those whom he had seen in the park, he would have had but little hesitation in declaring that they were the same.

These two persons joined the other three, who manifested no surprise at seeing them, and then the whole five stood close to the wall of the church, so that they were quite secure from observation, and one of them spoke.

"Brothers," he said, "you who prey upon human nature by the law of your being, we have work to do to-night — that work which we never leave undone, and which we dare not neglect when we know that it is to do. One of our fraternity lies here."

"Yes," said the others, with the exception of one, and he spoke passionately.

"Why," he said, "when there were enough, and more than enough, to do the work, summon me?"

"Not more than enough, there are but five."

"And why should you not be summoned," said another, "you are one of us. You ought to do your part with us in setting a brother free from the clay that presses on his breast."

"I was engaged in my vocation. If the moon shine out in all her lustre again, you will see that I am wan and wasted, and have need of — "

"Blood," said one.

"Blood, blood, blood," repeated the others. And then the first speaker said, to him who complained, " —

"You are one whom we are glad to have with us on a service of danger. You are strong and bold, your deeds are known, you have lived long, and are not yet crushed."

"I do not know our brother's name," said one of the others with an air of curiosity.

"I go by many."

"So do we all. But by what name may we know you best."

"Slieghton, I was named in the reign of the third Edward. But many have known me as Varney, the Vampyre!"

There was a visible sensation among those wretched beings as these words were uttered, and one was about to say something, when Varney interrupted him.

"Come," he said, "I have been summoned here, and I have come to assist in the exhumation of a brother. It is one of the conditions of our being that we do so. Let the work be proceeded with then, at once, I have no time to spare. Let it be done with. Where lies the vampyre? Who was he?"

"A man of good repute, Varney," said the first speaker. "A smooth, fair-spoken man, a religious man, so far as cant went, a proud, cowardly, haughty, worldly follower of religion. Ha, ha, ha!"

"And what made him one of us?"

"He dipped his hands in blood. There was a poor boy, a brother's only child, 'twas left an orphan. He slew the boy, and he is one of us."

"With a weapon."

"Yes, and a sharp one; the weapon of unkindness. The child was young and gentle, and harsh words, blows, and revilings placed him in his grave. he is in heaven, while the man will be a vampyre."

"'Tis well — dig him up."

They each produced from under the dark cloaks they wore, a short double-edged, broad, flat-bladed weapon, not unlike the swords worn by the Romans, and he who assumed the office of guide, led the way to a newly-made grave, and diligently, and with amazing rapidity and power, they commenced removing the earth.

It was something amazing to see the systematic manner in which they worked, and in ten minutes one of them struck the blade of his weapon upon the lid of a coffin, and said,

"It is here."

The lid was then partially raised in the direction of the moon, which, although now hidden, they could see would in a very short time show itself in some gaps of the clouds, that were rapidly approaching at great speed across the heavens.

They then desisted from their labour, and stood around the grave in silence for a time, until, as the moon was longer showing her fair face, they began to discourse in whispers.

"What shall become of him," said one, pointing to the grave. "Shall we aid him."

"No," said Varney, "I have heard that of him which shall not induce me to lift hand or voice in his behalf. Let him fly, shrieking like a frightened ghost where he lists."

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"Did you not once know some people named Bannerworth."

"I did. You came to see me, I think, at an inn. They are all dead."

"Hush," said another, "look, the moon will soon be free from the vapours that sail between it and the green earth. Behold, she shines out fresh once more; there will be life in the coffin soon, and our work will be done."

It was so. The dark clouds passed over the face of the moon, and with a sudden burst of splendour, it shone out again as before.

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Chapter CLXX. THE VAMPYRE. -- THE FLIGHT. -- THE WATCHMAN IN THE VALE OF HEALTH.

A death-like stillness now was over the whole scene, and those who had partially exhumed the body stood as still as statues, waiting the event which they looked forward to as certain to ensue.

The clear beauty and intensity of the moonbeams increased each moment, and the whole surrounding landscape was lit up with a perfect flood of soft, silvery light. The old church stood out in fine relief, and every tree, and every wild flower, and every blade of grass in the churchyard, could be seen in its finest and most delicate proportions and construction.

The lid of the coffin was wrenched up on one side to about six inches in height, and that side faced the moon, so that some rays, it was quite clearly to be seen, found their way into that sad receptacle for the dead. A quarter of an hour, however, passed away, and nothing happened.

"Are you certain he is one of us?" whispered Varney.

"Quite, I have known it years past. He had the mark upon him."

"Enough. Behold."

A deep and dreadful groan came from the grave, and yet it could hardly be called a groan; it was more like a howl, and the lid which was partially open, was visibly agitated.

"He comes," whispered one.

"Hush," said another, "hush; our duty will be done when he stands upon the level ground. Hush, let him hear nothing, let him know nothing, since we will not aid him. Behold, behold."

They all looked down into the grave, but they betrayed no signs of emotion, and the sight they saw there was such as one would have supposed would have created emotion in the breast of any one at all capable of feeling. But then we must not reason upon these strange frightful existences as we reason upon human nature such as we usually know it.

The coffin lid was each moment more and more agitated. The deep frightful groans increased in number and sound, and then the corpse stretched out one ghastly hand from the open crevice and grasped despairingly and frantically at the damp earth that was around.

There was still towards one side of the coffin sufficient weight of mould that it would require some strength to turn it off, but as the dead man struggled within his narrow house it kept falling aside in lumps, so that his task of exhumation became each moment an easier one.

At length he uttered a strange wailing shriek, and by a great effort succeeded in throwing the coffin lid quite open, and then he sat up, looking so horrible and ghastly in the grave clothes, that even the vampyres that were around that grave recoiled a little.

"Is it done?" said Varney.

"Not yet," said he who had summoned the to the fearful rite, and so assumed a sort of direction over them, "not yet; we will not assist him, but we may not leave him before telling him who and what he is."

"Do so now."

The corpse stood up in the coffin, and the moonlight fell full upon him.

"Vampyre arise," said he who had just spoken to Varney. "Vampyre arise, and do your work in the world until your doom shall be accomplished. Vampyre arise -- arise. Pursue your victims in the mansion and in the cottage. Be a terror and a desolation, go you where you may, and if the hand of death strike you down, the cold beams of the moon shall restore you to new life. Vampyre arise, arise!"

"I come, I come!" shrieked the corpse.

In another moment the five vampyres who had dug him from the grave were gone.

Moaning, shrieking, and groaning he made some further attempts to get out of the deep grave. He clutched at it in vain, the earth crumbled beneath him, and it was only at last by dint of reaching up and dragging in the displaced material that lay in a heap at the sides, so that in a few minutes it formed a mound for him to stand upon in the grave, and he was at length able to get out.

Then, although he sighed, and now and then uttered a wailing shriek as he went about his work, he with a

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strange kind of instinct, began to carefully fill up the grave from which he had but just emerged, nor did he cease from his occupation until he had finished it, and so carefully shaped the mound of mould and turf over it that no one would have thought it had been disturbed.

When this work was done a kind of madness seemed to seize him, and he walked to the gate of the grave yard, which opens upon Church-street, and placing his hands upon the sides of his mouth he produced such an appalling shriek that it must have awakened everybody in Hampstead.

Then, turning, he fled like a hunted hare in the other direction, and taking the first turning to the right ran up a lane called Frognal-lane, and which is parallel to the town, for a town Hampstead may be fairly called now, although it was not then.

By pursuing this lane, he got upon the outskirts of the heath, and then turning to the right again, for, with a strange pertinacity he always kept, as far as he could, his face towards the light of the moon, he rushed down a deep hollow, where there was a cluster of little cottages, enjoying such repose that one would have thought the flutter of an awakened bird upon the wing would have been heard.

It was quite clear that the new vampyre had as yet no notion of what he was about, or where he was going, and that he was with mere frantic haste speeding along, from the first impulse of his frightful nature.

The place into which he had now plunged, is called the Vale of Health: now a place of very favourite resort, but then a mere collection of white faced cottages, with a couple of places that might be called villas. A watchman went his nightly rounds in that place. And it so happened that the guardian of the Vale had just roused himself up at this juncture, and made up his mind to make his walk of observation, when he saw the terrific figure of a man attired in grave clothes coming along with dreadful speed towards him, as if to take the Vale of Health by storm.

The watchman was so paralysed by fear that he could not find strength enough to spring his rattle, although he made the attempt, and held it out at arm's length, while his eyes glared with perfect ferocity, and his mouth was wide enough open to nourish the idea, that after all he had a hope of being able to swallow the spectre.

But, nothing heeding him, the vampyre came wildly on.

Fain now would the petrified watchman have got out of the way, but he could not, and in another moment he was dashed down to the earth, and trodden on by the horrible existence that knew not what it did.

A cloud came over the moon, and the vampyre sunk down, exhausted, by a garden-wall, and there lay as if dead, while the watchman, who had fairly fainted away, lay in a picturesque attitude on his back, not very far off.

Half an hour passed, and a slight mist-like rain began to fall.

The vampyre slowly rose to his feet, and commenced wringing his hands and moaning, but his former violence of demeanour had passed away. That was but the first flush of new life, and now he seemed to be more fully aware of who and what he was.

He shivered as he tottered slowly on, until he came to where the watchman lay, and then he divested that guardian of the Vale of his greatcoat, his hat, and some other portions of his apparel, all of which he put on himself, still slightly moaning as he did so, and ever and anon stopping to make a gesture of despair.

When this operation was completed, he slunk off into a narrow path which led on to the heath again, and there he seemed to waver a little, whether he would go towards London, or the country. At length it seemed that he decided upon the former course, and he walked on at a rapid pace right through Hampstead, and down the hill towards London, the lights of which would be seen gleaming in the distance.

When the watchman did recover himself, the first thing he did was, to be kind enough to rouse every body up from their sleep in the Vale of Health, by springing his rattle at a prodigious rate, and by the time he had roused up the whole neighbourhood, he felt almost ready to faint again at the bare recollection of the terrible apparition that had knocked him down.

The story in the morning was told all over the place, with many additions to it of course, and it was long afterwards before the inhabitants of the Vale could induce another watchman, for that one gave up the post, to run the risk of such a visitation.

And the oddest thing of all was, that the watchman declared that he caught a glance at the countenance, and that it was like that of a Mr. Brooks, who had only been buried the day previous, that if he had not known that gentleman to be dead and buried, he should have thought it was he himself gone mad.

But there was the grave of Mr. Brooks, with its circular mound of earth, all right enough; and then Mr. B. was known to have been such a respectable man. He went to the city every day, and used to do so just for the purpose

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of granting audiences to ladies and gentlemen who might be labouring under any little pecuniary difficulties, and accommodating them. Kind Mr. Brooks. He only took one hundred pounds per cent. Why should he be a Vampyre? Bless him! Too severe, really!

There were people who called him a bloodsucker while he lived, and now he was one practically, and yet he had his own pew at the church, and subscribed a whole guinea a year to a hospital --- he did, although people did say it was in order that he might pack off any of his servants at once to it in case of illness. But then the world is so censorious.

To this day the watchman's story of the apparition that visited the Vale of Health is talked of by the old women who make what they call tea for Sunday parties at nine pence a head. But it is time now that we go back to London, and see what is taking place at the hotel where the Lakes are staying, and how the villany of the uncle thrives --- that villany of which he actually had the face to give such an exposition to Mr. Lee the clerk of the attorney.

Let us hope that the right will still overcome the injustice that is armed against it, and that Lord Lake and his beautiful child may not fall victims to the machinations that are brought into play against them, by those who ought to have been their best friends.

Chapter CLXXI. MISS LAKE PASSES A FEARFUL NIGHT. -- THE IMPOSTOR PUNISHE

The landlord of the London Hotel made every possible exertion to keep a profound secret the events of the night, but people will talk when even they have not anything particular to say, so that we cannot wonder at their doing so when they have.

In fact the story of the vampyre at the London Hotel got known pretty well half over London in the course of the day succeeding that second attempt upon the life blood of the young lady, who had become the object of attack from the monster.

Mr. Lake was in a strange frame of mind as regarded the whole affair. He did not yet know whether to really believe it or not -- whether to ascribe it, after all, to a dream, or, as Mrs. Lake hinted, for she was a woman fond of scheming herself, so always ready to suggest its existence in others -- a mere plan upon the part of the young girl to get rid of the projected alliance with young Master Lake, and possibly evoke the sympathy of all who heard her story.

This view of the matter however, although it did not make much impression upon Mr. Lake, suggested a something to him, that he thought would chime in well with his other plans and projects.

"If," he said "I could but instill a little courage into my son he might now, at all events make a favourable impression upon his cousin."

Full of this idea, he summoned the young gentleman to a conference with him, and having carefully closed the door, he said in a low confidential tone, --

"Of course you have heard all about this -- this vampyre business?"

"Yes, govenor, to be sure I have. Who could fail of hearing all about it? Why, nobody in the house will talk about anything else. I'm afraid to go to bed, I can tell you; that is to say, for fear I should do anything rash, you know, that's all."

"I understand you, and it's no use blinking the fact to me, that you are a coward."

"I am a coward, I -- oh, you are very much mistaken. I'm a long way off that. I'm only always desirous of getting out of the way when anything happens, for fear of doing a rash act; it's excess of courage you know -- that's what alarms me."

"Well, there are cases in which there would be no harm resulting, were you ever so rash."

"Ah! only show me one, and then you'll see."

"Very well, your cousin, you know -- and you know she is you cousin -- won't have you. Now, unless you are married to her, all our nicely got up plans are liable to be blasted by any accident, or by any breath of treachery that may come across them. But if you were the husband of your cousin, policy, habit, and, indeed, everything would combine to induce Lord Lake and her to smother up the affair. You comprehend."

"But what am I to do, if she won't have me?"

"I will tell you. You must awaken her gratitude by rescuing her from all these foolish terrors about vampyres, and when once a woman feels and knows that a man has done a brave act in her behalf, the principal entrance to her heart is open to him."

"Oh, but -- I -- I -- the vampyre; that's rather unpleasant."

"Come, now, you are not such a fool, as really to believe that it's, after all, anything but a mere dream. Don't tell me. Vampyres, indeed! At all events you can vapour as much as you like upon that subject without any danger occurring."

"Yes, yes -- you may think so."

"I know so. Listen to me."

The son did listen, and the father added:

"You must volunteer to watch alone by your cousin's door for this vampyre, and of course nothing will think of coming. It's too ridiculous altogher, that it is; so, you see, you run no risk at all. You comprehend that?"

"Well, but if I run no risk, I don't see what's the use of doing it, you know; for if all is quite, how can she be grateful to me for having rescued her from nothing at all?"

"Very well put, very well indeed. But as there will be nothing really to rescue her from, suppose we make something that will just suit our own purposes."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you know my great grey travelling cloak — what is to hinder you having that with you, and whenever you are quite certain that your cousin is fast asleep, you can put that on over your face partially, and go into the room, and pretend to be the vampyre, and when she is in a paroxysm of terror do you dash out the light, and then in your natural voice, cry out, 'Ah, wretch, I have you, I have you. How dare you invade the sanctity of this chamber?' and all that sort of thing, you know, and you can knock about the chairs as much as you like, so as to induce the belief that you are engaged in a deadly struggle, and then you call for lights, and you are there, and the vampyre gone."

"Well, I rather like that, and if I were quite sure — "

"Of what?"

"That there was no real vampyre, you know, why I wouldn't mind it."

"Pshaw!"

"Well, well, I'll do it, I'll do it, I tell you. I see all the importance of getting her for my wife. Ahem! and if I do," he added to himself aside, "I'll take deuced good care you don't get hold of the money, for after we are married, I shall just tell Lord Lake all about it."

During the day Mr. Lake had sought an opportunity of speaking to Mr. Black.

"My dear sir," he said to him, you don't seem well at all, and I shall insist that you do not trouble yourself to watch to-night by the door of the young lady, who has had so disagreeable a visitor."

"I am certainly not quite well," said Mr. Black. "The fact is, my health will not bear anything like a shock; a family occurrence has so shattered my nerves."

"My dear sir, say no more; you shall have no more trouble about us. My son who loves his cousin, and is quite jealous of anybody defending her but himself, will watch alone by her door. He has great courage when once his spirit is up, and it is now."

"I'm glad to hear it: it takes some time to get it up!"

"Why, a — a — yes, sometimes."

"I must be on the look out myself tonight, or the cowardly fellow will spoil all," thought Mr. Lake; "any unusual noise in the house, I suppose, will be almost sufficient to induce him to faint away. Confound his cowardice, it mars all."

Mr. Lake was not by any means so clear in his own mind as he pretended to be of the fact of the vampyre being only a delusion and a creation of the brain of his niece; so when the evening came, he did all that was in his power to keep the courage of his son to the mark.

He even took care that he should have a glass of something strong and hot, for he knew by personal experience that while they lasted, the fumes of hot alcohol did something for a weak heart.

But what pleased Mr. Lake most of all was the ease with which he had thus managed matters with Mr. Miller and his clerk, who he had no doubt, would fabricate such a story as would convince the single minded Annetta of his claims to be her father.

"Then," thought the old Lake, "we can surely among us badger her into marrying my son. Oh, it will be all right. Let no plot henceforward hope to succeed if this one does not. It must, and it shall; it shall, and it must."

It's all very well of any one to say that a scheme shall succeed;

"But how light a breath of air will chase away,
The darkly woven fancies of a thousand plots."

Mr. Lake stood upon a precipice which he little saw, or the terrific height of it would have driven him distracted.

Miss Lake was in a great state of mental depression; if anything, more than another was calculated to thoroughly break down the spirits of a young and innocent girl, it certainly would be such circumstances as those which now surrounded her, and deprived too, as she was, of that aid and sympathy she would have received at the hands of a father or a mother, it was only a wonder that she did not sink under the affliction most completely.

She made no objection to young Lake watching by the outside of her door. Indeed, she was weeping and depressed, so that she could scarcely know what proposal was made to her.

"I shall not sleep," she said. "God knows what will become of me."

"Do not despair, all may be well; it was a very sad thing that my brother Lord Lake ever found out that you were not his daughter. I'm sure I would have given freely all I possessed to have averted any such news, for it has attacked both his happiness and yours."

The young girl made no reply to this, but the look she gave him was quite sufficient to show him how much she doubted the sincerity of the professions of friendship and affection for her that fell from his lips. There was a something in his hollow, heartless character which, young and innocent and unknowing in the ways of the world even as that young girl was, she saw through, and he felt that she did so.

This was the most provoking thing of all that his heartlessness and selfishness should be transparent to one so young as she was.

But the night came at last, and with it the fidgetty fears of young Lake increased mightily. He was all of a shake, as Slop the waiter said, like a lot of jelly.

It was only by repeated doses of brandy—and–water that he kept himself from declaring off the adventure altogether, so that by eleven o'clock at night he was in a terrible state between fear and intoxication; and as any two impulses will each do its best to defeat the other, he was prevented from getting entirely drunk by his fears, and from getting entirely afraid by the liquor.

But at last he did actually take his place by the door of the chamber occupied by his cousin, and then with a table before him on which were lights, brandy—and–water, and cigars, he prepared to go through what to him was a terrible ordeal.

"You -- you -- really think," he whispered to his father, who came to promise him that he would not undress himself, but remain in his own room within call, "you really think there is no vampyre?"

"Tut, tut."

"Well, but really now, really -- "

"Have I not told you before? Come, come, nonsense, there's the old grey travelling cloak, put it under the table, and now I shall leave you; its about half–past eleven, and you have nothing in the world to do but just to enjoy yourself, you know. Good night."

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Chapter CLXXII. THE VAMPYRE DISCOVERED. -- THE ESCAPE ON THE THAMES.

"Enjoy myself!" muttered the young Lake, "enjoy myself! That may be his idea of staying here vampyre-catching, but it ain't mine. What a fool I was to consent to come here, to be sure, and all alone too. Eh, what was that? Oh! I'm all of a shake. I thought I heard somebody, but I suppose it was nothing. Oh dear, what a disagreeable affair this is; what an infernal fool I am, to be sure. Eh? eh?"

The hair on his head nearly stood up as he heard, or fancied he heard, a low groan. He shook so while he arose from his seat that he was glad to sit down again as quickly as he possibly could, for he found his strength evaporating along with the Dutch courage, or rather as it should be called, French courage, that had been instilled into him by the brandy.

"What shall I do," he gasped, "what shall I do? Oh, what will become of me? I'm in for a row, I'm in for it to a certainty; I -- I think I'll call the old man."

He did not, however, call his father, whom he designated the old man, more familiarly than respectfully, but as all continued now quiet, he thought he would wait until the next alarm, at all events, before he made a piece of work and thoroughly exhibited his own pusillanimity.

"It may be nothing" he said, "after all, perhaps only the wind coming through some chink in a door or window. Lord bless us, I've read of such things in romances till my blood had turned to curds and whey. There was the Bloody Spectre of the Tub of Blood, or the Smashed Gore. Eh? eh? I thought somebody spoke. No, no -- oh, its all what do they call it, imagination, that's what it is, and the sooner I get the job over the better, so I'll just pop on the cloak, and do the business."

With trembling hands Mr. Lake junior drew the cloak from under the table and put it on, bringing the collar of it right up to the top of his head, so that but a small portion of his head was at all visible when he was thus equipped, and he certainly might look like a vampyre, for he did not look like anything human by any means.

"Now, I wonder if she's asleep," he muttered as he laid his hand gently on the lock of the door, "if she ain't, it would be a pity; but still I can say, I only wanted to know how she was, so I'll just make the trial at all events. Here goes."

He opened the door of the bedroom a very short distance, and said, --

"Hist! hist! are you awake, eh? eh? What did you say? -- nothing, oh, she's asleep, and now here goes -- upon my life when one comes to think of it, it ain't by any means a bad plan. But just before I begin, I'll have another drain,"

About two-thirds of a glass of brandy-and-water were in the tumbler on the table, and that he tossed down at once, and feeling very much fortified by laying in such a stratum of courage, he drew up the cloak to its proper vampyre-like position, as he considered it, and advanced two steps within the chamber of the sleeping girl.

She was sleeping, and slightly moaning in her sleep. It was a great satisfaction to young master Lake, to hear her so moaning, for it convinced him that such were the sounds which he previously heard, and which had gone near to terrifying him out of his project.

He had no compunction whatever regarding the amount of alarm which this dastardly project was likely to give to Miss Lake. No, all he looked to and thought of was himself. A light was burning in the chamber, and that according to the directions of his father he blew out, and then groping his ways towards the bed, he laid his hands upon the young girl's face, and said, --

"The vampyre! the vampyre has come! -- blood, blood, blood! -- the vampyre!"

She awoke with a cry of terror as usual, and then master Lake moved off to the door, and said in his natural voice,

"I'll protect you -- I'm coming -- I'll soon clear the room of the vampyre. Come on, you wretch! Oh, I'll do for him. Take that -- and that -- and that."

Then he commenced kicking about the chairs, and nearly upset the washing-stand, all by way of making the necessary disturbance, and convincing his cousin what a sanguinary conflict he was having with the vampyre. In the midst of this something laid hold of him by the ears and whiskers on each side of his head, and the door

swinging open, his own light that was upon the table in the corridor shone upon a hideous countenance within half an inch of his own. The long fang-like teeth of which, with the lips retracted from them, were horrible to look upon, and a voice like the growl of an enraged hyena said, --

"What want you with the vampyre, rash fool? He is here."

Master Lake was absolutely petrified with horror and astonishment. The hair bristled up upon his head. His eyes opened the width of saucers, and when in a low voice the vampyre said again, -- "What want you, reptile, with the vampyre?" he let his feet slide from under him, and had he not been upheld by the horrible being who grasped him, he would have fallen.

Bang went a pistol out of the corridor, and the vampyre uttered a cry and let go his hold of Lake, who then fell, and being out of the way, showed his father standing on the threshold of his own door, with a pistol in his hand recently discharged, and another apparently ready.

In another moment the vampyre kicked the insensible form of young Lake out of the way, and shut himself in the girl's bedroom. The father heard him lock the door, and although he instantly sent another pistol shot through the panelling, he heard no sound indicating its having done any execution.

"Help, help, help," he cried, "help here. The vampyre, the vampyre, the vampyre!"

All this had not taken above two or three minutes, and the whole house was now alarmed by the sound of fire-arms, and as nobody had completely undressed themselves to go to bed since the first alarm of the vampyre, the landlord and several of the waiters, and the night watchman ran with all speed to the spot, looking full of consternation, and all asking questions together.

"Force the door, force the door," cried Mr. Lake, "a hammer, a hatchet, anything, so that we may get the door forced; the vampyre is inside."

"Oh lor!" cried one of the waiters who had gone close to the door, but who now made a precipitate retreat, treading upon the stomach of young Lake as he did so.

"If you'll pay for the door, Sir," said the landlord, "I'll soon have it open."

"Damn it, I'll pay for twenty doors."

The landlord took a short run at the door, probably he knew its weakness, and burst it open at once. There was the pause of about a moment, and then Mr. Lake, snatching up the candle, the light of which had first revealed the hideous features of the vampyre to his son, rushed into the room.

In these cases all that is wanted is a leader, so he was promptly enough followed. The state of affairs was evident at a glance. The young lady had fainted, and the window was wide open, indicating the mode of retreat of the vampire.

"I thought you told us," said Mr. Lake "that this window was too far from the ground to anticipate any danger from-- --"

"Yes, so I did, sir. But don't you see he could easy enough jump off the sill on to those leads there. Nobody could get in by the window, but anybody that wasn't afraid could get out. But we have him, sir, we have him now as sure as a gun."

"Have him. How?"

"Why don't you see sir, there's nothing but high walls. He must be among our stables, and he can't get out, for I have the keys of the outer doors myself, we shall not lose him now, sir, I'm not a little thankful for it. Come on, everybody, round to the stables, and nothing now can prevent us catching him if he is flesh and blood. Come on, come on."

By this time Mrs. Lake had reached the scene of action, and although the first thing she did was to tumble, sprawling, over her hopeful son, who lay in the door-way of his cousin's chamber, she gathered herself up again, and remained in charge of Annette and the chamber, while Mr. Lake accompanied the landlord and the waiters to the stables of the hotel, which were surrounded by high walls and only to be approached by a pair of large gates, which were quite satisfactorily fastened, and there was not a chink large enough for a cat to get through.

The landlord had the keys, and he opened a small wicket in one of the large gates.

"Now be careful," he said, "for fear he bounces out."

At this everybody but Mr. Lake, who to do him but justice, had certainly the quality of courage, looked as alarmed as possible, but he said, --

"I have re-loaded my pistols, and he shall not escape me."

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The wicket was opened, and in an instant out walked Mr. Black! He appeared at first somewhat agitated, but speedily recovered his self-possession, and looking at the group, he said, --

"Have you caught him? I have been upon the look out, notwithstanding my indisposition, and jumped out of the bedroom window after him; I cannot see him anywhere. Have you caught him."

"Yes," cried Mr. Lake, "I saw you in the room when I fired at you -- you are the vampyre!"

He made a rush forward as he spoke, but Mr. Black got dexterously out of the way, and seizing the landlord by the hair of the head he cast him so fairly in Mr. Lake's way that they both fell down together; with amazing rapidity the vampyre then fled from the spot.

"After him, after him," cried Mr. Lake, as he scrambled to his feet, "don't let him escape, after him, whatever you do; alarm the whole city, rather than let the monster elude you. This way -- this way, I see him. Follow me, a vampyre, a vampyre; help -- help, seize him, a vampyre!"

"Fire," cried the landlord, and he too ran.

But all the running was in vain, the vampyre had fairly got the start of them, and he took good care to keep it, for with the most wonderful fleetness he ran on, until, to his great relief, he found his pursuers were distanced.

He made his way to the Strand, and diving down one of the narrow streets terminated by the river, and at the end of which was a landing place, he called aloud, --

"Boat, boat!"

An old waterman answered the hail.

"Where to, your honour?"

"Up the river, I will tell you where to land me, row quick, and row well, and you may name your own fare, without a chance of its being questioned."

"That's the customer for me," said the waterman.

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Chapter CLXXIII. THE PLOT DISCOVERED. -- THE LETTER LEFT AT THE HOTEL BY THE VAMPYRE.

The further pursuit of the vampyre was very soon given up by those who had commenced it with, as they had vainly imagined such an assurance of success.

Probably with the exception of Mr. Lake himself none were really very eager in it at all, and they were not sorry for a good excuse to drop it.

There sat upon the countenance of Mr. Lake an appearance of great anger, and when they got back to the hotel, he said to the landlord,

"This is a very disagreeable affair, and I cannot think of remaining here over to-morrow."

"But sir, the vampyre has gone now!"

"Yes, and may come again, for all I know."

"Oh, dear me, surely not now, sir. After what has happened, I should be inclined to say that you will find this the quietest hotel in London."

Mr. Lake would not be moved from his determination, however, and briefly again announced that he would on the morrow remove.

"How very vexatious," thought the landlord, but he could do nothing in the matter. His only hope, and that was a very slight one indeed, was, by the morning the exasperated feelings of Mr. Lake would be somewhat assuaged, and therefore, he thought it would be, at all events, a prudent thing to say no more to him just then, when he was in such a mood.

When Mr. Lake retired to his own apartment he was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind, for he found that things were not exactly turning out as he wished, and he much feared that all his schemes would turn out abortive, in which case they would recoil upon his own head in their consequences.

It was quite by accident, that happening to cast his eyes upon the dressing-table, he saw a sealed letter lying there, and upon looking at the superscription he was surprised to find that Annetta was the person for whom it was intended.

It was not, as the reader may suppose from what he knows of Mr. Lake, from any honourable scruples that he hesitated at once to open the letter addressed to his niece, but he was for a time considering whether he might not, by doing so, be getting himself into some scrape from which he might find it very difficult to extricate himself.

"Who the deuce can it come from?" he said.

He turned the epistle about in all directions, but such an inquiry did not assist him, and finally he made up his mind that come what might, he would break the seal and look at the contents.

He soon, after coming to the determination, carried it into effect, and to his surprise he found that the letter contained the following statement. --

"To the lady Annetta Lake.

"Fear nothing, lady. He who disturbed your repose will disturb it no longer. Be happy, and do not let the dread of such another visitation ever disturb your pure imaginings. Your father will rescue you from your present unhappy circumstances, and you will, likewise, soon see one who ere this would have been with you, had he known of your being in London. "THIS COMES FROM "VARNEY THE VAMPYRE.

"If Mr. Lake, your bad uncle, upon whose dressing table this note is placed, delivers it not to you, woe be to him, for I will make his nights hideous with realities, and his days horrible with recollection and anticipation."

Mr. Lake was superstitious. Are not the unprincipled always so?

He read the postscript to the note with a shudder; and he felt that he could no more muster courage enough to destroy the letter, than he could to lay violent hands upon himself. There he was with an epistle that he would fain have kept from Annetta, and yet he dared not do so.

"Confound my unlucky destiny," he said, "for bringing me to this hotel. Perhaps if I had gone elsewhere, all this would not have happened. Oh, if I could but have suspected what this Mr. Black really was, I would have tried some means for his extermination."

He paced his chamber in an agitated manner until Mrs. Lake made her appearance from the chamber of the

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lady Annetta, where she had been staying, and to her then he at once communicated the letter that gave him so much uneasiness.

"I don't know what to do," he said, "or what to think."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed. Perhaps you can suggest something?"

"And can you allow yourself to be made a slave of such fears. There is but one course to pursue, and that is, tomorrow to put the affair altogether in a different shape, by overwhelming Annetta with the seeming evidence that she is the daughter of an attorney's clerk, instead of her real father, Lord Lake. I know of no other way; and then when she finds such, as she will think, to be the case, it's my opinion that she will no longer hesitate to marry our son."

"You thing so?"

"Indeed do I, The girl is not an absolute fool surely."

"Well, of course, I should be very glad if that darling project could be, after all, brought about, but what is to be done with this letter?"

"Can you ask?"

"I do, when I consider the threat that is in it. That threat, recollect, is to me, and you can afford to think lightly of it."

"I will take the consequences. It is hardly likely that you will be punished for what you can't help. I will take good care that this letter never reaches Annetta, and as you have it not, why of course you cannot deliver it, and so cannot be blamed."

"But I might have it."

"No such thing," said the lady snatching it up. "You know me rather too well, I should think, to hope that I would give it up to you, and as for your taking it by force, I should think you knew me too well likewise to make such a ridiculous attempt."

"Well, then I wash my hands of it."

"Ah! you may as well. I don't know what has come over you of late, you are as mean spirited as you can be, and formerly you used to be able to cope with anything."

"We never played for such a stake as we have now upon the board, and I confess that I am rather nervous for the consequences."

"Pshaw! I see that I must guide you, or all will be lost. To-morrow let the whole affair be settled. Let this attorney Miller, as you call him, come here, and bring with him the person who is to claim Annetta as his own daughter. Let him have all the evidence that you tell me he has been so ingenious in getting up, ready, in order that he may be in a position to answer any questions."

"Yes, yes."

"And then, when all is settled, our son must come forward, and make a speech, saying, he don't care a bit, who or what she is, that he loves her and will make her his wife, although she has not a penny piece in the world."

"I see, I see."

"I think, from what I know of her, that such a course of proceeding will have a great effect upon her."

"Well, I hope so."

"You hope so! How despondingly you talk."

"Why the honest truth — "

"Good God! what do you mean by making use of such words, I never told the honest truth in all my life; you may depend that won't do in this world, on any consideration. Never let me hear you say such a thing again, I beg of you."

"I was merely going to remark that this vampyre's business had really so completely unsettled my whole nervous system, that I could not act with all the tact and the determination that used to characterise my proceedings, and for which you were ever disposed to give me so much credit."

"Really."

"Yes. But I cannot regret such a state of things so much as I should otherwise do, because I see that you are unmoved and as energetic as ever."

"Well, well, say no more."

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"I am done."

"I will prepare our boy for the part he is to act to-morrow; and mind, I shall rely upon you to see your associates and get all the affair in train. Let it be all over by twelve in the morning, so that if you like you can send to Lord Lake where he is staying, at Florence still I presume, an account of the matter by post that same night; only let me see the letter before you send it."

"I will, I will; you are my guardian angel."

"Pho, pho; you are getting quite romantic and foolish; we have both made up our minds to get money, and we have likewise known so much the want of it, in abundance that is to say, that we have resolved to get it in any way we can."

"Yes, that I rather thing is our principle of action."

"And has it not succeeded hitherto. Have we not lived well without troubling ourselves to earn the means by which we have done so. Earn, indeed! I leave that to a parcel of sleepy drones of people who have not the wit to live upon others as we have; so now got to bed and sleep off some of the unmanly fears that seem of late to be continually pressing upon you. It is well you have me to look after you as I do."

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Chapter CLXXIV. THE MEETING IN THE MORNING AT THE HOTEL -- THE PREPARATIONS OF THE ATTORNEY.

It is no less than strange, the difference that takes place in people's feelings with regard to precisely the same circumstances in the morning, from what they really felt and thought in the evening, and when the shadows of night were upon them.

This mental phenomenon was not wanting in the case of Mr. Lake.

He felt as he rose the next day, and the sun was shining in at the window of his bedroom, most thoroughly ashamed of his fears and his nervous tremours of the preceding night.

His wife saw with a smile the change in his feelings.

"You are no longer," she said, "afraid of the vampyre."

"Oh, say no more about it," was his reply. "I shall go immediately after breakfast and see Mr. Miller, and with him make such arrangements as will bring the affair upon which we have set our hearts to a crisis, and while I am gone you can instruct our son in what he has to do."

"I will."

The breakfast passed over in rather a constrained manner. Mrs. Lake had made an attempt to persuade Annetta that she was really too unwell to get up for an hour or two, but that Annette would not submit to, as she felt herself, notwithstanding all her sufferings and all her fright, really capable of rising.

The consequence was, that she appeared at the breakfast table, and stopped most effectually anything in the shape of a confidential discourse taking place among the Lakes.

The meal therefore passed off rather silently, and there were only a few remarks made, incidentally, about the preceding night's alarm.

Annetta was evidently in a state of great nervousness, as well she might be, for the idea that she would be again subjected to the frightful visits of the vampyre, was ever present to her, and she was denied the consolation which the letter of Varney might, and most probably would have given her.

After the morning meal, Mr. Lake gave his wife a significant look to intimate that he was then going to Mr. Miller's, and that in his absence she was to play her part.

She perfectly understood him, and nodded in return, and thus this worthy pair separated.

We will follow Mr. Lake.

The attorney did not live in one of the most respectable haunts of the profession, but he was a man of his word, and by the time Mr. Lake reached his chambers he was there, it being then not much above ten o'clock.

There was some delay in admitting Mr. Lake to the private room of the attorney, and he thought that the clerk who was in the outer office looked a little confused.

"Is anybody with Mr. Miller?" asked Lake.

"Yes -- that is to say -- I mean no."

"A strange answer. Yes, and you mean no."

"Why, Sir, I only meant that Mr. Miller was rather busy, and we are so much in the habit when that is the case, of saying that he has some one with him that it slipped out unawares, only as we would not deceive you, sir, for the world, you understand that that was why, you perceive, sir, that in a manner of speaking, I corrected myself."

This explanation was rather more wordy than satisfactory to Mr. Lake, however, for want of a better, he was compelled to put up with it, and he said nothing, but waited with the most exemplary patience, until Mr. Miller's bell rang.

The clerk answered it, and in a few moments returned to say that Mr. Miller had got through a legal document he had been engaged upon, and the he much regretted having kept Mr. Lake waiting, but was then quite at his disposal.

Now Lake could have sworn that he had heard the sound of a voice from the private room of the attorney, and he consequently did not feel quite easy.

When he went in he found Mr. Miller with a number of letters before him.

"Ah, my dear sir," cried the lawyer, "sit down."

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"Thank you. I thought somebody was with you?"

"Oh, dear no, not at all. I was going through a lease, you see, and from long experience in such matters, I have found that I have a better and clearer understanding of the matter, if I read it aloud to myself, but perhaps that is only a peculiarity of mine."

"Then it was your voice I heard just now?"

Mr. Lake's suspicions were about half removed, certainly not more than half, but he could say no more about it, although he cast now and then suspicious glances round the room; yet if he had been asked what he was suspicious of, he would hardly have been able to give a clear and understandable answer to the question.

It is one of the curses of conscious guilt ever to live in an atmosphere of doubt and dread, and to the full did Mr. Lake feel that curse.

"Well, Mr. Miller," he said, after a pause, "I have called upon you to say that I hope it will suit your convenience to settle a little affair to-day at twelve o'clock at the hotel."

"Twelve -- let me see -- twelve. Not at the hotel my dear sir, I am compelled to be in chambers in case of a letter coming on very particular business, but if you will bring her here, I can manage it very nicely; if she don't leave this place with a conviction that she has a father in London, I'll eat my boots."

"Well, I don't see why we should not come here, as you give me great satisfaction Mr. Miller by avowing yourself to be so confident of the result."

"I am as confident as that I sit on this three legged stool."

"Good -- then you may depend upon our coming here at twelve o'clock precisely. There will be myself, Mrs. Lake, my son and the young lady. Mind she is no fool, she must be perfectly overwhelmed with proofs of what we wish to make her believe."

"Exactly, that she is not the daughter of Lord Lake, but a mere changling imposed upon him as his own child -- the said own child being dead."

"Precisely."

"Agreed, sir, agreed. With respect to my reward, I have been thinking that I should like, you know, to have some acknowledgment. You tell me you have no money now, but that this obstacle once removed you will come in for all the Lake estates, and that Lord Lake cannot live long."

"That's the state of the case."

"Then sir, will you give me a note for 2000 pounds, payable on demand."

"On demand?"

"Yes; of course it would be needless folly of me to present it until you have money you know."

"True, true."

We need not pursue the conversation further, but satisfy the reader by stating the result, which was, that the attorney got the note for 2000 pounds from Lake, likewise a paper signed, which admitted the debt more fully still, and effectually barred Lake from objecting to any proceedings on account of want of consideration for the promissory note, or that it had not been fairly obtained of him, pleas which might have inconvenienced Mr. Miller if he chose to pursue Lake for the amount.

In the meantime Mrs. Lake had not been idle, but had spoken to her booby and cowardly son, making him aware of what he had to do in the business, namely, to shew his great disinterestedness in taking for his wife Annetta after she was supposed to be proved not the daughter of Lord Lake, but quite a different personage, and altogether destitute of pecuniary resources.

He managed pretty well always to understand any villany, and so entered life and soul into the scheme of his mother.

"Ah! I like that a monstrous deal better than keeping watch for a vampyre, which is a sort of job that don't at all suit such a constitution as mine, do you see?"

Mrs. Lake not being aware of the alteration of arrangements by which they were all to proceed to the lawyer's chambers, instead of coming to the hotel, took no trouble with Annetta, conceiving that it would perhaps be better at twelve o'clock, when the parties were assembled, to take her by surprise, than to say anything to her beforehand, which might have the effect of preparing her for what was to come, and so getting up a spirit of resistance and of inquiry which it might be difficult to resist or satisfactorily to meet.

When Mr. Lake came home from Gray's Inn, she was made aware of the alteration, and consultations ensued

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as to how Annetta was to be got there at all. At length after several modes of managing the matter had been discussed, Mrs. Lake said,

"You two can walk there, and then I can say to Annetta that I am going for a drive and to make a few purchases, so that she will have no objection to go with me for an airing, and I will take good care to be with you at the hour of twelve."

"That will do prime," said the son. "Leave mother alone for managing things."

"Well," said Mr. Lake, "it shall be so, I don't see any objection to the scheme, nor can I suggest a better one, so we will look upon that as settled. "All you have to do," turning to his son, "is to play your part well."

"Oh! never fear me, I like the girl and I like money."

Chapter CLXXV. THE VAMPYRE'S VISIT TO THE BARRACKS AT KINGSTON. -- THE YOUNG OFFICER.

We do not wish altogether to lose sight of Varney in these proceedings, and it so happens that he is sufficiently mixed up in what further occurred to make it desirable that we should now again refer to him.

It was not the least singular fact in the character of that mysterious being, to notice how he always endeavoured to make some sort of amends or reparation to those whom he had so much terrified by his visitations.

We have seen in the case of the family of the Bannerworths how eventually he was most anxious to do them a service, as a recompense for the really serious injury he had inflicted upon them, and how it was really and eventually through him that they emerged from the circumstances of difficulty and danger in which they had been pecuniarily engaged.

We shall now see if Varney, who really in his way is a very respectable sort of a personage, is about good or evil.

We left him on the river, after promising in his usual liberal spirit, a handsome reward to the waterman whom he employed to row the boat in which he embarked.

After going some distance, the waterman, finding his fare was silent, thought it would be as well again to ask him where he was going.

Accordingly, with a preparatory hem, he began by saying,

"About as nice a tide, sir, as we could have for going up the stream."

"Very likely," was the brief reply.

"Do you land near hand, sir?"

"I want to go to Kingston; take me to some Quay on the river as near as you can, for the purpose of my walking there."

"Kingston?" said the waterman, with a look rather of surprise. "Its a long pull to Kingston, and if your honour could get a conveyance, your best way would be to get out at Putney."

"Wherefore?"

"Why after that, the river takes such a plaguy lot of windings and turnings that you have to go treble the actual distance before you reach Teddington."

"I said Kingston."

"Well that's close by Teddington; but I'll row your honour if you like, only it will take us some hours to get there that's all."

"Go on."

"Very good, pull away, pull a -- way."

Having now, as he knew, a long job before him, the waterman husbanded his strength, he did not row near so fast, but to a low kind of tune he muttered to himself he worked away at his sculls, slowly and surely, and got through the water at a moderate easy rate, while rather a quick jerking one would soon have exhausted him.

The boat went slowly onward, and many an interesting sight was passed upon the banks of the river, but none appeared in the least to attract the attention of the man who sat in the boat, apparently deeply absorbed in his own meditations.

The boatman began much to wonder who he had got a a fare, and to think that it would be but a dull and wearisome job to row all the way to Teddington without any amusing gossip by the way, so he made yet another attempt to break the stillness that reigned around.

"The river up this way, sir," he said, "is quiet enough at night; it's different below bridge though, for there there is always some bustle going on."

"Ah!" said Varney.

"But here, somehow, it is dull to my mind."

"Ah!"

"Though the gentry and those as is book-learned find a deal of pleasure in looking at the old places on the

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banks, where things have been done and said by folks many a long year since, whose heads don't ache now, sir."

"Ah!"

There was no getting on at this rate, so, after two or three more remarks and getting nothing by "Ah!" as a reply, the waterman gave it up as a bad job altogether, and pulled away, chaunting in a low tone his song again, without making another attempt to disturb the taciturnity of his fare, who sat as still as a statue in the boat, and looking as if he did not breathe, so rigid and strange were his attitude, and the lifeless-like appearance he had.

The waterman was really a little alarmed by the time they reached Teddington, for he thought that it might be possible his fare was dead, and the horrid idea that he had stiffened in that attitude as he sat, began to find a place in the boatman's imagination.

When, however, he boat's keel grated on the landing-place, he cried, --

"Here we are, your honour."

The vampyre rose and stepped on shore. He held out his hand and dropped a guinea into the extended palm of the waterman, and then stalked off.

After he had walked some distance he spoke to a watchman whom he met, saying, --

"Are there not military barracks somewhere hereabout?"

"Oh, yes."

"Thank you. Can you direct me?"

"Certainly. You have only to go on, and take the second turning to your left, and you will see the gate; it's horse soldiers that's there now -- the 4th Light Dragoons."

By keeping to the directions which the watchman had given, Varney soon reached the gate of the barracks, and then it was three o'clock in the morning. A sentinel was pacing to and fro at the gate. To him Varney at once went, and with a lofty kind of courtesy, that made the man at once respectful to him, he said, --

"Is Lieutenant Rankin in barracks?"

"Yes, sir, -- on duty."

"Indeed! Is he on guard to-night?"

"Yes, sir, to four o'clock. He will be relieved then."

"That's fortunate, I want to see him. It is on business of the very first importance, or of course I would not trouble him or myself. You must send to him somehow."

The sentinel hesitated.

"I hardly know," he said, "how the lieutenant will take it -- he is on duty."

"But I suppose he is human for all that, and is liable to all the accidents and alternations of human affairs, which may make it absolutely necessary he should be communicated with, even at such an hour as this. I will hold you harmless."

This was so reasonable, and there was such an air of quiet gentlemanly authority about Varney, that the soldier began to think he should run less risk of offending somebody of importance if he consented to disturb the lieutenant than if he refused. Accordingly he stepped a pace or two within the gate and called out.

"Guard!"

A soldier from the guard-room answered the summons.

"Ay," he said, "what is it? -- a strange cat I suppose."

"No, none of your nonsense. Here is a gentleman, I think a general officer, by Jove, wants to see Lieutenant Rankin. Go and tell him."

"And give him this," said Varney, as he handed the soldier a card, on which was written, --

"A friend to a friend of Lieutenant Rankin, whose initials are A. L."

"I know that this young soldier loves the Lady Annetta," muttered the vampyre to himself, "and he shall be given the opportunity of flying to her rescue from her villainous relations. So far, I will make reparation to her."

In less than three minutes, Lieutenant Rankin came hurriedly to the gate.

"Where is the gentleman?" he said.

"Here sir," said Varney, "step aside with me."

The young officer did so, and then Varney said to him, --

"It matters not how I became acquainted with the fact, but I know that you love the Lady Annetta Lake, and that you are far from being indifferently regarded by her. She is in London at the London Hotel. A vile plot is

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formed to marry her to her cousin, the gist of which is to make her both her and her father believe that she is a changeling and not the daughter of Lord Lake. You love her, young man. Go and rescue her."

"Annetta in London!"

"Yes, what I tell you you may rely upon, as if it were a voice from heaven that spoke to you. Go and snatch her whom you love from the base hands of those who, under the mask of pretended friendship, would betray her."

"And you," cried the young soldier; "who are you, and how can I repay you for bringing me this intelligence of her whom I-- "

"Enough," said the vampyre. "I have performed my mission. It is for you, young sir, to take a due advantage of that which I have told to you."

In another moment he was gone.

Chapter CLXXVI. AN ECLAIRCISSEMENT. -- THE INNOCENT TRIUMPHANT.

It is eleven o'clock, Mr. and Mrs. Lake are standing by one of the windows at the hotel conversing in whispers, while the hopeful son is brushing his hat.

"It is time, you think?" said Mrs. Lake.

"Yes," was the reply. "and I will be off now at once, and depend upon you following with Annetta to Mr. Miller's."

"That you may be sure of. She has had a refreshing night's rest, and this morning she eagerly enough caught at the proposal to take a drive round the principal thoroughfares in the carriage we have hired so that that is no longer a difficulty."

"What is to be done if she rejects?"

Mr. Lake gave a jerk with his head in the direction of his son, to signify that it was of him he talked.

"It can't be helped if she does. Then I should say all we have to do, is to persevere in making her out no child of Lord Lakes, and wait for his decease. We must be careful what we are about, though, or he may take it into his head to make some ample provision for her, to the decrease of his personal means, which I hope to see all ours."

The only way to stop that will be getting Miller and the pretended father to make it as a complete part of the plan that Annetta herself should seem latterly to have been a party to palming herself off upon him as his daughter when she knew the contrary quite well."

"Ah, if that could be done."

"It must and shall; Miller's ingenuity in such matters is immense. He will accomplish anything in the world -- aye seeming impossibilities -- for money."

"He is just the man for us, so now be off with you at once, and expect me in good time."

In a few moments afterwards, Mr. Lake set off with this booby son to the lawyers, enjoining him all the way as they went, to be especially careful how he maintained the character of a disinterested suitor, which had been marked out for him in the programme of the family proceedings.

"Oh, never fear me, father."

"Well, I hope that you will do and say the right things, and what is as important, I hope you will do and say them at the right time, otherwise you will spoil all."

Thus armed at all points, as they thought, for conquest, old Lake and young Lake, than whom all London could not have produced two more unprincipled persons, arrived at Gray's Inn, and were received in the outer room of Mr. Miller's chambers with every demonstration of respect.

"Walk in, gentlemen, walk in to the clients' private-room if you please," said the clerk. "Mr. Miller left directions with me that when you came, you should be shown in at once."

All this was very gratifying indeed, and the solicitor was there, seated in his easy chair, looking as full of serenity as possible, and as if the least affair in the world was on tapis.

Scarcely had the usual salutations passed, when the clerk announced Mrs. Lake and a young lady.

"My wife with Annetta!" exclaimed Lake; and in a moment his words were verified by the appearance of the parties he had named.

"Tell me at once," said Annetta, "why I am brought here?"

"My dear young lady," said Mr. Miller, "if you will condescend to take a seat, I will explain."

"Be brief, sir."

The party was seated, and then Mr. Miller, clearing his throat said, --

"Ahem! You are of course aware, miss, that great doubt arose in the mind of Lord Lake with regard to your proper identity, and he sent you over to this country from Italy with his brother and family, to have those doubts resolved -- ahem! They are resolved, and you are found to be the daughter of a gentleman now in London."

"The proofs, sir," said Annetta, with a dignity and a calmness that surprised the whole party.

"Ah, ah -- the proofs. Let me see, oh yes; there are the papers. No. 1, copy of a confession made by --"

"Stop, sir," said young Lake, "stop. This is -- it must be painful to the feelings of this young lady, and very,

very painful is it to my feelings, for I have been long fervently attached to her, and let her be whose daughter she may, she is to me all perfection. I love her and would gladly make her my wife, let her be named whatever she may."

"But she is destitute, -- quite destitute," said Miller.

"It don't matter to me," cried young Lake -- he was playing his part famously -- "it don't matter to me; I love her, and will work for her -- she shall never want while I have life-blood in my veins."

"If this now were sincere," said Annetta, "I should begin for the first time to respect you. But you will excuse me for doubting it very much. I likewise doubt much the pretended evidence that you bring forward regarding my birth."

A tremendous knock at the outer door of the chambers now disturbed the party. An altercation was heard with the clerk -- then a shout for police, and a heavy fall as if somebody had been knocked down, and in another moment the door of Mr. Miller's private room was dashed open, and Lieutenant Rankin, in his undress military uniform, stood upon the threshold.

"Annetta!" he cried.

"Rankin -- oh, George, George!" shrieked Annetta, and in another moment she was in his arms.

"Here's a go," cried young Lake; "I say, young fellow, this won't do."

"Oh, George, George!" said Annetta, "they will have it that I am not my own father's child, that I am some nameless, houseless thing."

"They lie, Annetta who say so," replied the young soldier; "you shall be mine, and the proudest that ever stepped shall treat you with becoming respect, or shall rue the consequences."

"Well, I think it's time!" cried Mr. Miller in a marked manner, and throwing open the door of an inner room, he added, "my Lord Lake, come forth; no doubt you have heard all." Lord Lake himself -- the Mr. Blue of the London Hotel, the sham confidential clerk of Miller -- made his appearance, to the utter confusion of the Lakes.

"My father," said Annetta, "my dear father!"

"Hold," said Lord Lake, gravely, "I suspected, Annetta, from the first that your birth was impugned by my brother from the most interested motives, and I followed you from Italy -- Mr. Miller disclosed all to me, and the infamous plot is discovered."

"Then I am your child?"

"Confusion," muttered Lake, "death and the devil, what a contre temps."

"Stop," added Lord Lake, "the strangest thing of all has yet to be told. This plot to make out that you are not my child is but a plot, but it is not baseless as to the fact. You are not my daughter. I have by mere chance found out that lately, and I cannot provide for you, as the resources I have must go to him who will inherit my title. What say you, Master Lake, this girl with all her beauty is destitute, her name is Smith -- will you have her?"

"Not I in faith, thank you for nothing."

"Will you, young soldier, knowing what she is?"

"Ay, will I with all my heart! she is the highest, brightest treasure this world can offer me. Any name or no name -- poor or rich -- noble or commoner -- she is still my own dear girl, and her resting place shall be my heart, the whole world shall not tear her from it."

"God's blessings on you," cried Lord Lake, grasping his hands; "I did but this to give you shrinking coward a chance of creeping into favour with me, because he boasted so of his disinterested affection a while ago. She is my child, the Lady Annetta Lake -- I never doubted it, and she is yours -- George Rankin, and you shall be the dear son of my adoption."

"I say, father," said young Lake, "I -- I think we had better go."

"Curse you all," cried Lake, "and doubly curse you, lawyer Miller, you have betrayed me; but I'll be revenged."

"Through the bars of a prison," said the lawyer. "An officer is down stairs to arrest you for two thousand pounds. Ha, ha, ha!" *****

Thus then was it that this episode in the life of Varney the Vampyre terminated. But still he lived, and still there existed all the strange and fearful mixture of good and evil that was in his disposition. There he was yet upon the earth's surface, looking like one of the great world, and yet possessing so few feelings in common with its inhabitants.

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Surely to him there must have been periods of acute suffering, of intense misery, such as would have sufficed to drive any ordinary mind to distraction, and yet he lived, although one cannot, upon reviewing his career, and considering what he was, consider that death would have been other than a grateful release to him from intense suffering.

Perhaps, of all the suffering that, in consequence of his most awful and singular existence, was inflicted upon human nature, he suffered the most, for that he was a man of good intellect no one who has followed us thus far can doubt, and one cannot help giving in almost at times to as strange and fanciful theory of his own, namely that this world was to him the place of perdition for crimes done in some other sphere.

"It must be so!" he would say, "but as the Almighty Master of all things is all merciful, as he is all powerful, the period of my redemption will surely come at last."

This was the most consolatory thought that Varney could have, and it showed that even yet there was a something akin to humanity lingering at his heart.

This showed that despite the dreadful power he had — a power, as well as an awful propensity — he had some yearnings after a better state.

What had he been? How did he become a vampyre? Did the voice of fond affection ever thrill in his ears? Had little children ever climbed the knee of that wretched man? Fearful questions, if he could have answered them the affirmative — if he bore about with him, deep in his memory, a remembrance of such joys gone by.

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Chapter CLXXVIII. THE VAMPYRE HAS SERIOUS THOUGHTS. -- THE DREAM. -- THE RESOLUTION.

The next day after the events that we have detailed, Varney found himself in a hotel in London. He did not even make the effort to inquire how the affair connected with the Lady Annetta, in which towards the last he had played a generous part, prospered.

He was too spirit-broken himself to do so.

For nearly the whole day he remained in a room by himself, and although to avoid uncomfortable and ungracious remarks being made by the people of the house, he ordered from time to time food and wine, he, in accordance with his horrible nature, which forbade him any nourishment but human blood, touched neither.

During that day he seemed to be suffering acutely, for now and then as the waiters of the hotel passed the door of the private room he occupied, they heard deep agonising groans, and when once or twice they went in, fancying that he must be very ill or dying, they found him seated at a table on which his head was resting.

He would start up on these occasions, and sternly question them for interrupting him, so at last they left him alone.

Let us look at him in his solitude.

It is getting towards the dim and dusky hours of late twilight, and he can only barely be descried as he sits bolt upright in a high-backed arm-chair, looking at vacancy, while his lips move, and he appears to be conversing with the spirits of another world, that in their dim untangibility are not visible to mortal eyes.

Now and then he would strike his breast, and utter a dull groan as if some sudden recollection of the dreadful past had come over him, with such a full tide of horror that it could not be resisted.

It was not until a considerable time had elapsed, and the darkness had greatly increased, that he at length spoke.

"And I was once happy," he daisie mournfully, "once happy, because I was innocent. Oh! gracious Heaven, how long am I to suffer?"

A spasmodic kind of movement of his whole features ensued, that was quite dreadful to look upon, and would have terrified any one who could have seen them. Then he spoke again.

"I was happy one hundred and eighty years ago," he said, "for that has been the awful duration my life as yet; yes, a hundred and eighty years have, with their sunshine of summer, and their winter storms, passed over my head; and I had a wife and children, who, with innocent and gladsome prattle, would climb my knee and nestle in my bosom. Oh! where are they all now?"

He wrung his hands, but he did not weep the fount of tears had dried up for a hundred years in his bosom.

"Yes, yes! the grave holds them --- holds them? said I. No, no, long since have they crumbled into dust, and nothing of them remains as a faint indication even of who once was human. I, I it was who listened to the councils of a fiend, and destroyed he who had give up home, kindred, associations, all for me."

He rose up from the chair, and seemed to think that he would find some relief in pacing the room to and fro, but he soon threw himself again into the seat.

"No, no," he said, "no peace for me; and I cannot sleep, I have never slept what mortals call sleep, the sleep of rest and freedom from care, for many a long year. When I do seen [seem?] to repose, then what dreadful images awake to my senses. Better, far better than my glaring eyeballs should crack with weariness, than that I should taste such repose."

The sympathetic shudder with which he uttered these words was quite proof sufficient of his deep and earnest sincerity. He must indeed have suffered much before he could have give such a sentiment such an utterance. We pity thee, Varney!

"And when, oh, when will my weary pilgimage be over," he ejaculated; "Oh when will the crime of murder be cleansed from my soul. I killed her. Yes, I killed her who loved me. A fiend, I know it was a fiend, whispered suspicion in my ear, suspicion of her who was as pure as the first ray of sunlight that from heaven shows itself to chase away the night, but I listened and then created from my own fevered brain the circumstances that gave suspicion strength and horrible consistency --- and I killed her."

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After the utterance of these words he was silent for a time, and then in heart-rending accents he again repeated them.

"I killed her — I killed her, and she was innocent. Then I became what I am. There was a period of madness, I think, but I became a vampyre; I have died many deaths, but recovered from them all; for ever, by some strange accident or combination of circumstances, the cold moonbeams have had access to my lifeless form, and I have recovered."

By this time the landlord of the hotel in which Varney was staying, had got in a fearful fidget, for he began to think that he had a madman in his house, and that it would turn out that his guest had made his escape from some lunatic asylum.

"I wonder now," he thought, "if a little soothing civility would do any good; I will try it. It can't surely do any harm."

With this intent the landlord went up stairs to the room in which Varney the Vampyre was, and he tapped gently at the door.

There was no reply, and after a few moments' consideration, the landlord opened the door and peeped in, when he saw his customer sitting in an arm-chair, in the manner in which we have described him to sit.

"If you please, sir," said the landlord, "would you not like— —"

"Blood!" said Varney, rising.

The landlord did not wait for any more, but bustled down stairs again with all the promptitude in his power.

It was a bed-room and sitting-room that Varney occupied at the hotel, the one adjoining the other, and now although he groaned and sighed at the idea of repose, he flung himself upon the bed, full dressed, as he was, and there he lay as still as death itself.

One of those strange fitful kind of slumbers, such as he had himself described as being so full of dread, came over him.

For a time he was still, as we have said, but then as various images of agony began to chase each other through his brain, he tossed about his arms, and more than once the word "mercy" came from his lips in accents of the most soul-harrowing nature.

This state of things continued for some considerable time, and then in his sleep a great change came over him, and he fancied he was walking in a garden replete with all the varied beauties of a southern clime, and through the centre of which meandered a stream, the chrysal music of which was delightfully calming and soothing to his senses.

All around seemed to speak of the peace and loveliness of an Eden.

As he wandered on, he fancied that some form was walking by his side, and that he heard the gentle fall of its feet, and the flutter of garments.

"Varney," it said, "you have suffered much."

"I have. Oh, God knows I have."

"You would die, Varney, if the moonbeams could be prevented from reaching you."

"Yes, yes. But how — how?"

"The ocean. The deep, deep sea hides many a worse secret than the corpse of a vampyre."

It might have been that, after all, his sleep was to some extent refreshing to him, or that the dream he had, had instilled a hope into him of a release from what, in his case, might truly be called the bondage of existence; but he certainly arose more calm, cool, and collected, than he had been for some time past.

"Yes," he said, "the deep sea holds a secret well, and if I could but be washed into some of its caverns, I might lie there and rot until the great world itself had run its course."

This idea took great possession of him. He thought over various modes of carrying it out. At one time he thought that if he bought a boat on the sea coast, and went out alone, sailing away as far from land as he could, he might be able to accomplish his object. But then he might not be able to get far enough.

At length he thought of a more feasible and a better plan than that, and it was to take his passage in some ship for any port, and watch his opportunity, some night when far from land, to steal up upon the deck and plunge in the waves.

The more he considered of this plan the better he liked it, and the more it wore an appearance of probability and an aspect of success, so at length the thought grew into a resolution.

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"Yes, yes," he muttered, "who knows but that some friendly spirit -- for the mid air that floats 'twixt earth and heaven is peopled with such, may have whispered such counsel in my ears. It shall be done; I will no longer hesitate, but make this attempt to shake off the dreadful weight which mere existence is to me."

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Chapter CLXXIX. THE SCOTCH PACKET SHIP. -- THE SUICIDE.

It was in pursuance of this resolution, so strangely and suddenly formed, that the unhappy Varney rose on the following morning and went to that region of pitch, slop clothing, red herrings, and dirt -- the docks.

But yet, somehow, although the docks may not be the cleanest or them most refined part of the vast city of London, the coarseness and the litter there -- for after all it is more litter than dirt -- are by no means so repulsive as those bad addenda to other localities.

There is a kind of rough freshness induced by the proximity of the water which has a physical and moral effect, we are inclined to think, upon the place and the people, and which takes off much of what would otherwise wear the aspect of what is called low life.

But this is all by the way, and we will at once proceed to follow the fortunes of Varney, in carrying out his plan of self annihilation.

The hour was an early one, and many a curious glance was cast at him, for although he had humanised and modernised his apparel to a great extent, he could not get rid of the strange, unworld-like (if we may use the phrase) look of his face. He was very pale too, and jaded looking, for the thoughts that had recently occupied him were not such as to do good to the looks of any one.

He cared little in what vessel he embarked. He had but one object in embarking at all, and that was to get out to sea, so that the ultimate destination of the ship that should receive so very odd and equivocal a passenger was a matter of no moment.

Stopping a personage who had about him a sea-faring look, Varney, pointing to a bustling place of embarkation, said, --

"Does any vessel start from there today?"

"Yes, there's one going now, or as soon as the tide serves her. She is for Leith?"

"On the coast of Scotland, I think?"

"Yes, to be sure."

Varney walked on until he came to a kind of counting-house, where sat a man with books before him, and, not to take up more valuable space, he secured what was called a berth on board the "Ocean", a dirty, small, ill-convenient ship bound for the port near the Scotch metropolis of Edinburgh.

Not wishing to be himself much noticed, and having no desire to notice anybody, Varney went down below, and seated himself in a dark corner of the generally dingy cabin, and there, amid all the noise, bawling, abuse, and bustle contingent upon getting the ill-conditioned bark under weigh, he never moved or uttered a word to any one, although the cabin was frequently visited.

But Varney had no idea of the amount of annoyance to which he was likely, in the course of the evening, to be subjected.

The vessel was got under weigh, and as both wind and tide happened to be favourable, she dropped down the river rapidly, and soon was clear of the Nore-light, and holding on her course northward.

The cabin now began to fill with the passengers, and extraordinary as the fact may appear, there were many Scotchmen actually going back again. They were, however, only going to pay visits, for it is one of the popular delusions that Scotchmen try to keep up in this country, that they have left something dear and delightful behind them in Scotland, and that, take it altogether, it is one of the most desirable spots in the whole world. It becomes, therefore, quite necessary for them to go back now and then, in order to keep up that delusion.

Personal vanity, too, is one of the great characteristics of the nation; and many a Scotchman goes back to Edinburgh, for example, to make an appearance among his old friends and family connexions, totally incompatible with his real position in London.

By about nine o'clock at night, when the shore to the west could only be discovered as a dim, grey line on the horizon, the cabin of the "Ocean" packet was crammed.

Whisky was produced, and a drink that the Scotch call "bottled yell," meaning ale; and as these two heady liquids began to take effect "Auld Lang syne" was chaunted in the vernacular by the whole party. At length a feeling of annoyance began to grow up from the fact of the isolated aspect of Varney, and the quiet, unobtrusive

manner in which he looked on at the proceedings, appearing not in the smallest degree enthusiastic, even when the most uproarious Scotch songs, in the most unintelligible of all jargons, were sung, for strange to say, the authors of that nation take a pride in slaughtering the English language.

At length a Scotchman approached Varney and said, --

"Ye'll take a glass to auld Reekie mon?"

"What are you doing that for?" said an Englishman. "Eh! mon, I can smell the gude auld toon."

"I do not understand your language," said Varney, and he walked from the cabin to the deck of the vessel. He recoiled an instant, for the moon was rising.

"Ever thus, even thus," he said, "how strange it is that I never dream of ridding myself of the suffering of living, ut the moon is shining brightly. Can its rays penetrate the ocean?"

The deck was very still and silent indeed. The man at the helm, and one other pacing to and fro, were all that occupied it, save Varney himself, and he stood by the side gazing in the direction, where he had last seen the dim grey speck of land.

"A pleasant run, sir, we shall have of it," said the man who had been pacing the deck, "if this kindly wind continues."

"It blows from the west."

"Yes, nearly due-west; but that suits us. We keep her head a few points in shore, and do well with such a wind, although a south-west by south is our choice."

"How far are we from land?"

"It's the coast of Suffolk that is to our left, but we are I hope a good thirty miles or more from it."

"You hope?"

"Yes, sir. Perhaps you are not sufficient of a sailor to know that we never hug the shore if we can possibly help it."

"I understand. And there?"

"Oh, there lies the German Ocean."

"How deep now should you say the sea was here?"

"Can't say, sir, but it's blue water."

This was not much information to Varney, but he bowed his head and walked forward, as much as to say that he had had enough of the information and conversation of the man, who was the mate of the vessel, and quite disposed to be communicative. Perhaps in the very dim light he did not see exactly what a strange-looking personage he was talking to.

"Thirty miles from land," thought Varney, "surely that is far enough, and I need have no dread of floating to the shore through such a mass of water as that thirty miles. The distance is very great; I can to-night in another hour make the attempt."

To his great joy some heavy clouds climbed up the sky along with the moon, and congregating around the beautiful satellite, effectually obscured the greater number of its beams. There was in fact, no absolute moonlight, but a soft reflected kind of twilight coming through the clouds, and dispersed far and wide.

"This will do," muttered Varney. "All I have to fear are the direct moonbeams. It is they that have the effect of revivifying such as I am."

The man who had been pacing the deck finally sat down, and appeared to drop off to sleep, so that all was still, and as Varney kept to the head of the vessel, the man at the wheel could see nothing of him, there being many intervening obstacles. He was perfectly alone.

Now and then, with a loud roaring about, he heard some boisterous drinking chorus come from the cabin, and then a rattle of glasses as fists were thumped upon the tables in token of boisterous approbation, and then all would be still again.

Varney looked up to the sky and his lips moved, but he uttered no sound. He went closer to the vessel's side and gazed upon the water as it lazily rippled past. How calm and peaceful, he thought, he ought to be, far beneath that tide.

A sudden plunge into the sea would have made a splash that would have been heard, and that he wished of all things to avoid. He clambered slowly over the side, and only held on by his hands for a moment. Cool night air tossed about his long elfin locks, and in another moment he was gone.

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Chapter CLXXX. THE OLD MANOR HOUSE. -- THE RESCUE. -- VARNEY'S DESPAIR.

At about ten o'clock on that same night on which Varney the Vampyre plunged into the sea with hopes of getting rid of the world of troubles that oppressed him, a small fishing boat might have been seen a distance of about twenty-five miles from the Suffolk coast, trying to make for land, and baffled continually by the wind that blew off shore.

In this boat were two young men, and from their appearance they evidently belonged to the wealthier class of society. They were brothers.

From their conversation we shall gather the circumstances that threw them into such situation, not by any means divested of peril as it was.

"Well, Edwin," said one, "here we have been beating about for five hours, trying to get in shore, and all our little bark permits us to do is I think not materially to increase our distance from home."

"That is about the truth, Charles," said the other, "and it was my fault."

"Come, Edwin, don't talk in that way. There is no fault in the matter; how could you know that the wind would stiffen into such a breeze as it has, so that we cannot fight out against it; or if there be fault, of course it's as much mine as yours, for am not I here, and do I not know full well what an amount of consternation there will be at the Grange?"

"There will indeed!"

"Well, their joy when we get back will be all the greater."

"Shall we get back?"

"Can you ask? Look at our little boat, is she not sea-worthy? Does she not dance on the waves merrily? It is only the wind after all that baffles us, if it would drop a little, we could, I think make head against it with the oars.

The brothers were silent now for a few moments, for they were each looking at the weather. At length Edwin spoke, saying, —

"We shall have the moon up, and that may make a change."

"Very likely — very likely. There is not, I think, quite so much sea as there was; suppose we try the oars again?"

The other assented, and the two young men exerted themselves very much to decrease their distance from the Suffolk coast by pulling away right manfully, but it was quite evident to them that they did no good, and that they had just as well dropped westward as they had been doing, by keeping the sail set, and steering as near as possible to the wind.

"Why, if this goes on, Charles, where shall we get to by the morning?"

"To Northumberland, perhaps."

"Or further."

"Well, if we go far enough, what say you to attempting the vexata questio of the north-west passage?"

"Nay, I cannot jest — it's a sad thing this — more sad a good deal for those who are at home, than for us. To-morrow is Clara's wedding day, and what a damper it will be upon all to suppose that we have perished at sea."

"They will never suppose that we would do anything so ridiculous. Why, at the worst, you know, we could go before the wind and run on to Holland."

"Yes, if no storm arises or such a gale as might founder our boat. There, there is the moon."

"Yes, and she will soon be overtaken by yon bank of clouds that seem to be scudding after her in the blue heavens. Ha! a sail, by Jove!"

"Where? where?"

"Not I think above four miles there to the east, by our little compass which it is a thousand mercies we have with us. Look, you may see her sails against that light cloud — there."

"I see her. Think you she will see us?"

"There is every chance, for her swell of canvass will be all the other way. Fire your fowling-piece and the

sound may reach her, the wind is good for carrying it."

Charles took a fowling-piece from the bottom of the boat. The brothers had merely gone out at sunset or a little before it, to shoot gulls, and he tried to discharge the piece, but several seas that they had shipped, while they were thinking of other things than keeping the gun dry, had, for the time being, most effectively prevented it from being discharged.

"Ah!" said Edwin as he heard the click of the lock, "that hope is lost."

"It is indeed, and to my thinking the ship is distancing us rapidly. You see our mast and sail, will, at even this distance, lie so low in the horizon that they will hardly see us unless they are sweeping the sky with a night glass."

"And that is not likely."

"Certainly not, so we have nothing for it but to hold on our way. I am getting hungry if you are not."

"I certainly am not getting hungry, for I have felt half famished these last two hours; but I suppose we may hold out against the fiend hunger some hours yet. What are you looking at so earnestly, eh?"

"I hardly know."

"You hardly know? Let me see -- why -- why what is it?"

"There seems to me to be something now and that much darker than the waves, tiding on their tops; there, do you not see it? There it is again. There!"

"Yes, yes."

"What on earth can it be?"

"A dead body."

"Indeed! ah! it drifts towards us. There is some current hereabouts, for you see it comes to us against the wind."

"Dont deceive yourself, brother. It is we who are going with the wind towards it, and now you can see there is no doubt about what it is. Some poor fellow, who has been drowned. Get out the boat-hook, get it out."

"Why, you would not take in such a cargo, Edwin."

"God forbid! but I feel some curiosity to see who and what sort of a personage it is. Here we have him. What a length he is to be sure."

The body was nearly alongside the boat, and one of the brothers detained it with a boat-hook, while they both looked earnestly at it.

It was the body of a man, remarkably well dressed, and had no appearance of having been under the water long. The features, as far as they could see them, were calm and composed. The hands were clenched, and some costly looking rings glittered on the fingers through the salt spray that foamed and curled around the insensible form.

"Charles," said Edwin; "what we shall do?"

Edwin shook his head.

"I -- I don't like."

"Like what?"

"I don't like to cast it adrift again, and not take it ashore, where it can rest in an honest man's grown if he be one. Fancy it being one of us, would it not be a consolation to those who love us to know that we rested in peace among our ancestors, in preference to rotting in the sea, tossed and mangled by every storm that blows. I do not like to cast the body adrift again."

"It's a ghastly passenger."

"It is, but that ghastliness is only an idea, and we should remember that we ourselves-- -- "

"Stop, brother, stop. Do not fancy that I oppose your wish to convey this body to the shore, and place it in some sanctified spot. What I expressed concerning it was merely the natural feeling that must arise on such an occasion, nothing more."

"Then you are willing?"

"I am."

The two brothers now, without further doubts or remarks upon the subject, got the body into the boat, and laid it carefully down. Then Edwin folded and tied a handkerchief over the face, for as he truly enough said, --

"There is no occasion to have to encounter that dead face each moment that one turns one's eyes in that direction; it is sufficient that we have, by taking the body in at all done, all that humanity can dictate to us."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

To this Charles agreed, and it was remarked by them both as a strange thing that from the moment of their taking in the dead body to the boat, the wind dropped, and finally there was almost a calm, after which there came soft gentle air from the south-east, which enabled them with scarcely any exertion on their own parts to make great progress towards their own home, from which they found they had not by any means been driven so far northward as they had at first thought.

The brothers looked at each other, and it was Edwin who broke the silence, and put into words what both thought, by saying, --

"Charles, there is something more in this whole affair than what lies just upon its surface."

"Yes, it seems as if we were driven out to sea by some special providence to do this piece of work, and that having done it, the winds and the waves obeyed the hand of their mighty Master, and allowed of our return."

"It does seem so," said the other.

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Chapter CLXXXI. A FAMILY SCENE. -- THE SISTERS. -- THE HORRIBLE ALARM.

In the course of two hours more, the young men were so close in shore that they could see the lights flashing along the coast, and they even fancied they could catch a glimpse of human forms moving along with torches; and if such were the case, they doubted not but that these people were sent to serve as a guide to them should they with their little bark be hovering near the coast.

"Look, Edwin," said Charles, "we are expected, are we not?"

"Yes, yes."

"I am certain that those lights are meant as guides for us."

"They may spare themselves the trouble, for do you not see that the clouds are wearing away, and that in a few minutes more we shall have the undimmed lustre of a full moon looking down upon us."

"It will be so."

The boat had now got so far within a large natural inlet of the ocean that but very little wind caught its gently flapping sail, so that the brothers bent manfully to their oars, and got the boat through the water at a rapid rate.

Oh, how very different their sensations were now to what they had been when they were beating about at the mercy of the winds and waves, but a few short hours since, and when it certainly was but an even chance with death whether they would ever see their home again.

If a gale had sprung up, accompanied by anything in the shape of a very heavy sea, they must have been lost.

Soon they saw that their boat was descried, and at a particular portion of the coast there stood a complete cluster of men with torches, inviting them there to land, and they knew that such landing place was upon their father's property, and that in a few minutes they would be safe on shore.

Neither of them spoke, but reflection was busy in the hearts of both.

There was a loud and thoroughly English shout, as the boat grated upon the sandy beach, and Edwin and Charles jumped on shore. They were in another moment pressed in their father's arms.

"Why, why, boys," he said, "what a fright you have given us all; there's Clara and Emma have been forced -- I say forced, for nothing but force would do it -- to go home, and the whole country has been in an uproar. You were blown out to sea, I suppose?"

"Yes, father, but we have not been in any danger."

"Not in any danger with such a cockleshell of a boat fairly out into the German Ocean. But we will say no more about it, lads. Not another word, come home at once, and make all hearts glad at the old Grange-house."

"There's something in the boat," cried one of the men who held a light.

"Good God, yes!" exclaimed Charles.

"We had forgotten," said Edwin, "we met with a little adventure at sea, and picked up a dead body."

"A dead body?"

"Yes, father, we could not find it in our hearts to let it be, so we brought it on shore that it might have the rites of Christian burial in the village church-yard. Somebody who loved the man may yet thank us for it, and feel a consolation to know that such had been done."

"You are right boys, you are right," said the father, "you have done in that matter just as I would wish you; I will give orders for the body to be taken to the dead house by Will Stephens, and to-morrow it shall be decently interred."

This being settled, the father, accompanied by his two sons, who were not a little pleased to be safe upon terra firma again, walked together up a sloping pathway, which led to the Grange-house, as it was called.

The joy that the return of the brothers caused in the family, our readers may well imagine. The sisters Clara and Emma wept abundantly, and the mother, who had let her fears go further than any one else, was deeply affected.

But it is time that we should inform the reader who these people were, whom we have introduced upon the scene of our eventful history.

Sir George Crofton, for such was the name of the father of Edwin and Charles, was a wealthy warm-hearted

country gentleman, and constantly resided upon his own estate all the year round, being a good landlord to his tenantry, and a good father to his four children, who have already been to some extent presented to the reader.

The mother was a kind-hearted, but rather weak woman, with an evangelical bias that at times was rather annoying to the family.

This, however, was perhaps the good lady's only fault, for with that one exception, she was fond of her children to excess, notwithstanding, as Sir George sometimes jestingly said he verily believed, she in her heart considered they were all on the high road to a nameless abode.

The night was so far advanced when the young men got home that, of course, not much was said or done, and among other things that were put off until the following morning, was the story of the finding of the body.

"There is no occasion," whispered Sir George, "to say anything to your mother about it."

"Certainly not, father."

"At least not till to-morrow, for if you do, I shall not get a wink of sleep for her reflections on the subject."

The two young men knew very well that this was no exaggeration, and that their mother would, like any divine, eagerly seize the opportunity of what is called "improving the occasion" by indulging in a long discourse upon the most dismal of all subjects that the mind of any human being can conceive, namely, the probability of everybody going to eternal perdition unless they believe in a particular set of doctrines that to her seem orthodox.

The consequence of this was that the dead body was quietly taken out of the boat by men who did not possess the most refined feelings in the world, and carried to the bone house.

"He seems a decent sort of chap," said one, as he looked at the very respectable habiliments of the corpse.

"Ah! look at the gould rings."

"Yes, you may, look, Abel, but eyes on, hands off."

"Why?"

"Why, you gowk, do you think as young Master Charles and Edwin don't know of 'em, and more besides, who would touch dead man's gold off of his fingers?"

"Is it unlucky?"

"Horrid!"

"Then I'll have nought to do with un."

The body was placed on the ground, for there was no coffin of any sort to put it in, and the door was shut upon it in the dead house, and then the party who had brought it there thought it a part of their duty to wake up Will Stephens the sexton, to tell him that there was such a thing as a dead body placed in his custody, as it were, by being put into the dead house, which was not above a hundred yards from the cottage occupied by Will.

They hammered away rather furiously at his door, and no wonder that he felt a little, or perhaps not a little, alarmed upon the occasion.

In a few moments a casement was opened and out popped a head.

"Hilloa! you ragamuffins, what do you mean by hammering away at an honest man's door at this rate, eh? Am I to have any sleep?"

"Ragamuffin yourself," cried one; "there's a dead body of a drowned man in the bonehouse. All you have got to do is to look after it, and there's a lot of gold rings on its fingers with diamonds in them, for all we know, worth God knows how much. You may make the most of it now that you know it."

"A dead man! Who is he?"

"Ah, that's more than we can tell. Good night, or rather good morning, old crusty."

"Stop! stop! — tell me— —"

The men only laughed, for they had no desire to protract a conversation with the sexton, and he called in vain after them to give him some further information upon the subject of this rather mysterious information.

"A drowned man," he pondered to himself, "a drowned man, and with fingers loaded with gems, and brought to the bonehouse! Oh, pho! pho! It's a hoax, that's what it is, and I won't believe it. It's done to get me up in the cold, that's all, and then there will be some trick played off upon me safe, and I shall be only laughed at for my pains."

Full of this idea, the sexton turned into his bed again, and hoped that by speedily going to sleep, he should get the laugh of his tormentors, instead of they getting it of him, as well as lose the shivering that had come on him through standing at the open window, exposed to the night air so very indifferently clad.

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Chapter CLXXXII. THE SEXTON'S AVARICE. -- THE DEAD AND THE LIVING. -- THE RING.

It was all very well for the sexton to wish, and to try to get to sleep, but actually to succeed in procuring "Nature's sweet oblivion" was quite another matter.

In vain he tossed and turned about, there was no rest for him of any kind or description, dreamless or dreamful, and still he kept repeating to himself, --

"A dead body, with gold and diamond rings in the bone-house."

These were the magic words which, like a spell that he was compelled by some malign influence continually to repeat, kept Will Stephens awake, until at last he seemed to lose entirely his first perception of the fact that he might be only hoaxed, and all his imagination became concentrated on the idea of how came the dead body in the bone-house, and how was it that gold and diamond rings were left on its fingers in such a place?

These were mental ruminations, the result of which was transparent from the first, for that result in the natural order of things was sure to be that the passion of curiosity would get the better of all other considerations, and he, Will Stephens, would rise to ascertain if such were really the state of things.

"It aint far off morning, now," he reasoned with himself, "so I may as well get up at once as lie here tossing and tumbling about, and certainly unable to get another wink of sleep, and besides after all I may be wrong in thinking this a hoax. There may really be such a dead body as those fellows mentioned in the bone-house and if there be, I ought certainly to go and look after it."

We easily reason ourselves into what is our pleasure, and so while these cogitatory remarks were uttered by the sexton, he rose.

He found that if he drew back the blind from before his window, the moon which was now sailing through a nearly cloudless sky, would give him amply sufficient light to enable him to go through the process of dressing, so he at once began that operation.

"Yes," he said, "I ought to go, it's my positive duty to do so, after getting the information I have, and if that information be untrue, let it recoil on the heads of those who invented the falsehood. I shall go, that's settled. What a sweet moonlight."

It was a sweet moonlight indeed. The floods of soft silvery light fell with an uncommon radiance upon all objects, and the minutest thing could have been seen upon the ground, with the same clearness and distinctness as at mid-day.

The only difference was that a soft preternatural looking atmosphere seemed to be around everything, and a kind of marble like look was imparted to all objects far and near on which those soft silvery rays rested in beauty and sublimity.

The sexton was full dressed, and although the moonlight guided him well, he thought that he might in the bone-house require another mode of illumination, and he lighted and took with him a small lantern which had a darkening shade to it.

Thus prepared, he walked at a rapid pace from his own house towards the small shedlike building which served as a receptacle for the unowned dead, and for such human remains as were from time to time cast ashore by the waves, or flung up from new graves by the spade and the mattock.

Familiar as he was and had been for many a year with that bone-house, and often in contact with the dead, he yet on this occasion felt as if a strange fear was creeping over him, and then a flutter of his heart and the fiery feel that was in his brain were circumstances quite novel to him.

"Well, this is odd," he said, "and I suppose it is what they call being nervous I can't make it out to be anything else, I'm sure."

Thus reasoning with himself upon his own unwonted timidity, he reached the bone-house.

The door of the dilapidated building which was known by that name, was only secured by a latch, for it was not considered that the contents of the place were sufficiently interesting for any one's cupidity to be excited by it.

The sexton paused a moment before he lifted the latch, and glanced around him. Even then he half expected to hear a loud laugh expressive of the triumph of those who had combined to play him the trick, if it were one, of

getting him out of his bed on a bootless errand. But all was still around him — still as the very grave itself, and muttering then in a hurried tone, "it is true, there is no trick," he hastily opened the door, and went into the bone-house.

All was darkness save one broad beam of moonlight that came in at the door-way, but the sexton closed the entrance, and applied to his lantern for a light.

He slid the darkening piece of metal from before the magnifying glass, and then a rather sickly ray of light fell for a moment upon the corpse that lay then upon its back — a ray only sufficiently strong and sufficiently enduring to enable the sexton to make quite sure that there was a body before him, and then his lantern went out.

"Confound the lantern!" he said, "I ought to have looked to it before I started, instead of lighting it on the mere hazard of its going on comfortably. What's to be done? Ah, I have it, I remember."

What the sexton remembered was that on the same wall in which the door was situated, there was a large square aperture only covered by a kind of shutter of wood, the withdrawal of a bolt from which would cause it to fall in a moment on its hinges.

The sexton knew the place well, and drawing back the somewhat rusty bolt, down went the shutter, and a broad flood of moonlight fell at once upon the corpse.

"Ah," said Will Stephens, "there it is sure enough. What a long odd-looking fellow to be sure, and what a face — how thin and careworn looking. I do very much wonder now who he really is?"

As he continued to gaze upon the dead body, his eyes wandered to the hands, and then sure enough he saw the bright and glittering gems the men had spoken of, and which the salt water had not been able to tarnish into dimness. Perceiving that the setting was gold and the stones real, —

"Ahem!" said Stephens, softly; "they will not bury the corpse with those rings on his fingers. Why, he must have half a dozen on at least; they will be somebody's perquisite of course, and that somebody won't be me. The idea of leaving such property unprotected in a bone-house!"

Will Stephens remained now silent for a short time, moving his head about in different directions, so that he caught the bright colours of the jewels that adorned the dead man's hands, and then he spoke again.

"What's more easy," said he, "than for some of the very fellows who brought him here, to slip back quietly, and take away every one of those rings?"

After this much, he went to the door of the bone-house and listened, but all was perfectly still; and then his cogitations assumed another shape.

"Who saw me come from my house?" he said. — "Nobody. Who will see me go back to it? — Nobody. Then what is to hinder me from taking the rings, and — and letting the blame lie on some one else's shoulders, I should like to know? Nothing will be easier than for me to say in the morning that owing to the strange and insolent manner in which the information was given me of the arrival of the dead body in the bone-house, I did not believe it and therefore did not rise, and so — so I think I may as well eh?"

He thought he heard something like a faint sigh, and the teeth chattered in his head, and he shook in every limb as he bent all his energies to the task of listening if there were really any one in or at hand, playing the spy upon him.

All was as before profoundly still, and with a long breath of relief, he cast off his terror.

"What a fool I am to be sure," he said; "it was but the wind after all, no doubt, making its way through some one of the numerous chinks and crevices in this shed; it did sound like a sigh from some human lips, but it wasn't."

The propriety of making short work of the affair, if he wished to do it at all, now came forcibly to the mind of the sexton, and arming himself with all the courage he could just then summon to his aid, he advanced close to the corpse.

Kneeling on one knee he took up one of the hands from which he wished to take the rings, and when he saw them closer, he felt convinced that they did not belie their appearance, but were in reality what they seemed to be — jewels of rarity and price.

The hand was cold and clammy and damp to the touch, and the knuckles were swollen, so that there was great difficulty in getting the rings over them, and the sexton was full five minutes getting one of them off.

When he had done so, he wiped the perspiration of fear and excitement from his brow, as he muttered, —

"That's always the case with your drowned folks, they are so swelled when first they come out of the water,

and so I shall have quite a job, I suppose."

The sexton's cupidity was, however, now sufficiently awakened, to make him persevere, despite any such obstacles, in what he was about, and accordingly, kneeling on both knees he clasped the wrist of the dead man in one hand, and with the other strove to coax off, by twisting the hoop of gold round and round, a ring that had one diamond, apparently of great value, set in it, and which the robber of the dead thought was a prize worth some trouble in the obtaining.

In an instant, the dead hand clasped him tight.

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Chapter CLXXXIII. THE RECOVERY. -- THE SEXTON'S FRIGHT. -- THE COMPACT.

What pen shall describe the abject fright of Master Will Stephens, the sexton, as the cold clammy fingers of the supposed corpse closed upon his hand.

The blood seemed to curdle at his very heart -- a film spread itself before his eyes -- he tried to scream, but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he could utter no sound.

In good truth he was within an ace of fainting, and it was rather a wonder that he did not go clean off.

Power to withdraw his hand from the horrible grasp he had not, and there he knelt, shivering and shaking, and with his mouth wide open, and the hair literally bristling upon his head.

How long he and the dead man remained in this way together in silence, he knew not, but he was aroused from the state of almost frenzy in which he was, by a deep sepulchral voice -- the voice of the apparently dead.

"What has happened?" it said, "what has happened? Is this the world which was to come?"

"M--m--mer-cy -- help," stammered the sexton. "I -- I -- I -- am a poor man -- I -- I don't want your rings, good Mr. -- Mr. Ghost. Oh -- oh -- oh -- have mercy upon me I -- I -- implore you."

The only reply was a frightful groan.

The perspiration rolled down the sexton's face.

"Oh, don't -- oh, pray don't -- hold -- hold me so -- so tight."

"Now," said the dead man, "I know all. The dye is cast; my fate has again spoken. Steel shall not slay me, the bullet shall kill me not, fire shall not burn me, and water will not drown while yon bright satellite sails on 'twixt earth and heaven."

"Yes -- yes, sir."

"The fi at has gone forth, and I am wretched, oh, Heaven so unutterably wretched!"

"Perhaps, good Mr. Ghost, you -- you will let me go now. Here's your ring, I don't want to keep it. Here's the only one I took off your worshipful fingers, good Mr. Ghost."

A very thin filmy sort of cloud had been going over the moon's disc, but now had passed completely away, and such a flood of unchecked untempered brilliancy poured in at the open window, if it might be so called of the dead-house that it became quite radiant with the silvery beams.

The drowned man rose with a wild howling cry of rage, and springing at the throat of the sexton, bore him down to the earth in an instant, and placed his knee upon his chest.

"Villain," he groaned out between his clenched teeth, "you shall die, although you have made me live. There shall be one victim to the fell destroyer."

The sexton thought his hour was come.

"Wretch!" pursued the revived corpse, "wretch, what devil prompted you to do this most damnable deed? Speak -- speak, I say, who are you?"

"What -- what deed?" gasped the sexton.

"The deed of restoring me to life -- of dragging me from the ocean, and forcing me to live again."

"I -- I -- oh dear."

"Speak. Go on."

"I didn't do anything of the sort. The truth is, I only came to -- to -- to -- "

"To what?"

"To borrow a ring of you, that's all, and the greatest calamity that ever happened to me is your coming to life."

"How came I here?"

"That I can't tell your worship. I am the sexton of this place, it's called Culburn, and is in Suffolk, and they picked your worship up at sea, and brought you here. That's all I know about it, as I hope for mercy. It can't do you any good to kill a poor fellow like me. I don't think you are a ghost now, but some ugly -- no I mean handsome fellow -- supposed only to be drowned."

"Do you tell me truth?"

"As I live, and hope your worship will let me live I do. And here's the ring, I came to borrow of you, sir, as a

proof."

"Of what?"

"Of -- of -- of -- I hardly know what to say to you, sir."

"If you are not the great enemy to me that I thought you -- you are a mere thief. You came to steal the jewels I had upon my fingers. Is not that the truth?"

"I -- I rather think it is, sir."

"You may save your wretched life if you like. If you promise me that you will keep all that has happened a secret, except so much of it as I shall empower you to reveal, I will spare you; but if after having so promised, you break faith with me, and let your tongue wag further than I wish it, you will not live twenty-four hours afterwards, be assured, for I will find you out, and twist your head from your shoulders."

"Anything, sir, I will promise anything, I will swear if you like."

"I heed no oaths. Consideration for your own safety will keep you silent. Rise."

He took his knee off the chest of the sexton and his hand off his throat, and then Will Stephens tremblingly rose to his feet. The idea did cross him for a moment of measuring his strength with the resuscitated man, but when he beheld the tall, bony, gaunt figure before him, he saw he had not the shadow of a chance in a personal struggle.

Moreover he had a lively remembrance of a most vice-like pressure upon his throat, which seemed to say that the ugly stranger was by no means in an exhausted state.

Upon the whole, then, the sexton was glad to have escaped so well.

"You have only to say, sir, what you would have me do," he said.

"Answer me first. Have you always lived here? Is this your native place?"

"Oh, no, sir, I came from London; but then it's years ago."

"Very well. You must say that you remember me in London, as a gentleman of good repute, and you must add that you came to the bone-house here, and found me reviving, and that you took measures to complete my recovery."

"Yes, sir. And here is your ring."

"Keep it as a memento of this affair."

"Many thanks, sir. Will it please you to tell me your name and condition?"

"John Smith, a foreign merchant; and now tell me, minutely, how I was rescued from the ocean, or did the waves themselves give up their dead?"

The sexton who was now assured in his own mind that it was no ghost he was speaking to, entered as far as he knew into the story of the finding the body, and bringing it to the bone-house, but as that information was not great, he volunteered, if Mr. Smith would go with him to his cottage, to get him all the particulars.

To this the other consented, and they both left the bone-house together.

On the short bit of road, the sexton began to think that his companion must be some madman, for ever and anon when the moon was brightest, he saw him lift up both his arms to it, as if he were worshipping it, and at those times too, he heard him mutter some words in a language that he did not comprehend. At length the singular being spoke in English.

"Henceforth," he cried, as if quite forgetful of the presence of another, "henceforth, begone remorse, begone despair. The great sea has rejected me, and not again will I seek destruction; I will live, and I will live to be the bane and curse of the beautiful."

"Sir," said the sexton, "here is my house, sir; if you will step in, I will soon dish you up a little something in the way of refreshment. You see, sir, I live alone, that is to say, an old woman who keeps my cottage in order and waits upon me goes away at night, and comes again in the morning, but as it is not her time yet, I will get you anything you like to eat or to drink."

"I never eat nor drink."

"Not eat! -- nor -- drink! Never, sir?"

"Never. I shall cost you nothing to entertain me. I want some rest, and while I am taking it, do you go and get me such information as you can regarding me. Make no concealment that I am alive, but go at once, and return with what expedition you may, and remember that your fate is in my hands."

"I will, sir."

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The sexton was quite terrified enough to do what he was bidden, and perhaps, the consciousness that the strange and mysterious man whom he had for a guest might accuse him of the projected robbery of the jewellery he had about his person influenced him more than the rather obscure threat of personal vengeance by the promised screwing his head off.

But the matter, take it for all in all, was anything but an agreeable one for Master Will Stephens, and most heartily did he wish he had remained in his bed and left the stranger to recover, if was to recover, by himself. Will did not attribute that recovery to the moonlight he had himself let in.

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Chapter CLXXXIV. THE NIGHT ALARM. -- THE VAMPYRE'S ATTACK UPON THE BRIDE.

The particulars concerning the bringing in of the body that had been picked up at sea by the brothers Edwin and Charles Crofton, were to be learnt from many mouths so soon as the sexton evinced a disposition to know them, and in a very short time, and as the daylight was making the fainter and more spiritual light of the moon fade away, he again reached his own abode, where he had left a guest of whom the reader knows much, but of whom Will Stephens knew but little.

He found the self-christened Mr. Smith waiting for him rather impatiently.

"Well," he cried, "your news? your news?"

"May be told, sir, in a few words," replied the sexton, and then he made his new friend acquainted with the whole story, just as he had heard it of the fishermen on the coast.

Mr. Smith, or as we may as well call him at once the vampyre, hesitated for a few moments as if he had not exactly and accurately made up his mind what to do, and then he said, --

"You will go to the Grange-house and tell the story that I have before informed you I would have told. Be sure that you expatiate upon my gentility and respectability, for I want to be upon good terms with the Crofton family."

"Well, but sir, I'm a tenant of Sir George Crofton's and so you see -- "

"What," said the vampyre, his eyes flashing with indignation as he spoke "dare you dispute my positive commands?"

"No, sir, I -- I only-- -- "

"Peace caitiff, and know that I hold thy life in my hands for your attempted robbery of me."

The sexton trembled. That was indeed the weak point now of all his defences against whatever commands might be put upon him by his master, as we may now call the vampyre, although after all it was but the usual dominion of a strong mind over a weak one, for there was not so much in reality for the sexton to be afraid of as his own guilty conscience dictated to him.

It were easy enough for the vampyre to charge him with robbery, but not at all so easy for him to prove such a charge, and at the same time to substantiate, as by some inquisitive counsel he might be called upon to do, his own position in society.

But it is most true

"Conscience doth make cowards of us all." And feeling that his intention regarding the rings of the supposed drowned man had been of a dishonest character, he could not summon courage sufficient to defy him now.

"I will go," he said, "I am going."

"'Tis well."

In far from the pleasantest train of thought the sexton went to the Grange, and asked to see Mr. Charles Crofton, and to him he related the version of the resuscitating of the supposed drowned man. It was heard with, as might be expected, the most profound astonishment, and the sexton soon found himself confronted with the whole assembled family, and forced to repeat the wonderful facts over again.

It seemed, as indeed it might well do, a something quite beyond belief.

"Why, Edwin," said Charles, "he must have been in the water far beyond the length of time that it mostly takes to drown any one before we saw him."

"I think so too."

"It must be so, for this reason, that he was a considerable distance from land, and there was no vessel near enough for him to have come from."

"Hold!" said Sir George Crofton, "my dear boys, you are forgetting the most important fact of all."

"Are we, father?"

"Yes, and that is that the gentleman is alive. You cannot get over that, you know, and as I have often heard that whatever is natural, why there's no use in disputing any more about it; and besides how do we know but that he was in some boat which was swamped a few minutes before you saw him."

"That is a most rational suppositon," said Edwin.

"And that we can say nothing against," added Charles; "what is to be done father?"

"Why, do not let us do good by inches, we know that this is the only decent house within a considerable distance for a gentleman to remain in, if he have the habits of comfort about him. So Master Stephen, if you will go and give our compliments to the stranger, and ask him to come here, I shall be much obliged to you."

"I will, Sir George."

"And you can tell him that we are plain folks, but assure him of a hearty welcome."

Will Stephens made his bow and exit.

"Well," said Edwin, "it's very odd, although of course, it must be all right, and I am the last person who would wish to make anything out of a common-place event, but to all appearances dead he was when we took him into the boat, and I never before heard of a spontaneous recovery like this from such a state."

"Then you have added to your stock of experience," said his father, laughing, "and I must own, for my own part, that I am rather curious to see this person, who was a curiosity in appearance, according to your accounts when he was dead or supposed to be dead."

"He was so," remarked Charles, "for I am certain you might travel the world over without meeting a more singular looking man than he was; in the first place, he looked particularly tall, but that might have arisen from the fact that we only saw him in a horizontal position, and then there was a something about the expression of his face which was perfectly indescribable, and yet at the same time filled you with feelings of curiosity and dread."

The sisters heard this account of the mysterious stranger with feelings of great interest.

"Why," said Emma, "we have all of us often complained of being dull here, but such an animal as this will be quite an acquisition."

"And just as Clara is going, too, what a pity," laughed Edwin.

"I shall endeavour to survive the horrid disappointment," said Clara, for she was to be married on that day, to one who had been the chosen companion of her heart for many a day, and was to leave the home of her childhood to proceed far away to his house in Wales, where she was to be the light of joy to another admiring and loving circle.

"Ah, well, I pity you," said Emma.

"Then you had better at once," remarked Clara, forbid the occasional visits here of a certain young officer who, I'm afraid, has some audacious intentions."

The ready colour flushed to the cheek of the younger sister, who had scarcely expected such a retort, although she had fairly provoked it.

"Come, girls," said the father, "we will have no more lance breaking between you about your lovers."

"Certainly not, father," said Clara, "but then, you know, unless Emma is made to see that she is vulnerable, she will go on tormenting me."

"In other words, Emma," said Edwin, "you see that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones — a most useful maxim."

"I don't care for any of you," said Emma, half crying, as she ran out of the room.

Clara followed here, for there was really the very best understanding and the kindest feeling between the two young girls, although occasionally a smart repartee would be uttered upon some such occasion as the present, but all that was soon forgotten.

The sexton who was getting each moment more and more uneasy about the share he had in the affair of the resuscitated man of the bone-house, went back to the cottage, and there informed the self-named Mr. Smith of the success of his mission to the Grange-house.

"You think they will welcome me," said the vampyre.

"I am sure of it, sir. They are the frankest, freest family I ever knew, and they would not have asked you to go to the Grange if they did not mean to use you well."

"And there are two daughters?"

"Yes, sir."

"And young and fair, you tell me."

"They are two as handsome girls as you will find in this part of the country, sir. They have always been much admired. One of them, as I before mentioned, is going to be married and taken away, but the other stays at home."

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"'Tis well, not you will not fail to remember the awkward situation in which you are. Keep the ring which you took from my finger, and with it keep your own counsel, for any babbling upon your part will most assuredly lead to your destruction."

"Yes, sir, I know."

"And although that destruction might not be immediate, you would lead a life of trembling terror until your doom was accomplished, and that doom should be a dreadful one in its manner. Now farewell! farewell! and remember me."

"I shall never forget you the longest day I have got to live," said the sexton, with a shudder, as he saw the tall, angular, gaunt-looking form of his most mysterious new acquaintance leave his cottage, and make his way towards the Grange.

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Chapter CLXXXV. THE DEFILE IN THE ROCKS. -- THE HORSEMAN AND THE ACCIDENT.

The Grange-house was visible from the cottage of the sexton, and so the vampyre had declined the offer of Will Stephens to be his guide.

As it happened, though, it would have been better regarded his reaching the Grange quickly that he should have taken the sexton with him, for the cliffs that were close at hand concealed to the eye many deep gulleys and frightful precipices that had to be coasted round, before any one could reach the Grange-house by that route.

If he could have gone directly onward, about half a mile's walking would have sufficed to enable him to reach the place, but before he had proceeded a quarter of that distance, he came upon a deep ravine or splitting in the cliff, too wide to jump across, and with all the appearance of extending inland a considerable distance without narrowing.

"I had indeed better have brought a guide with me," muttered Varney.

He then paused for a few moments, as if he was debating with himself whether or not he should return back and get the sexton. But the mental hesitation did not last long, and accustomed as he was to trust to his own sagacity and his own resources more than to other people, he walked along by the side of the fissure in the cliff, muttering to himself, --

"Were all the guides in the country here, they could but do as I am doing, namely, walk on until the ravine closes."

With this idea he pursued it, but to his mortification he found that it widened instead of presenting the least symptoms of closing, and suddenly it opened to his eyes to a width of about fifty feet, and he paused again irresolute.

"How am I to proceed?" he said; "this is a perplexity."

He advanced close to the brink, and looked down. The depth was very considerable, and at the bottom there was evidently a road made of sand and chalk, which wound down somewhere from the interior of the country to the sea-beach.

As he looked, he heard the rapid sound of a horse's feet.

In another moment there dashed down the road towards the sea, a horse bearing on his back a man, who was exerting himself in every possible way to stop the maddened, headlong career of the animal, but it would not be checked.

With starting eyes and dilated nostrils, and with its flanks covered with foam, the frightened steed, which had evidently come some distance in that state, rushed on, but the broken nature of the ground made it almost impossible that it should make such great speed then as it had been making, at least with any degree of safety.

This was what occurred to the thoughts of Varney, and it was sufficiently proved to be a correct idea, by the horse stumbling the next moment, and throwing his rider heavily upon the sand and broken rock that was strewn around.

The steed, now disincumbered of its load, recovered itself in a moment, and with a snort of rage and probably of pain likewise, dashed and disappeared from the sight, round the abrupt corner of the ravine to the left hand on the beach.

"So be it," said the vampyre, calmly; "another being is snatched away from the muster roll of the living, one who perhaps would gladly have preserved his existence, while I -- I remain and cannot, let me do what I will to accomplish such a purpose, shake off the cumbrous load of life that will cling to me."

Suddenly quite a whirlwind of passion seemed to come on him, and, standing on the brink of the ravine with his arms extended, he cried, --

"Since death is denied to me, I will henceforward shake off all human sympathies. Since I am compelled to be that which I am, I will not be that and likewise suffer all the pangs of doing deeds at which a better nature that was within me revolted. No, I will from this time be the bane of all that is good and great and beautiful. If I am forced to wander upon the earth, a thing to be abhorred and accursed among men, I will perform my mission to the very letter as well as the spirit, and henceforth adieu all regrets, adieu all feeling -- all memory of goodness

— of charity to human nature, for I will be a dread and a desolation! Since blood is to be my only sustenance, and since death is denied to me, I will have abundance of it — I will revel in it, and no spark of human pity shall find a home in this once racked and tortured bosom. Fate, I thee defy!"

He continued for some few moments after uttering this speech in the same attitude in which he had spoken the words. Then suffering his hands slowly to fall, again he looked cold, and passionless, as he had been before.

But his determination was made.

By looking carefully about him, he saw that there was a kind of footpath down the side of the ravine, which an active person might descend by, although, probably, not altogether without some risk, for the least false step might precipitate him to the bottom.

The vampire, however, had no such fears. He seemed to feel that he possessed a kind of charmed life, and that he might adventure to do what others might well shrink from.

This feeling begot a confidence which was almost certain to be his protection, even if it had been only founded upon imagination, for it fortified his nerves, and when he began the descent down the side of the ravine, it was without the smallest terror.

He found, however, that when he was fairly on the path, it was a better and a wider one than he had a first supposed it to be, and in the course of five minutes he had got completely down to the narrow road, on which, apparently dead, lay the wounded man, for he was only grievously hurt by his fall, although he was quite insensible.

The vampyre strode up to him.

"Ah," he said, "young, and what the world would call handsome. Ha! ha! Heaven takes but little care sometimes of its handiwork."

After a few moments' contemplation of the still form that lay at his feet, he knelt on one knee by its side, and placed his hand upon the region of the heart, after roughly tearing open the vest of the stranger.

"He lives — he lives. Well, shall I crush the fluttering spirit that now is hovering 'twixt life and death, or shall I let it linger while it may within its earthly prison? Let it stay. The worst turn that any one can do another in this world, is surely to preserve existence after once the pang of what would be all the agony of death is past."

The vampyre rose, and was moving away up the ravine, when a sudden thought seemed to strike him, and he turned back again.

"Gold," he said, "is always useful to me, and I think with my new thoughts and feelings it will now be more so than ever. This insensible man may have some about him."

Again he knelt by the side of the young man, and soon possessed himself of a tolerably well-stocked purse that he found upon him. Round his neck, too, by a thin chain of gold, hung a small portrait of a young and beautiful girl, upon which Varney gazed intently.

"She is fair," he said, "very fair — she would make a fit victim for me. I will take this portrait; it might stand me in some stead should I encounter the original."

He placed the portrait in his pocket, and was in the act of rising, when he heard the sound of a footstep.

"Ah, some one comes; it will be no part of my plan to have been seen by the body."

He darted forth down the narrow gorge or ravine, and was soon sufficiently hidden from the sight of those who were advancing. They proved to be some fishermen going to spread their nets upon the beach, which just below the spot where the seemingly fatal accident had taken place, was as level as a carpet, screened from the wind, and composed of the finest sand.

Of course, it was impossible to avoid seeing the body that lay in their path, and Varney had no need to be fearful that he would be seen, when an object of so much greater and more absorbing interest lay in their direct and unavoidable path.

He heard from the sudden exclamations that fell from them, that they had seen the body, and upon advancing a step or two, he found that they were collected round it in a dense throng, for there were about a dozen men in all.

"'Tis well," said Varney, "it matters not to me if he be living or dead. I can doubtless now find my way to the Grange-house by this path along the shore. I will pursue it at all events, and see whither it will lead me."

He did so, and after going about half a mile, he found another ravine, which, upon entering and ascending for a time, led him quite close to one of the entrances of the Grange-house, as it was called, and which he was so

anxious to reach.

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Chapter CLXXXVI. THE DISAPPOINTMENT AT THE GRANGE. -- THE NEWS OF DESPAIR. -- THE FINDING THE BODY.

It was a fine old place the Grange, view it from what aspect you might, and had not the mind of Varney, the vampyre, been so fearfully irritated by the circumstances of his horrible existence, he must have paused to admire it.

It was one of those ancient English edifices, which, alas, are fast disappearing from the face of once merry England. Railways have gone tearing and screaming through the old parks and shady glens. Alas, all is altered now, and for the sake of getting to some abominable place, such as Manchester, or Birmingham, in a very short space of time, many a lonely spot of nature's own creating is marred by noise and smoke.

"So," said Varney, "this then is the home of these young men who have done me such an injury as to rescue me from the sea."

He ground his teeth together as he spoke, and it was quite clear that he felt disposed to consider that a most deadly injury had been done to him by Edwin and Charles Crofton, who had only followed the proper dictates of humanity in rescuing him from the waves.

"It shall go hard with me," added Varney, "but I will teach such meddling fools to leave the great sea in charge of its dead. Oh, had I but been allowed to remain until now, which but for these officious persons might still have been the case, I should have sunk deep -- deep into the yellow sands, and there rotted."

His passion as he uttered these words had in it something fearful, but in a few moments the external symptoms of it passed away, and he walked slowly and to all appearance calmly enough towards the Grange.

The distance he had to go was still as before, a deceiving one, for he had to wind round a clump of trees before he really got to the gate, which appeared to be just in sight, but at length he reached it, and paused as he saw an old man, who was a kind of warder there.

"Is this Sir George Crofton's?" he said, and he threw into his voice all that silvery softness which at times had been so fascinating to the Bannerworth family.

"It is, sir."

"Will you announce me?"

"I do not leave this gate, sir, but if you go down this avenue, you will reach the mansion, and some of the servants will attend to you."

Varney walked on.

The avenue was one formed by two stately rows of chestnuts, the spreading branches of which met over head, forming a beautiful canopy, and notwithstanding that they were so near the sea -- that foe to vegetation, these trees were in good truth most luxuriantly beautiful.

"There was a time," muttered Varney, "when I should have admired such a spot as this, but all that has long since passed away. I am that which I am."

He now arrived in front of the house itself, and being perceived by one of the domestics, he was politely asked what he wanted.

"Say that Mr. Smith is here," was the message that Varney gave.

The servant had already heard that such was the name of the person who had been rescued from the sea by his young masters Edwin and Charles, he now hastened with the information to the drawing-room, where the family was assembled.

"Oh, if you please, sir, he has come."

"Who has come?"

"The drowned man, Mr. Smith."

"Admit him instantly."

The servant ran back to Varney, and then politely ushered him into the large really handsome room, in which the family sat awaiting his arrival with no small share of curiosity. What the sexton had said of him had excited much speculation, and the eagerness to see a man who was, as it were, a present from the sea, was extreme.

"Mr. Smith," announced the servant; and Varney with one of his courtly bows, and a smile that was half

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hideous, half charming, entered.

There was a decided effect produced by his appearance, and perhaps that effect is best described by the word awe. They all seemed as if they were in the presence of something very peculiar, if not something very superior.

Sir George Crofton broke the rather awkward silence that ensued by addressing his visitor with all the frankness that was a part of his nature.

"Sir," he said, "I am glad to see you and hope you will make yourself as much at home as if you were in a house of your own."

"Sir," said Varney, "you know how much I owe your family already, and I fear to increase the heavy debt of gratitude."

"Oh, you are welcome, most welcome. Stay here as long as you like; we are rather dull at times in this isolated house, and the arrival of an intelligent guest is always an event."

Varney bowed, and Edwin advanced.

"Mr. Smith," he said, "I suppose I may almost call myself an old acquaintance."

"And I," said Charles.

"Gentlemen, if you be those to whom I am indebted for my preservation, I owe you my warmest thanks."

"Oh, think nothing of it," said Sir George; "it was not at all likely that my two boys would see a fellow creature in such a situation, and not, dead or alive, take possession of him. Your recovery is the only remarkable thing in the whole affair."

"Very remarkable," said Varney.

They waited a moment as if he was expected to make some sort of explanation of that part of the business, but as he did not, Sir George said —

"You have no idea of how you became resuscitated."

"Not the least."

"Well, that is strange indeed."

"Perhaps the good fellow who afforded me an immediate shelter, applied before that, some means of recovering suspended vitality."

"Oh no. Will Stephens is to the full as much surprised as any one. But, however, I dare say, to you, sir, that is not the most entertaining subject in the world, so we will say no more about it, except that we are very glad to have a living guest instead of a dead one."

"I much fear, from what I have heard," said Varney, "that I shall be intruding at a time like this into your family circle."

"Oh, you allude to the marriage to-day of one of my daughters, and that puts me in mind of really quite an omission on my part. Mr. Smith — my daughters, Clara and Emma."

The vampyre bowed low, and the young ladies went with established grace through the ceremony of the introduction to the remarkable personage before them.

At this moment there came upon the ears of all assembled there the sound of hurried footsteps, and a servant without any ceremony burst into the apartment, exclaiming —

"Oh, Sir George — Oh, oh, sir — "

"What is it? Speak!"

"Oh, oh. They have found him — killed in the ravine."

"Who, who?"

"Mr. Ringwood, as was to be married — "

"My daughter."

Clara uttered a cry of despair, and sank into a chair in a state of insensibility. The scene of confusion and general consternation that now ensued baffles all description, and the only person who looked calm and collected upon the occasion was Mr. Smith, although it was not the insulting calmness of seeming indifference.

In a few minutes, however, Sir George himself recovered from the first shock which the intelligence had given to him, and he said, —

"Where is he? Where is he? Let me to the spot."

"And allow me, sir, to accompany you," said Varney. "Believe me, sir, I feel deeply for the family misfortune. Let me be useful."

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"Thank you, sir, thank you — Edwin, Charles, come with me and this gentleman, and we will see if this dreadful report be true. Let us hope that fear and ignorance have exaggerated a very simple affair into so seemingly dreadful a circumstance.

Leaving Clara to the care of her sister and some of the female domestics of the Grange, who were hastily summoned to attend upon her, the little party, consisting of Sir George, his two sons, Varney, and several of the men-servants, turned from the Grange in the direction of the ravine.

Their intimate acquaintance with all the neighbourhood enabled them to reach the place much sooner than Varney thought it possible to do, and as they came within sight of the spot where the accident had occurred, they saw a crowd of villagers and fishermen assembled.

They quickened their pace, and forcing through the throng, Sir George Crofton saw his intended son-in-law, to all appearance, lying dead and bleeding on the sands.

Such a sight was enough, for a moment, to paralyse every faculty, and it really had, for a time, that effect upon Sir George.

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Chapter CLXXXVII. THE SICK CHAMBER AT THE GRANGE. -- THE NIGHT.

"Is he dead? Is he dead?" cried Sir George.

"We don't know, sir," replied one of the fishermen; "some of us think he is, and some of us think he is not."

"What is to be done?"

"Have him taken at once to the Grange, father," said Charles, "and let us get medical assistance; who knows but the affair may turn out in reality very different from what it first appeared. He may be only stunned by a fall."

"I hope to Heaven it may be so. Can you, among you, my men, make anything like a litter to carry him on?"

This was soon done. Some of the loose seats from some boats close at hand, and a rough cloak or two, made a capital couch for the dead or wounded man, as the case might be. They lifted him carefully into it, and then four of them lifted the rude but easy and appropriate conveyance, and carried him towards the hall.

"How could this have happened?" said Sir George.

"Perhaps I may be able to throw some light upon it," said Varney. "As I came here to your hospitable house, a horse without a rider, but caparisoned for one, passed me furiously."

"That must have been his horse then," said Charles. "You may depend, father, he was riding on to see Clara before the hour appointed for their marriage, and has met with this accident. Come, there is some consolation in that. A fall from his horse is not likely to kill him."

"Where is Edwin?"

"Oh, he went off at once for Dr. North, and no doubt he will get to the Grange about as soon as we shall."

"That was right -- that was right. I really have been taken so much by surprise that I hardly know what I am about. It was very right of Edwin."

Nothing of any importance now passed in the way of conversation, nor did any incident worth recording take place until the melancholy little procession reached the Grange, and by the advice of Varney, the young bridegroom was carried direct to a bed-chamber before he was removed from the litter on which he had been carried.

The operation was scarcely performed, and he laid upon a bed, when Dr. North came, having mounted his horse upon hearing the information from Edwin that he was wanted in a case of such great emergency at the Grange, and ridden hard all the way.

He was at once introduced to his patient, and upon a cursory examination, he said, --

"This is a concussion of the brain, but don't let that alarm you. It may be very slight, although it certainly has an awkward sound, and a little rest and blood-letting may put him all to rights."

This was to some extent cheering, and the doctor at once proceeded to bleed his patient. As the ruddy stream fell into a crystal goblet, the young man gradually opened his eyes, and looked round him with a bewildered glare.

"Darken the room," said Dr. North; "he is right enough, but he must be kept quiet for a day or two at all events."

"What has happened?" said the wounded man.

"Nothing particular," replied Dr. North, "nothing particular. You have had a fall from your horse."

"Clara!"

"Ah, I know, and now listen to me. If you remain quiet and don't speak, you will see Clara soon; but if you are wilful and disobey orders, you will bring on a brain fever and you won't see her at all in this world; so now you can judge for yourself."

"You are rather harsh," said Sir George.

"Pardon me sir, I am not. There is nothing like making a patient thoroughly understand his own position; and I give this young gentleman credit for sufficient wisdom to enable him to profit by what I say to him."

Mr. Ringwood nodded.

"There, you see, all's right; now he will go to sleep, and as all will depend upon the state in which he awakens, I will, if you please wait here, unless I should be urgently sent for from home, for I have left word where I am."

"Pardon me, doctor, for finding any fault with you."

"Don't mention it; what I said did sound harsh."

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Sir George went now at once to the room where his daughter Clara had been taken to, for the purpose of informing her of the hopeful state of affairs. He found her just recovered from her swoon, so that recollection had not yet sufficiently returned to give her all the agony of thinking that the news so heedlessly and so suddenly communicated by the servant might be true in its full intensity.

"My dear, you must not distress yourself," said Sir George. "Ringwood was riding over here, it seems, to see you, and his horse, getting restive, has thrown him; Dr. North says, there is nothing particular the matter, and that after a little rest he will recover."

Clara tried to speak, but she could not — she burst into tears.

"Ah!" said the old nurse, who was attending her, and who had been in her family many years, "ah, poor dear, she will be all right now. I was just wishing that she would have a good cry; it does any one a world of good, it does."

"What an agitating night and day this has been, to be sure," said Sir George. "First the terror of losing both my boys, then their return with the dead man, who, so oddly comes to life again; Then this dreadful accident to Ringwood; upon my word the incidents of a whole year have been crammed into a few hours. I only hope this is the last of it."

"And I shall see him again, father," sobbed Clara.

"Of course you will."

"You — you have sent him home very carefully?"

"Home? no. He is here under this roof and here he shall stay till he recovers, poor lad. Oh dear no, I never thought of sending him home, but I must send some one, by—the-by, with the news of what has happened. This is well thought of."

The knowledge that her lover, and her affianced husband was doing well, and that he was under the same roof with her, gave Clara the most unalloyed satisfaction, and she recovered rapidly her good and healthful looks. It was duly explained to her, that she must not go near Ringwood to disturb him, as rest was so very essential to his recovery; so she did not attempt it. The whole household was commanded to be unusally quiet, and never had the Grange before presented such a collection of creeping domestics, for they went up and down stairs like so many cats.

Clara did not omit to thank Mr. Smith for the assistance he had rendered them in this evil emergency, and Dr. North stood with the family in the dining room waiting, perhaps with greater anxiety than he chose to express, the awaking of his patient.

A servant was left in the adjoining chamber to that occupied by Ringwood, who was told to bring to the dining-room the first intimation that the wounded man was living.

About two hours elapsed when the servant came in with an air of affright.

Dr. North sprang to his feet in a moment.

"What is it, is he awake?"

"Not exactly awake, sir, but he is speaking in his sleep, and it's all about a — a — —"

"A what?"

"A vampyre."

"Stuff."

"Well, sir, he's a having some horrid dream, I can tell you, sir, and he said, 'Keep off the vampyre; save her, oh, save her from the vampyre!'"

"How singular!" said Varney, "what an absurd belief that is! A vampyre! what on earth could have put such a thing in his head, I wonder?"

"I will go to him," said Dr. North, "if he should be very much disturbed, perhaps I shall think it preferable to awake him; but I can inform you all that such dreams show that there is much excitement going on in the brain."

"Then you do not consider the symptom favourable, doctor?"

"Certainly not; quite the reverse of favourable."

Dr. North rose, and as Varney offered very politely to accompany him, he made no sort of objection, and they proceeded to the chamber of the bridegroom.

During the time that the doctor had been in the society of Varney, he had been much pleased with him, for he found that he possessed a vast store of knowledge upon almost any subject that could be touched upon, besides no

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small amount of skill and theoretical information upon medical matters, so he let him come with him, when perhaps he would have objected to any one else.

Varney the vampyre could fascinate when he liked.

When they reached the chamber the young man was quiet, but in a few minutes he began to toss about his head, and mutter in his sleep, --

"The vampyre, the dreadful vampyre. Oh, save her! Help, help, help!"

"This won't do," said the doctor."

He went to the toilette table, and procuring a large towel he soaked it well in cold water, and then wrapped it round the head of Ringwood, and so carefully too as not to arouse him. The effect was almost instantaneous. The vexed sleeper relapsed into a much easier attitude, the breathing was more regular, and the distressing fancies that had tortured his fevered brain were chased away.

"A simple plan," said Varney.

"Yes, but a most efficacious one."

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Chapter CLXXXVIII. A MIDNIGHT ALARM. -- THE CHASE. -- THE MYSTERY.

Young Ringwood did awaken about two hours afterwards, and the state he was in, although not such as to create alarm, was not pleasing to Dr. North. That gentleman desired that he should be carefully watched and kept quiet, while he went to his own house for some medicines.

He returned as soon as he possibly could, and administered such remedies as he considered the urgency of the case required, and having, as he always made a practice of doing, left word at his own house where he was, he offered to remain at the Grange the whole of the night.

It is scarcely necessary to say, that such an offer was most gratefully accepted.

Clara was profuse in her acknowledgements of the doctor's kindness, and they all passed the evening together in the large dining room, to which Varney was first introduced.

Not, however, for a long time had so gloomy an evening been passed at the Grange as that; nobody was in spirits, and although there was a great deal of conversation, it somehow assumed always a very sombre shape, let it commence on what subject it might.

Half past ten o'clock was the usual hour at which the family retired for the night, and it was quite a relief to every one, when that hour came, and Sir George ordered lights for the bed chambers.

Clara, indeed, being much oppressed, had retired some time before, and so had Emma, so that there were none but gentlemen in the dining room at half past ten.

"I have ordered a bed to be prepared for you close to your patient's," said Sir George to Dr. North.

"Oh, thank you, but I shall only lie down in my clothes, a couch would have done just as well, I am used to sitting up all night upon occasion."

"No doubt, but I hope you will not be disturbed, and that tomorrow-morning we shall have a better account of your patient."

"I hope so too; a good calm night's rest may do much."

"You speak doubtfully."

"Why in these cases it is difficult to know the extent of injury. There is no fracture of the skull, but it is as yet impossible to say what amount of shaking he has had."

"Well, we can but hope for the best. Mr. Smith, although we retire at this early hour, there is no sort of occasion for you to do so. Order what wines you please, and sit as long as you please."

"By no means, Sir George; I am a great patron of early hours myself."

Varney was shown into a bed-room which was upon the same floor with those of the family, and which formed one of a range of chambers, all opening from a corridor that ran the entire length of the house, and which in the daytime was lighted by a very large, handsome window at one end, while at the other was a broad flight of stairs ascending from the lower part of the house.

The sisters occupied contiguous chambers, and then there was an empty room, and next to that again was the bed-room in which was Ringwood, and then Dr. North's.

Exactly opposite was Varney's room, and colse at hand slept the sons, while Sir George himself occupied a room at the furthest corner of the corridor.

Emma made Clara an offer to sleep with her that night, as she was in grief and anxiety, but this Clara would not permit, for she could not think of sacrificing her sister's repose to attend upon her.

"No, Emma," she said, "I will hope for the best, and strive to rest."

The bade each other affectionately good night, and shortly afterwards retired to their separate apartments.

By eleven o'clock all was still in the house.

Dr. North had begged a book from the library, for he thought it likely enough that he should not be able to get much repose, and with that he sat in his room, the only one, as he thought, in all the house who was not in bed.

He continued reading for about an hour, and then, after visiting his patient, and finding him asleep, he thought it would be just as well for him to pull off his boots and his coat, and lie down on the bed to snatch a few hours' sleep.

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He performed all the operations but the final one — the sleeping — for scarcely had he lain down, when he heard a soft sliding sort of noise close to the room door, he thought, and he sprung up in a sitting posture to listen to it.

"Who's there!" he cried.

There was no answer, and jumping off his bed, he took the light which he had not put out, and opened his door. All was deserted and still in the corridor.

"Imagination, or some accidental noise that I am not familiar with," said the doctor, as he closed his door again.

Down he laid himself, and he was just upon the point of getting to sleep, when he heard a scratching sound as he thought upon the very panel of the door of his room.

Up he sprang again, and this time without the delay of asking who was there; he opened his door, and looked out into the corridor, holding the light above his head so as to diffuse its rays as much as possible, but he saw no one, and all the other doors were close shut.

"A plague take it," he said, "I may keep myself at this sort of thing all night, if I am foolish enough. It's a cat, perhaps, for all I know; however it may scratch away, I won't move again."

Shutting the door, he lay down, now fully determined that he would not move, unless something very much out of the common way, indeed, should take place.

Again he started. There was a curious sound about the lock of his door, and he listened intently.

"Now, what on earth can that be?"

All was still, and he nearly dropped asleep. Twice, however, he thought he heard the sound again, but he would not move, and in a few moments more, he was enjoying a sound repose.

How long this repose lasted, he had no means of telling, for he was suddenly awakened by such a cry, that at first he lay overpowered completely by it, and unable to move. It was a loud shrieking cry, such as might come from any one in a most dreadful agony.

"Good Heaven!" he cried, "what's that?"

Now, Dr. North was not a fearful man, nor a nervous one, and he soon recovered. Besides, such a cry as that, he knew very well, must have the effect of arousing everybody in the house, so he sprung out of his bed, and rushed to the door.

It was fast.

In vain he tried the lock, and hammered at it and pushed. The door was a thick and a heavy one, and it was quite clear he was a prisoner.

This was serious, and he cried out, —

"Help! help! here, undo the door, undo the door. Who has locked me in?"

He heard the scraping of feet, the sound of voices, the ringing of bells, and all the symptoms of a suddenly disturbed and alarmed household, but nobody paid any attention to him. He dragged on his boots, in order that he might be able to keep up a constant kicking on the lower part of his door, and he did keep it up with a vengeance.

At length he heard voices close to his door, and some one cried, —

"Open the door, sir, open the door!"

"Open it yourself," said Dr. North, "you have fastened it on the outside, I suppose."

There was some further running about, and then with a crash the door was forced open with a crowbar, and upon emerging from the apartment, the doctor found assembled in the corridor, the whole family, with the exception of the two girls, and several servants half-dressed bearing lights.

"What's the matter," cried Sir George, "what's the matter?"

"Ah," said the doctor, "that's what I want to know."

"Yes, why — why you made all the disturbance."

"I beg your pardon, there was a scream came from somewhere, and when I tried to come out to find what it was, my room door was fast. That's all I know about it."

Bang — bang, bang, bang, came now a sound. Bang, bang, bang; and all eyes were turned in the direction of the chamber occupied by Mr. Smith, and they heard his voice from within shouting in loud and frightened tones.

"Help! help! is it fire! Open my door, help — help. Do you lock in your guests here? Help!"

"Why, God bless me," said Dr. North, "that gentleman is locked in likewise."

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"But it can't be," said Sir George, "for the keys of all these doors are in the library in a drawer. The fact is, we none of us fasten up our bed-rooms, and the keys were all removed years ago."

"Help! help! help!" cried Mr. Smith.

"Break the door open," said Sir George, "this is inexplicable to me, I cannot make it out in the least."

The same crow-bar that had been brought by one of the servants to bear upon the door of Dr. North's room, was now applied to that of Mr. Smith, and it soon yielded to the force of the lever that was used with strength and judgment.

Mr. Smith partially dressed, and with rather a terrified look, emerged.

"Good God," he cried, "I wish you wouldn't lock one in; what has happened? I heard a shriek that awoke me up, as if the last trumpet had sounded."

"My daughters, are they safe," cried Sir George.

He flew to the door of Clara's room, it yielded to his touch.

"Clara, Clara," he called.

"I am paralysed," said Dr. North, "and so are you, sir. Come in."

He seized a light from one of the servants, and with a presentiment that there was to be found a solution of, at all events, the mystery of the dreadful shriek that had alarmed all the house, he dashed into the chamber of the young girl, followed by the father.

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Chapter CLXXXIX. THE SIGHT OF TERROR. -- THE DOCTOR'S SUSPICIONS. -- THE NIGHT WATCH.

The sight that met the eyes of the father in his daughter's chamber, was, indeed, one calculated in every respect to strike him with horror and misery.

Emma was lying insensible at the side of the bed, and Clara seemed to be dead, for she was ghastly pale, and there was blood upon her neck.

The father staggered to a seat, but Dr. North at once rushed forward, and held the light to the eyes of Clara, at the same time, that he placed his finger on her wrist to note if there was any pulsation.

"Only a fainting fit," he said.

"But the blood -- the -- the blood," cried Sir George.

"That I know nothing about, just at present, but let us see what's the matter here."

He raised Emma from the floor, and found that she too had fainted, but as she appeared to be perfectly uninjured. She slightly recovered as he lifted her up, and he resigned her at once to the care of some of the female servants, who now made their appearance in the chamber, all terribly alarmed at the shriek that had awakened them.

"This is strange," said Dr. North, "here is a small puncture upon the throat of your daughter Clara, that almost looks like the mark of a tooth."

"A tooth!"

"Yes, but of course that cannot be."

"Hear me, oh, hear me," cried Emma, at this moment. "Horror -- horror!"

"What would you say -- speak at once, and clear up this mystery if you can. What has happened?"

"I heard a noise, and came from my own chamber to this. There was some one bending over the bed. 'Twas I who shrieked."

"You?"

"Yes, oh yes! 'Twas I. I know not what then happened, for I either fell or was struck down, and I felt that my senses left me. What has happened? I too ask; oh, Clara! What was it? what was it?"

"Imagination, most likely," said the doctor. "You had better go to your room again, Miss Emma, for you are trembling with cold and apprehension. Perhaps in the morning, all this affair will assume a different shape. At present we are all too much flurried to take proper cognisance of it. There your sister is rapidly recovering. How do you feel now, Miss Clara?"

"I -- I -- am mad!"

"Oh, pho! pho! nonsense!"

"Oh, God help me! How horrifying! How more than dreadful! That awful face! Those hideous teeth! -- I am mad! -- I am mad!"

"Why, my dear child, you will drive me mad," cried Sir George, "if you talk in such a strain. Oh, let me beg of you not."

"Don't heed her," said Dr. North. "This will soon pass away. Come, Miss Clara, you must tell me freely, as your medical man, what has happened. Let us hear the full particulars, and then you know well, that if any human means can aid you, you shall be aided."

This calm mode of discourse had evidently a great effect upon her, and after the silence of a few moments, she spoke much more collectedly than before, saying, --

"Oh, no -- no! I cannot think it a dream."

"What a dream?"

"You -- you shall hear. But do not drag me from my home, and from all I love, if I am mad; I pray you do not -- I implore you!"

"You are quite safe. Why, what a ridiculous girl you are, to be sure. Nobody wants to drag you from your home, and nobody will attempt such a thing, I assure you. You have only to tell us all unreservedly, and you will then be quite safe. If you refuse us your confidence how can we act for you in any way?"

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This argument seemed to be effective, and to reach her understanding quite, so that after a shudder, and a glance around her of great dread and dismay, she spoke, saying in a low, faltering voice, —

"Something came; something not quite human, yet having the aspect of a man. Something that flew at me, and fastened its teeth upon my neck."

"Teeth! everybody says 'teeth!'" exclaimed the father.

"Hush!" said the doctor, with an admonitory wave of his hand; "keep that a secret from her, whatever you do. I implore you, keep quiet on that head. Well, is that all, Clara?"

"Yes — yes."

"Then it was a dream, and nothing else, I can assure you. Nothing but a dream; make yourself comfortable, and think no more of it. I dare say you will have a quiet sleep now, after this. But you had better let your sister Emma lay with you, as your nerves are a little shattered."

"Oh, yes, yes."

Emma, who truth to tell, was very little better than her sister, professed her readiness to stay, and the doctor giving Sir George a nod, as much as to say, "Let no more be said about it just now," led the way from the room at once.

When he reached the corridor, where Varney and the two sons were waiting, he said, —

"We shall none of us after this, I am certain, feel inclined to sleep; suppose we go down stairs at once and think and talk this matter over together; there is more in it, perhaps, than meets the eye; I will follow you in a moment, when I have just seen that my patient is all right."

They all proceeded down stairs to the dining-room, and in a few minutes, the doctor followed; lights were procured, and they sat down, all looking at the doctor who had taken the lead in the affair, and who evidently had some very disagreeable, if not very true, ideas upon the subject matter of the evening's disturbance.

"Well, doctor," said Sir George, "we rely upon you to give us your opinion upon this business, and some insight into its meaning."

"In the first place then," said the doctor, "I don't understand it."

"Well, that's coming to the point."

"Stop a bit; it was no dream."

"You think not."

"Certainly not a dream, two people don't dream of the same thing at the same time; I don't of course deny the possibility of such a thing, but it is too remarkable a coincidence to believe all at once; but Emma avows that she saw a somebody in her sister's room."

"Ah," said Sir George; "she did, I had in my confusion forgotten that horrible confirmation of Clara's story. She did so, and before Clara was well recovered too, so she could not have put the idea into her head. Good God! what am I to think? For the love of Heaven some of you tell me what are your opinions upon this horrible affair, which looks so romantically unreal, and yet so horrible real."

All except the doctor looked at each other in surprise.

"Well," he said, "I will tell you what the thing suggests; not what it is, mind you, for the affair to me is too out of the way of natural causes to induce me to come to a positive conclusion. Before I speak, however, I should like to have your opinion, Mr. Smith; I am convinced it will be valuable."

"Really I have formed none," replied Varney; "I am only exceedingly surprised that somebody should have fastened me in my bed-room. I know that that circumstance gave me a terrible fright, for when I heard all the outcry and confusion, I thought the house was on fire."

"Ah! the locking of us in our rooms, too," said the doctor, "there's another bit of reality. Who did that?"

"It puzzles me beyond all comprehension," said Sir George; "how the doors could be locked I cannot imagine; for as I told you the keys are in a drawer in my library."

"At all events, the doors could not lock themselves, with or without keys," said Charles; "and that circumstance shows sufficiently evidently that some one has been at work in the business whom we have still to discover."

"True," said Mr. Smith.

"Well, gentlemen," added the doctor, "I will tell you what I suggest; and that is contained in a letter, written a long while ago by a distant relation of mine, likewise a surgeon. Mind, I do not of course pledge myself at the

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present time, for the truth and accuracy of a man who was dead long before I was born; he might too have been a very superstitious man."

"But what did he suggest?"

"He did more than suggest; he wrote for a medical publication of that day an account, only of course suppressing names, of the appearance of a vampyre."

"A what?"

"A vampyre!"

"I have heard of such horrors," said Mr. Smith, "but really at the present day, no one can think of believing such things. Vampyres indeed! No — that is too great a claim upon one's credulity. These existences, or supposed existences, have gone the same way as the ghosts, and so on."

"One would think so, but you shall hear."

Sir George Crofton and his sons looked curious, and thought that the doctor was going to draw upon his memory in the matter to which he alluded, but he took from his pocket a memorandum book, and from it extracted some printed papers.

"The communication was so curious," he said, "that I cut it out of the old volume in which it appeared, and kept it ever since."

"Pray," said Mr. Smith, "what was the name of your distant relation, the medical man?"

"Chillingworth."

"Oh, indeed; an odd name rather, I don't recollect ever hearing of it."

"No, sir, it is not likely you should. Dr. Chillingworth has been dead many years, and no one else of his name is at present in the medical profession to my knowledge. But you shall hear, at all events, what he says about it."

The doctor then opened the folded paper, and read as follows: —

"Notwithstanding the incredulity that has been shown regarding vampyres, I am in a condition from my own knowledge to own the existence of one, I think he is dead now. His name was Varney, at least that was the name he went by, and he came strangely enough under my observation, in connection with some dear friends of mine named B- — "

"Is that all?" said Mr. Smith.

"Not quite," replied Dr. North, "He goes on to say that but for touching the feeling of living persons, he could and would unfold some curious particulars respecting vampyres, and that if he lived long enough he will perhaps do so, by which I suppose he meant if he outlived the parties whose feelings he was afraid of hurting by any premature disclosures."

"And — and," faltered Sir George, "do you draw a conclusion from all that, that my daughter has been visited by one of these persons — surely not."

"May be, Sir George; I draw no conclusions at all, I merely throw out the matter for your consideration. It is always worth while considering these matters in any possible aspect. That is all."

"A most horrible aspect," said Sir George.

"Truly dreadful," said Mr. Smith.

"This shall be settled," said Charles, "Edwin and I will take upon ourselves to-morrow night to set this question completely at rest."

At this moment there was a loud cry of "Help, help, help," in the voice of Emma, and they all rushed up stairs with great speed.

"Oh, this way, this way," she cried, meeting them at the head of the stairs. "Come to Clara."

They followed her, and when they reached the room, they found to their horror and surprise that Clara was dead!

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Chapter CXC. FAMILY TROUBLES. -- THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.

It was too true. It was not the mere appearance of death, but the reality of the fell destroyer that the Crofton family had to mourn. She who, but a few short hours since, was in all the bloom of apparent health, and youth, and beauty was now no more.

The poor father, the sisterless sister, the astonished, indignant, and agonised brothers formed a group that was too sad to contemplate.

As they gazed upon the wreck of her whom they had all loved so fondly, they could scarcely believe that death had indeed claimed her as her own; they

"Thought her more beautiful than death," and could not, as they gazed tremblingly upon her still form, bring themselves to believe that she had indeed gone from them for ever.

Dr. North, however, soon put all doubt upon the subject to rest by an announcement that her spirit had really fled. In vain he tried all the means that his art suggested. That mysterious and mighty something which we call life, which we miss and yet see no loss, which is so great, yet so evanescent and impalpable, was gone.

"Come away," he said, "we can do no good here now. Come away, all of you!"

"Oh, no, no," cried Sir George. "Why should we leave my child?"

"That," said the doctor, as he pointed to the corpse, "that is not your child."

The old man shuddered, and with an aspect upon his face, as if ten years of added age had at least passed over him in those few moments, he suffered them to lead him from the room. They all passed down stairs again, leaving Emma in her own chamber along with the female servants, so hastily again called up to remain with her.

When the dining-room was reached once more, Mr. Smith, who bore all the appearance of being quite thunder-struck by what had passed, spoke in the most feeling manner, saying, --

"This is truly one of the most affecting circumstances I ever remember. It is dreadful; a young girl to be at once snatched from a circle of admiring and loving friends in this manner, is too sad a picture for any one with a heart to feel for the distresses of others to contemplate. What, sir, is your opinion," to Dr. North, "of the actual cause of death?"

"The shock to the nervous system I suspect has induced some sudden action of the heart that has been too much for vitality."

"Dreadful!"

"Alas, alas!" sobbed Sir George. "What have I done, that Heaven should thus launch against me the bolts of its bitterest vengeance? Why should I be robbed of my child? Surely there were angels enough in Heaven without taking mine from me."

"Hush, hush," said Dr. North; "you are in grief, sir, and know not what you say. These were not else the words that would fall from the lips of such a man as you are."

The bereaved father was silent, and the sons looked at him with countenances in which dismay was most strongly pictured. They seemed as if as yet they had not become fully alive to the loss they had sustained, or of what had really happened within the once happy domestic circle, of which the fairest portion was now so ruthlessly dragged from them.

"It is like a dream," said Edwin, addressing his brother Charles in a whisper. "It is much more like a dream than aught else in the world."

"It is, it is. Oh, tell me that this is not real."

"It is too real," said the doctor, "you must bow with what amount of resignation you can call to your aid to that stroke of destiny which you cannot control; you should consider that as regards her who has gone from you, that she is now no object of pity. Death is an evil to you in your loss, but it is the end of all evil and pain to her; and then again, she has but gone a few years, after all, earlier than usual, for how long shall we -- ay, the best and strongest of us -- be behind her?"

This was consolation of the right sort, and was sure to have its effect upon persons in the habit of conversing coolly and calmly upon general subjects, so that in a short time, the father even felt much better, and although the sons were quite convinced of their loss they no longer looked at each other with such bewildered aspects, but

exhibited the rational grief of men.

Charles spoke after a time with great energy, saying, —

"It is true that we may call our reason to our aid, and contrive to rid ourselves of our grief in a great measure; but there is another duty we have to perform, and that is, to diligently inquire why and how it was, that our sister got this horrible fright, that has had the effect of hurrying her into eternity."

"Yes, brother," said Edwin, "you are right! our sister's memory shall be vindicated, and woe be to him who has brought this desolation and grief upon us."

Sir George looked from one of his sons to the other, but said nothing; he appeared to be prostrated too much by his feelings, and the doctor strongly urging him to retire to rest, he shortly did so, where we will leave him for a time, hoping that he will find the oblivion of sleep creep over him, and

"Knit up the ravelled sleeve of care." "Now," said Dr. North, "here we are four men with cool heads, and active enough judgments. For God's sake, let us try to come to some sort of conclusion about this dreadful affair. What do you say, Charles?"

"In the first place, I should recommend that the house be searched diligently, in order that we may see if any stranger is in it, or discover any means by which an entrance to the premises has been effected. We don't know but that after all some robbery may be the aim, and that the fright of our sister which has had so fatal an effect, may be the consequence merely of the appearance of a thief in her room."

"Agreed," said Edwin, "let the search of the house be our first step."

Two of the new servants were summoned with lights, and the party of four proceeded to an examination of the house, which on account of its size was not a very short process, for there was so many staircases and rooms opening the one into the other, that the hiding places were numerous enough.

At length, however, they were not only satisfied that no one was concealed on the premises, but likewise that all the fastenings were quite secure, and had been made so before the servants retired to rest. The mystery therefore was rather increased.

Had there not been the collateral evidence of Emma and the singular fact of the fastening up of the doors of the doctor's and Mr. Smith's bed-chambers, no doubt the whole affair would have rested where it was, and have been put down as a remarkable death arising from the influence of a dream.

But that was out of the question — somebody had been seen, and whether that somebody was really not an inhabitant of this world was the question.

In the midst of all this, the day began to dawn.

Sir George had had no sleep, but he had done himself some good in the solitude of his own chamber. He had prayed long and earnestly, and his prayers had had the effect which they almost invariably have upon all imaginative persons, namely, of bringing him an amount of mental calmness, peace, and resignation, highly desirable in his circumstances.

The breakfast table was laid in silence by the servants, and when Sir George met his sons and his guests, he spoke calmly enough, saying to them, —

"You will no more hear from me the accents of grief or of despair. I accept what consolation I can find, but as a man, and a father I will have justice; my child has been terrified to death, and I will find who has done the deed, for let him be whom he may, he is as much her murderer as though he had plunged a dagger in her heart."

"It is so," said Mr. Smith.

"Being so, then let him beware."

Varney thought that as the father uttered these last words, he glanced in a peculiar manner at him, but he was not quite sure that such was the case. Had he been sure, perhaps, he would have taken other steps than he did.

Little more passed during the breakfast, but when the meal was over, Sir George said, —

"Edwin, we are but dull and poor company to Mr. Smith; it will amuse him, perhaps, if you take him through the grounds, and show him the estate."

Edwin made no objection, and as the thing was put in the shape of an amusement to him, Varney could only say some civil things, and rise to go.

"I regret," he said, "to be of so much trouble."

"Not at all," said Edwin, "no trouble, sir; my own mind, God knows, wants something to distract it from too close a contemplation of its own thoughts. If you will accompany me in a walk over the estate, it will, perhaps,

put me into better spirits."

They left the room, and when they were gone, Sir George Crofton rose and shut the door, fastening it on the inside carefully, rather to the surprise of the doctor and his son Charles, who looked at him in silence.

"Charles," he then said, "and you, doctor, I have something particular to say to you."

"What is it? What is it?"

"God forgive me if I am wrong, but I suspect our guest?"

"Mr. Smith?"

"Yes, I don't like his looks at all; now we know nothing of him but from his own report; we have searched the house right through, or at least you have, you tell me, and found nothing. He is the only stranger within our doors. Perhaps it is uncharitable to suspect him, but I cannot help it, the thought came too strongly upon me last night, as I was alone in my chamber, for me to overcome it. I have now spoken to you both frankly, and tell me what are your thoughts."

"I don't like him," said Charles.

"He is a singular man," said Dr. North.

"What -- what now if he were -- were -- "

"Why do you hesitate, father? what would you say?"

"Go on, sir," said Dr. North, with a nod, that signified, I know very well what you are going to say. "Go on, sir."

"What, then, if it were really true, that there were such things, and he is a vampyre?"

Edwin sprang to his feet in surprise, and said, --

"Good God! you put a frightful idea into my brain that will now never leave it. A vampyre?"

"Heaven forbid," added Sir George, "that I should say such a thing heedlessly, or that I should take upon myself to assert that such is the case; I merely throw it out as a supposition -- a horrible one, I grant, but yet one that perhaps deserves some consideration."

"Get rid of him," said Dr. North.

"It is difficult after telling him he was welcome to stay, to now tell him that we want him to go. I would much prefer watching him closely, and endeavouring by such means, either to confirm or to do away entirely with my suppositions. And you can take an opportunity of speaking to Edwin upon the subject, quietly and carefully."

"I will, father."

"Then we can be all upon the alert; but above all things I charge you say nothing to Emma of the really terrific idea. Only I should say that to-night it is in the direction of her chamber that I would wish to keep the closest watch."

"And that, too, without her knowing it," said the doctor. "If she is aware of anything of the sort, there is no knowing what tricks her imagination might play her, and now, Sir George, I must say that I take the greatest interest in the matter, and will with your permission remain here until I am sent for. Poor Ringwood still reminds insensible, and I take it that under the circumstances that it is really a mercy, for what a sad communication has to be made to him, when he does recover sufficiently to hear it."

"Sad, indeed."

It was now finally agreed among them that there was to be no variation whatever in their conduct towards Mr. Smith, but that after they had taken leave of him for the night, and had all gone to bed, they should each glide out of his chamber, and wait at the extreme end of the corridor in silence, to mark if anything should happen.

This was duly announced to Edwin, who with a shudder announced that he had his suspicions, too, of Mr. Smith, so he of course came into the scheme at once; and now they waited rather anxiously for the night to come again.

Chapter CXCI. THE NIGHT WATCH. -- THE SURPRISE. -- THE CHASE.

Everything was now said and done that could induce a feeling in the mind of Varney, that he was perfectly welcome at the Grange, and to dispel the least idea of anything in the shape of supposition that he might have had, that he was suspected, although he had not himself by word or look betrayed such a feeling.

The day to all parties seemed a frightfully long one. Ringwood remained in the same state of unconsciousness as he had been in the day previous, and the only circumstance that served to break the monotony of the time, was the arrival of some of his friends to see him.

It is not essential to our story that we should take up space in detailing what they said and what they did; suffice it that all the grief was exhibited that was to be expected, and that finally they left the Grange with a conviction that the wounded man was in as kind hands as they could possibly wish him, and everything would be done, that kindness and skill could suggest, to recover him and preserve his life.

Probably the dreadful catastrophe that had happened in the family of the Croftons had in effect in reconciling the Ringwoods to the lesser calamity, for Dr. North gave them strong hopes of his ultimate recovery.

And so the time passed on, until the dim shadows of the evening began to creep over the landscape, and the distant trees imperceptibly mingled together in a chaotic mass. The song of the birds was over -- the herds and flocks had sought their shelter for the night, and a solemn and beautiful stillness was upon the face of nature.

Assembled once more in the dining-room of the Grange, were the Croftons -- but not Emma, she was in her chamber -- the doctor, and Mr. Smith.

Varney had exerted himself much to be entertaining, and yet not obtrusively so, as under the calamitous and extraordinary circumstances in which the family was placed, that would have been bad taste; but he led the conversation into the most interesting channels, and he charmed those who listened to him, in spite of themselves.

Dr. North was peculiarly pleased with so scientific a companion, and one who had travelled so much, for Varney spoke of almost every portion of the globe as familiar to him.

In this kind of way, the evening sped on, and more than once, as Varney was giving some eloquent and comprehensive description of some natural phenomenon that he had witnessed in some other clime, not only were the suspicions entertained against him forgotten, but even the grief of the family faded away for a brief space before the charm of his discourse.

At length the time for rest came.

Sir George rose, and bowing to Varney, said, --

"Do not let our example influence you, sir. We retire now."

"I shall be glad to do so," said Varney, "likewise; last night was a disturbed as well as a melancholy one for all in this house."

"It was indeed."

In another five minutes, the dining-room was vacant, and all that could be heard in the house was the noise of putting up extra bars, and shooting into their places, long unused bolts in order that it should be quite beyond all doubt that no one could get into the premises.

After that, all was still.

The moon was in her last quarter now, but only at the commencement of it, so if the night proved not to be cloudy, it would be rather a brilliant one, which might, or might not be of service to those who were going to watch in the corridor the proceedings of Mr. Smith.

An hour elapsed before there was any movement whatever, and then it was Dr. North who first, with great care, emerged from his room.

He had drawn on his stockings over his shoes, so that his footsteps might not be heard, and he took his station in a dark corner by the large window we have before spoken of as lighting the corridor.

The moon was up, but it only shone in obliquely at the window,, so that one side of the corridor was enveloped in the deepest gloom, while on the other the pale rays fell.

A few minutes more, for half-past eleven was the hour on which they had all agreed, and Sir George, with Edwin and Charles joined the doctor, who merely nodded to them, as they could faintly see him.

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

Sir George spoke in a very faint whisper, saying, —

"We are well armed."

"Good," replied the doctor, in a similar cautious tone, "but let me implore you to be careful how you use your arms. Do nothing hastily I beg of you; you don't know what cause of regret the imprudence of a moment may give rise to."

"Depend upon us, we will be very careful indeed."

"That is right."

"We had better not talk," said Charles, "these corridors cary sound sometimes too well; if we are to do any good, it must be by preserving the profoundest silence."

This advice was too practical and evidently good to be neglected, and consequently they were all as still as they could be, and stood like so many statues for the next half hour.

They heard a clock that hung in the hall below strike the hour of twelve, and when the reverberations of sound were over, a stillness even more profound than before seemed to pervade the whole house. The half hour they had waited in such silence appeared to them to be of four times the usual length, and they were glad to hear twelve strike.

Still they said nothing, for if silence before twelve o'clock was a thing to be desired, it was much more so after that hour, for it was then that the alarm of the preceeding evening had taken place. Their watchfulness, and their anxiety momentarily increased.

The old clock in the hall chimed the quarter past twelve, and yet all was as still as the grave; not the smallest sound disturbed the repose of the house.

The moon had shifted round a little, so that the gloom of the corridor was not so complete as it had been, and Dr. North was aware that in another hour the spot where they all stood would be visited by some rays which would render their concealment out of the question.

But as yet all was right, and there was no need to shift their position in the least.

Suddenly Sir George Crofton laid his hand upon the arm of the doctor, and an exclamation involuntarily escaped him, but not in a loud tone.

"Hush, for God's sake," whispered the doctor.

They had all heard a slight noise, like the cautious opening of a door. They looked eagerly in the direction from whence it came, and to their surprise they found it proceed from the chamber of the dead!

Yes, the door of the room in which lay the corpse of Clara slowly opened.

"God of Heaven!" said Sir George.

"Hush — hush," again whispered the doctor, and he held him by the arm compulsively.

All was still. The door creaked upon its hinges a little, that was all.

A quarter of an hour passed, and then Sir George was about to say something, when he started as if a shock of electricity had been applied to him, for the door of Varney's room was swung wide open, and he appeared, full dressed.

All the doors opening from the corridor creaked unless they were flung open smartly and quickly, and there could be no doubt but that Varney knew this, and hence the apparent precipitancy of his appearance.

There he stood in the moonlight, close by the threshold of his room, gazing about him. He bent himself into an attitude of intense listening, and remained in it for some time, and then he with slow sliding steps made his way towards the door of Emma's room.

His hand was actually upon the lock, when Sir George, who could stand the scene no longer, levelled a pistol he had taken from his pocket, and without giving any intimation to those who were with him of what he was going to do, he pulled the trigger.

The pistol only flashed without being fully discharged.

"How imprudent," said the doctor. "You have done it now! Follow me!"

He rushed forward, but he was too late, Varney had taken the alarm, and in a moment he regained his own room and fastened it securely on the inside.

"We must have him," cried Charles. "He cannot escape from that room. There is no other door, and the window is a good thirty feet from the garden below. Alarm the servants, we will soon open his door. It can't be very secure, for the lock was broken last night."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

As he spoke, Charles made a vigorous effort to open the door, but it resisted as if it had been a part of the solid wall, while within the chamber all was perfectly still, as if Mr. Smith had quite satisfied himself by shutting out his assailants, and meant to take no further notice of them.

"This is strange," said the doctor, "but we shall soon find out what he means by it. The door must be forced as quickly as possible."

Edwin ran down stairs by his father's orders to arouse some of the men servants, besides getting some weapon or tool by the assistance of which the door might be forced, and he soon returned with several of the men, and one armed with the identical crow-bar that had been used with such effect on the preceding evening. They brought lights with them too, so that the capture of Mr. Smith appeared to be no longer a matter of doubt with such a force opposed to him.

"Now," cried Sir George, "do not mind what mischief you do, my men, so that you break open the door of that room, and quickly too."

People somehow are always glad to be engaged in anything that has a destructive look about it, and when the servants heard that they might break away at the door as much as they liked, they set about it with a vengeance that promised soon to succeed in the object.

The door yielded with a crash.

"Come on, come on. Yield yourself," cried Sir George, and he rushed into the room followed by his sons and by Dr. North.

There was no Mr. Smith there.

"Escaped," said Dr. North.

"Impossible, — impossible! and yet this open window. He must be lying dashed to pieces below, for no one could with safety drop or jump such a height. Run round to the garden some of you, at once."

"Stop," said Charles. "There is no occasion. He has had ample time to escape. Look here."

Charles pointed out the end of a thick rope, firmly fastened to the ledge of the window, and by which it was quite clear any one could safely descend into the garden, it only requiring a little nerve to do so with perfect ease.

"This has all been prepared," said Dr. North.

"Still," cried Sir George, "I will not give the affair up. Mind I offer a reward of twenty guineas to any one of my household who succeeds in catching Mr. Smith."

"Lor, sir! what has he done?" said a groom.

"Never you mind what he has done. Bring him in, and you shall have the reward."

"Very good, sir. Come on, Dick, and you Harry; let's all go, and you know it will be all the pleasanter to share the reward among us. Come on."

Thus stimulated by their companion, the servants ran out of the house into the moonlit park in search of Varney the Vampyre.

Chapter CXCII. THE FUNERAL. -- A STRANGE INCIDENT.

It was all very well for Sir George Crofton to offer his twenty guineas for the taking of Mr. Smith, and nothing could be more legitimate than his servants making active exertions to endeavour to earn that amount of money, but the really succeeding in doing so was quite another thing.

To be sure they went out into the park, and did the best to catch him, and being well acquainted with every turn and every pathway within it, they considered they had a fair chance of succeeding, but after their pains they were at length obliged to give up the affair as a bad job, after an hour or two's most active search.

While they were away though, there was something that occurred at the Grange which gave a great additional shock to Sir George and his sons.

It will not fail to be remembered that the first door they saw move while they were keeping watch and ward in the moonlit gallery was the door of the chamber in which lay the corpse of Clara, who had met with so melancholy an end.

This circumstance recurred to them all with fearful force when they felt convinced that the now more suspected Mr. Smith had really and truly made his escape.

Upon proceeding to that room of the dead, Dr. North being first, they found some difficulty in opening the door, but upon using force they succeeded, when to their absolute horror they saw that the dead body was lying upon the floor close to the door, and that it had been the obstruction to moving it.

Dr. North would fain have spared the feelings of Sir George this affecting sight, but the baronet was so close behind him that he could not do so.

"Oh, God!" cried the father, "my child, my child."

"Take your father away, boys, for heaven's sake," said Dr. North to the two young men; "this is no sight for him to see."

It appeared too as if it was no sight for any one to see unmoved, for both Charles and Edwin stood like statues gazing at it, and for a time incapable of motion.

"My sister -- is it indeed my sister?" said Charles.

The doctor fairly closed the door upon them all, and turned them so out of the room. Then he having professionally lost all dread of the dead, lifted the body upon the bed again, and disposed of it properly, after which, without saying a word, he walked down to the dining-room.

"Tell me, tell me," said Sir George "what does all this mean?"

"Do not ask me," replied Dr. North, "I cannot tell you; I confess I do not know what advice to give you, or indeed what to say to you."

The old man rested his head upon his hands, and wept bitterly, while his two sons sat looking at each other perfectly aghast, and unable to think anything of a rational import concerning the most mysterious proceedings that had taken place. * * * *

Let our readers then suppose that a week has passed away, and that the morning has arrived when the body of Clara is to be placed in a vault appropriated as the resting place of the Croftons, beneath the church that was close at hand.

During that time nothing whatever had been heard of Mr. Smith. He seemed to have completely disappeared from the neighbourhood as well as from the Grange-house.

Fortunately, although Sir George had offered twenty guineas for the apprehension of Mr. Smith to his servants, he had said nothing of the cause why he offered such a reward, and the neighbourhood was left to its own conjectures upon the subject.

Those conjectures were of course sufficiently numerous, but it was quite agreed between Sir George, Doctor North, and the two sons that nothing more should be said upon the subject.

They of course did not wish "To fill the ear of idle curiosity" with such a tale as they might tell, but had a thousand reasons, each good and substantial of its kind, for withholding.

Young Ringwood was sufficiently recovered to be about, and to have told him the story that widowed his heart. He fell into a profound melancholy which nothing could alleviate, and as his recovery went on, he asked

permission to remain at the Grange.

Sir George, and indeed all the Crofton family, gladly pressed him to remain with them as long as he would do so, for it was some alleviation of their own distress to have him about them.

He begged permission to be present at the funeral, and it is of that funeral we have now to speak, for it took place on that day week on which the vampyre had first taken up his dreadful residence at the old Grange-house, where all before had been so happy.

The church, as we have remarked, was not very distant, and a mournful procession it was, consisting of the funeral equipages, followed by Sir George Crofton's carriage, that at twelve o'clock in the day started to place the youngest and the fairest of the name of Crofton that had ever reposed in the family vault.

The whole neighbourhood was in a state of commotion, and by the time the funeral cortege reached the churchyard, there was not a person capable of being out, for some miles around, that was not congregated about the spot.

The old church bell tolled a melancholy welcome to the procession, and the clergyman met the corpse at the entrance of the graveyard, and preceded it to the church, where it was placed by the altar while he made an impressive prayer.

This brief ceremony over, the coffin was carried to the part of one of the aisles, where upon the removal of a large stone slab, the resting-place of the Croftons was visible.

"I have not looked upon these stone steps," said Sir George, "since my poor wife went down there in the sleep of death."

"Compose yourself," whispered Dr. North, who was present. "You ought not, sir, to have been present at such a scene as this."

"Nay, it surely was my duty to follow my own child to her last resting-place."

The body was lowered into the vault, and the funeral service was read impressively over the cold and still remains of Clara.

"All is over," said the doctor.

"Yes," faltered Sir George; "all is over. Farewell, my dear child, but not a long farewell to thee; this blow has nearly stricken me into the grave."

"Leaning on the arm of his son Charles, who as well as Edwin was deeply affected, the old man now allowed himself to be led from the church. He met at the door Will Stephens, the sexton, who seemed desirous of speaking to him.

"What is it, Will?"

"Will your honour have some fresh sawdust put down in the vault. It wants it, Sir George; there aint been any put in for many a long day."

"Very well. It will be ready for me when I go. It won't be long before the vault is again opened."

"Oh, do not say that, father," said Edwin. "Do not leave us; think that if you have lost one child who loved you, you have others who ought to be as dear to you."

"That's right, Edwin," said the doctor.

Sir George made no distinct reply to this, but he pressed the hand of his son, and looked kindly upon him, to signify that he felt the full justice of what he had just said, so they had hopes that time would soon produce its usual effects upon that feeling which of all others is, while it lasts, the most poignant, at the same time that it is the most evanescent — grief for the dead.

And well it is that it should be so, otherwise we should be a world of weepers and mourners, for who is there that has not felt the pang of losing some fond heart in which we have garnered up the best affections of human nature.

Emma since her sister's death had been terribly broken down in spirit, and when they all got home to the Grange, they found her looking so ill, that the old baronet took Dr. North on one side, and said to him in tones expressive of the deepest anguish, —

"Am I to lose both my girls?"

"Oh no — no; certainly not," was the decided reply. "Why, my old friend, you used to be a man of great moral courage. Where has it all gone to now?"

"It is in the grave of my child."

"Come, come, you must for your own sake, as well as for the sake of others, who are near and dear to you, rouse yourself from this state of mental torpor, as I may call it. You can do so, and it is worthy of you to make the effort. Only think what would have been your situation if you had had but one child, and that had been snatched away from you; but you have yet three to comfort you, and yet you talk despairingly, as if every tie that bound you to the world had been suddenly burst asunder."

After this Sir George Crofton was almost ashamed to make such an exhibition of his grief, and whatever his thoughts were he kept them to himself, as well as exercising a much greater control over his voice, and the external expression of the feelings, which were still busy at his heart.

The despondency of Ringwood was great. He could not help fancy that if he had not met with the unlucky accident in the ravine, Clara would have been saved, and in some obscure way to his mind, the circumstances seemed to be connected together. He could not account either for the loss of her miniature, which he had been in the habit of wearing but which he missed upon his convalescence, so that he was irresistibly led to the conclusion that some unfriendly hands had been about him during his insensibility.

So highly did he prize the miniature, that he offered a sum of money, exceeding its intrinsic value by twenty times, for its recovery and pledged himself to make no inquiry as to how it came into the possession of the party who should restore it to him; but for all that it was not forthcoming.

The reader of this narrative knows very well in whose possession it was. Varney the Vampyre had possessed himself of it in the ravine, when he saw the young bridegroom lying insensible at his feet, and he kept it, although why he did so does not as yet appear, for surely the sight of it could only remind him of one of his victims; but then Varney had other thoughts and feelings than he used to have.

Alas, what a thousand pities it was that the ocean had presented him to the two brothers? Why did he not sink — why did not some wave hide him from their observation? What misery would have been spared to them, and to all dear to them. And what misery would have been spared to the wretched Varney himself!

It is true that he had given expression to sentiments, and declared intentions which would go far to prove that he had for ever given up and got rid of all human feelings and influences, but has he really so got rid of such feelings? It is a question which time alone can answer.

We shall soon see in his now very short career whether he is most to suffer or to inflict suffering, and what will be the result of his new principles of action — those principles which he had in the despair and the agony of his heart painted to himself as the main springs of a combined existence, he had with such vain and such fruitless perseverance strove to rid himself of. It was sad — very sad, indeed, that such a being could not die when he chose, the poor privilege of all.

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Chapter CXCIII. THE STRANGE VISITOR TO THE OLD CHURCH AT NIGHT.

The request of Will Stephens to be allowed to put some sawdust in the vault of the Croftons, was one of those regular things that he always propounded to any one who had a vault opened beneath the old church, and he generally made a very good thing of it.

People were always too much taken up with thinking of the loss of the relation who had just been placed in that dismal repository, to think much of a guinea to Will for a shilling's worth of sawdust, and if they did ever intimate that they thought it rather too much, he always had his answer ready at the tip of his tongue.

"How should you like, sir, or madam, as the case may be, to go into a vault among the dead, to lay the sawdust for 'em."

That argument was generally conclusive, and Will would get his guinea.

With Sir George Crofton he was quite sure and safe, so he had no scruples upon the subject, and the little bit of sawdust he meant to carry in when he had time, was more for the say of the thing, than for any utility it was at all likely to be of, but then as he said, —

"Where's the odds, the dead 'uns can't see it, and living 'uns won't go to see it, so it does very well, and I pockets my guinea, which does better still, for after all a sexton's aint the most agreeable life in the world, and he ought to be paid well; not that I care much about it, being used to it, but there was a time when I had my qualms, and I've had to get over 'em the best way I could, somehow, if I am now all right."

These were Will's arguments and reflections to himself before night, when he meant to go and place the little bag of saw-dust in the Croftons' family vault.

But, before we follow Will Stephens on his saw-dust expedition, as we intend to do, we wish first to draw the attention of the reader to another circumstance, the relation of which to Will Stephen's proceedings will very shortly appear indeed.

As the night came on there was some appearance of stormy weather. The wind blew in a strange, gusty and uncertain manner, shifting about from point to point of the compass in an odd way, as though it had not made up its mind from whence to blow. The most weather-wise personages of the neighbourhood were puzzled, for just as they prognosticated one species of weather from the particular direction whence the wind came, it shifted and came from some other quarter very nearly directly opposite.

This was extremely provoking, but at all events it was generally agreed that the moon would not on that night, shed its soft light upon the earth.

How far they were mistaken in this surmise we shall presently see.

Will Stephens had an opinion, from certain admonitory symptoms arising from his corns, that it would rain; so he delayed going to the church until he should see what sort of weather it was going to be, inwardly deciding that it would be a capital excuse not to go at all that night if the rain should come down pretty sharply.

This period of indecision he passed at a public house, known as the Blue Lion, the charms of the excellent ale of that establishment materially assisting him in coming to the conclusion that if it should rain ever so little it would be better to put off his job until the morning.

Now it was not that Will was afraid that he hesitated. He was too used to death to feel now any terrors of fear. It was nothing but the ale. Why then was the hurry? Simply that the flat stone which was over the vault of the Croftons was left unfastened until the aforesaid saw-dust was placed within the receptacle of the dead, and the next day was Sunday, so that the job must be finished before the service should commence.

At night, therefore, or very early the following morning, Will must seem to earn his guinea by going to the vault. He did not like to venture saying he had been and yet neglect going, for he knew there were too many gossips about the village to make that safe.

While he is however regaling himself at the ale house, another person totally, to all appearance, heedless of wind and threatening rain, is abroad in the neighbourhood of the church.

A tall figure enveloped in a large murky looking cloak, is moving slowly past the few cottages in the immediate vicinage of the church, and so noiselessly that it looks like a spirit of the dead rather than a living person.

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It was unseen by any one, for it was a time of the night — half-past eleven — now at which few persons in that little quiet place were abroad, and as we have said, Will Stephens, perhaps the only inhabitant who had any real business to be abroad at such an hour, was still solacing himself at the Blue Lion with the ale that seemed to get better every glass he took.

The figure moved on at a slow and steady pace among the old tomb stones that lay so thick around in the circuit of the church-yard, until it reached the church itself, and then it walked slowly around the sacred edifice, looking with a curious eye at the windows that presented themselves to observation, and apparently scanning the height from the ground.

Finally he paused at a rugged-looking part of the wall, and commenced, with great muscular power and most wonderful agility, climbing up to one of the windows.

To look at that wall it would have seemed that nothing human could possibly have succeeded in ascending it, and yet this stranger, catching at asperities which scarcely seemed to be such, did, with a wonderful power and strength, drag himself up until he grasped an iron bar, close to the window immediately above him, and then he had a firm hold.

After this his progress was easy, assuming that his object was merely to get up to the window of the old church, for he stood upon the narrow ledge without in a few moments.

There was a slight noise, it was of the breaking of a pane of glass, and then the stranger introduced his hand into the church, and succeeded in removing a rude primitive looking fastening which held the window in its place.

In another moment he disappeared from external observation within the sacred building.

What could he want there at such an hour, and who was he? Did he contemplate disturbing the repose of the dead with some unhallowed purpose? Was robbery his aim?

Let us be patient, and probably we shall soon enough perceive that some affairs are in progress that require the closest attention, and which in the vaults are calculated to fill the reflecting mind with the most painful images, and awake sensations of horror at the idea that such things can really be, and are permitted tacitly by Heaven to take place on the beautiful earth destined for the dwelling place of man.

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Chapter CXCIV. WILL STEPHEN'S VISIT TO THE FAMILY VAULT WITH THE SAW-DUST, AND WHAT HE SAW THERE.

Will Stephens waited at the ale-house much longer than he intended. To be sure the rain cleared off, but what of that? It was not a circumstance that made the ale anything worse, and so he waited to drink it with a gusto that improved each glass amazingly, and then some of those who were present — jolly toppers like himself — began to laugh and to say, —

"Ah, Will, you may as well poke that bag of saw-dust into some corner; you won't do anything with it to-night, old fellow, we know."

Now, some people get good tempered and complying when they have had the drop too much, and others again, get particularly obstinate and contradictory. Will of the two, certainly had more pretensions to belong to the latter class than the former, so when he heard such a prophecy concerning his movements and knew it was all an assumption based upon the ale he had drank, he felt indignant.

"Not go!" he cried. "Not go. You may fancy if you please that I will not go, but you will find yourselves mistaken, I will go."

"What, so late."

"What's the odds to me. Any of you now would be frightened out of your lives to set foot in the old church at such a time as this, I know; but I'm none of the timid sort, I'm afraid of nobody living, and it aint likely that I am now going to be afraid of anybody dead."

"Then you really will go."

The only reply that he made to this was to finish off the glass of ale that was before him, shouldering the bag of saw-dust, and sally out into the open air. Will Stephens felt highly indignant and touchy about his honour, and as he had said he would go and then somebody chose to imply a doubt still, he was grievously offended.

When he got out, he found that the night was anything but an inviting one. He was still sober enough to see that, and to feel that although the heavy rain had ceased, there was a little disagreeable misty sort of vapour in the air.

He staggered at the first turning he came to, for rather an uncomfortable gust of wind blew in his face, carrying along with it such a shower of small cold rain that he was, or fancied himself to be, wet through in a moment.

"Pleasant, this," thought Will, "but I won't go back to be laughed at."

As for the saw-dust he was carrying, its weight was by no means any great consideration for it was just as light as it could be.

"No, I won't go back — back indeed, not I; they would make me stand a pot of ale to a certainly if I were to go back, and besides it would be all over the parish tomorrow that Will Stephens after he got half way to the church was afraid to go any further. Confound the small rain, it pricks like pins and needles."

Nothing is more sobering than rain, and as he, Will, gradually got saturated with the small aqueous particles, the effect of the strong ale as gradually wore off, until by the time the dim, dusky outline of the church rose before him he was almost as sober as need be.

"Ah," he said, "here I am at last at any rate. I do hate this sort of rain, you can hardly make up your mind that it is raining at all, and yet somehow you get soaked before you know where you are. It's just like going through a damp cloud, that it is, and yet somehow or another, I don't much mind it; I'm earning a guinea easy enough. Ha, ha!"

This was by no means an unpleasant reflection.

"Yes," he added, "I am earning a guinea easily enough that's quite clear, but then it's not everybody who would, for a guinea, go into anybody's family vault at such a time. By-the-by, I wonder now what the time is exactly."

Scarcely had Will spoken those words when the old church-clock struck twelve.

It was a very serious, deliberate sort of clock that, and it took a long time to strike twelve, and Will listened with the greatest attention with the hope of persuading himself that it was only eleven, but there could be no

mistake, twelve it was.

"Really," he said, "is it so late, well, I didn't think — "

Will stood within the porch of the church door, and he gave a sort of shiver, and then, with the bag of sawdust in his hand, he stopped to listen attentively, for he thought he heard a slight sound.

"What was that, eh? what — I thought, nay, I am sure I heard something; it's very odd — very odd indeed."

As if then to afford Will an excuse for resolving the sound to something else, the wind at this moment came in such a sudden gale round the ancient edifice, that quite congratulated himself he was within the porch and protected from its fury, and besides it to his mind was a sufficing explanation of the noise he had heard.

"Some of the old doors," he muttered, "rattled by the wind, that's all. Now I suppose we shall have a clear night after all the rain. Such a gale will soon blow off the damp clouds."

Will was right. The gale, for a gale it was, blew from the north, and away went the rain clouds as if a curtain had been drawn aside by some invisible hand.

After some rummaging Will found in his pocket the key of the church; it was not the key of the principal door, but of a smaller side entrance, at which the officials, who required at all times free ingress and egress, made application. The little arched door creaked upon its hinges and then Will stood in a sort of vestibule, for another door that was never fast had to be opened before he could be fairly said to be within the church.

This second door was covered with green baize, and could be opened and shut very noiselessly, indeed.

Will Stephens stood in the vestibule until he had got a small lantern out of one pocket, and some matches from another. Then, in a few moments he had a light, and once again shouldering the bag of sawdust, he pushed open the inner door, and stood in the church.

It might have been fancy — nay, he felt certain, it could be nothing else — but he thought as he opened the door that a faint sort of sigh came upon his ears.

Fancy or not, though, it was an uncomfortable thing at such an hour, and in such a place too, and he had never before heard anything of the sort upon his visits to the church, and he had visited it at all hours, many and many a time.

"It's odd," he said, "it's uncommonly odd, I never felt so uncomfortable in the church before. I — I never used to mind coming to it in the middle of the night. But now, I — eh? — what was that?"

Again an odd sort of noise came upon his ears, and he dropped the bag of sawdust.

All was still again, save the regular roar of wind, as it swept round the sacred building, and although Will Stephens stood for nearly ten minutes in an attitude of listening, he heard nothing to augment his terrors. But let an impulse once be given to fear, and it will go on accumulating material from every trivial circumstance. The courage of the sexton was broken down, and there was no knowing, now, what tricks his awakened imagination might play him.

He began to wish he had not come, and from that wish, to think that he might as well go back, only shame forbade him, for it would be easily known on the morrow, that he had not placed the sawdust in the vault, and lastly, he began to think that some one might be playing him a trick.

This last supposition, probably, had more effect in raising his courage than any preceding one. Indignation took possession of him, and he no longer thought of retreating. He went forward at once, and fell over the bag of sawdust.

"Murder!" shouted Will.

The moment he did so, he recollected what it was that had occasioned his fall, and being ashamed of himself he called out impulsively, as if somebody was there to hear him, —

"No — no, it's only the sawdust. No — no."

He rose to his feet again, heartily ashamed of his own fears. Luckily, his lantern had not been broken or extinguished in his fall, and now, without another word, he prepared himself to execute the work he came to do, and leave the church to its repose as quickly as possible.

At one end of the church, the southern end, there was a large window, which might be said to light the whole of the interior, for the little windows at the sides were more ornamental than useful, being nothing but lattices; and across this window was drawn a heavy cloth curtain, so that when the sun shone too brightly upon the congregation on a summer's day, it could be wholly or partially excluded upon a sign from the clergyman.

The curtain was drawn close on the window now, at night, and Will just glanced up to it, as he walked on

towards the aisle where the opening to the family vault of the Crofton's was situated.

"All's right," he said, "what a fool I have been, to be sure." Upon my word I might have saved frightening myself all night, and some people would too, but that's not my way of doing business. So here we are, all right. The door on one side, so that I have just room enough to go down into the vault. Oh! when one comes to think of it, it was rather a melancholy thing, the death of such a young girl as she was, going to be married too. Well, that's the way the world goes."

The stone steps leading down to the vault were rather steep, and Will threw down the bag of sawdust first, in preference to carrying it, and then with his lantern in his hand, he commenced his own descent.

"That'll do," said Will, when he felt his feet upon the soft old sawdust that was on the floor of the vault.

"That'll do -- now for it, I shall soon have this job settled, and then I'll get home no faster than I can."

Somewhat, or another, he felt very much inclined to talk; the sound of his own voice, conversing, as he might be said to be, with himself, gave him a sort of courage, and made the place not appear to be altogether so desperately lonely as it really was.

That, no doubt, was the feeling that brought forth so many indifferent remarks from Will Stephens. He held up his light to look round him, and turned gradually upon his heels as he did so.

The light shook in his hand. The hair almost stood on end on his head -- his teeth chattered, and he tried to speak in vain, as he saw lying at his feet, a coffin lid.

It was new. The nails that held the blue cloth upon it, were bright, and fast -- the metal shone like silver. Yes, it was the lid of the coffin of Miss Clara Crofton; but how came it off -- unsecured, and lying upon the floor of the vault, while the coffin was in its proper niche?

"Gracious goodness!" gasped Will at length. "What does this mean?"

The question was easy to ask, but most difficult to answer, and he stood trembling and turning over in his mind all the most frightful explanations of what he saw, that could occur to any one.

"Has she been buried alive? Have the body snatchers been after her? How is it -- what -- what has happened?"

Then it occurred to Will, that it would be just as well to look into the coffin, and see if it was tenantless or not. If it were, an thought he should know what to think, and if the dead body was there, then he could only conclude that she had been buried alive, and had had just strength enough to force open the coffin, and cast the lid of it on the floor of the vault, and then to die in that horrible place.

It required almost more courage than Will could muster, to go and look into the coffin, for now that his usual indifference was completely broken down, he was as timid as any stranger to graves and vaults would have been. But curiosity is, after all, a most exciting passion, and that lent him power.

"Yes," he said, "I -- I will look in the coffin, I shall have but a poor tale to tell to Sir George Crofton, if I do not look in the coffin. I -- I -- have nothing to be afraid of."

He advanced with trembling steps, the light shaking in his hands as he did so. He reached the coffin, and with eyes unusually wide he looked in: it was empty.

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Chapter CXCIV. THE APPARITION IN THE CHURCH. -- WILL STEPHENS' SWOON. -- THE MORNING.

For some minutes, Will Stephens continued to gaze in the empty coffin, as if there was something peculiarly fascinating in it, and most attractive, and yet nothing was in it, no vestige even of the vestments of the dead. If Clara Crofton had herself risen, and left the vault, it was quite clear she had taken with her the apparel of the grave.

Will had thought that if he found the coffin empty, all his fears would vanish, and that he should be able to come at once to the conclusion, that she had become the prey of resurrectionists. But new ideas, as he gazed at that abandoned receptacle of the dead, began to creep across him.

"I -- I -- don't know," he muttered, "but she may in a ghost-like kind of way be going about. I don't know whether ghosts is corpses or not. I -- I wish I was out of this."

The idea of spreading the sawdust in the vault now completely left him; all he thought of was to get away, and the dread that Clara Crofton was, perhaps, hiding somewhere, and might come suddenly out upon him with a yell, got so firm a hold of him, that several times he thought he should faint with excess of terror.

That would be too horrible," he said, "I am sure I should go mad -- mad -- mad."

He retreated backward to the stairs, for the coffin, empty though it was, held his gaze with a strange kind of fascinating power. He thought that if he turned round something would be sure to lay hold of him. It was a most horrifying and distressing idea that, and yet he could not conquer it.

Of course, he must turn round, it would be an awkward thing to attempt ascending the staircase short as it was, backward, so he felt the necessity of turning his back upon the vault.

"I -- I will do so," he thought, "and then make such a rush up the steps, that I shall be in the church in a moment, I -- I can surely do that, and -- and after all its nothing really to be afraid of -- it's only a matter of imagination, after all! oh, yes, that's all, I -- I will do that."

He put this notable scheme into execution by turning suddenly round and making a dash at the stairs, but as people generally do things badly when they do them in a hurry, he stumbled when about half-way and felt himself at the mercy of the whole of the supernatural world.

"Have mercy on me," he cried, "I am going. Have mercy on me."

He had struck the lantern so hard against the stone stairs that he had broken it into fragments, and now all was intense darkness around him.

He gave himself up for lost.

He lay, expecting each moment to feel some dead bony fingers clutching him, and he only groaned, thinking that surely now his last hour was come; and it is a wonder that his fancy, excited as it was, did not conjure up to him the very effect he dreaded, but it did not do so, strange to say, and he lay for full five minutes without anything occurring to add to his terrors.

Then he began gradually to recover.

"If -- if," he gasped, "I could but reach the church, I -- I think I should be safe. Yes, I should surely be safe in the body of the church. Have mercy on me, good ghosts; I never harmed any of you, I -- I respect you very much, indeed I do. Let me go, and -- I'll never say a light word of any of you again, no, never, if I were to live for a thousand years."

As he uttered these words, he crawled up the remaining stairs, and to his great satisfaction, made his way fairly into the church.

But then a new surprise, if it was not exactly a new fright, perhaps it was something of both, awaited him.

The curtain that had been, as he had observed when he was walking down the aisle, closely drawn across the large south window was now drawn on one side, so that a large portion of that window was exposed, and the north wind having chased away by this time entirely the damp clouds, the moon was sailing in a cloudless sky, and sending into the old church a glorious flood of light.

"What a change," said Will Stephens.

It was indeed a change; the church was as light as day, save in some places where shadows fell, and they, in

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contrast to the silvery lightness of the moonbeams, were of a jetty blackness.

But still, let the moon shine ever so brightly, there is not that distinctness and freshness of outline produced as in the direct daylight. A strange kind of hazy vapour seems to float between the eye and all objects — an indistinctness and mysteriousness of aspect, which belongs not to the sun's unreflected rays. Thus it was, that although the church was illuminated by the moon, it had a singular aspect, and would scarcely have been recognised by any one who had only seen it by the mild searching light of day.

But of course Will Stephens the sexton knew it well, and as he wiped the perspiration from his face, he said,

—
"What a relief to get out of that vault and find now that the night has turned out so fair and beautiful. I — I begin to think I have frightened myself more than I need have done — but it was that coffin-lid that did the business; I wasn't my own man after that. But now that I have got out of the vault, I feel quite different — oh, quite another thing."

Suddenly, then, it occurred to him, that the curtain had been close on the window, when he came into the church, and following upon that thought came another, namely, that it could not very well remove itself from before the casement, and that consequently some hands, mortal or ghostly, must have done that part of the business.

Here there was ample food again for all his fears, and Will Stephens almost on the instant relapsed into his former trembling and nerveless state.

"What shall I do?" he said; "it aint all over yet. What will become of me? There's something horrid going to happen, I feel certain, and that curtain has only been drawn aside to let the moonlight come in for me to see it."

With a painful expectation of his eyes being blasted by some horrible sight, he glared round him, but he saw nothing, although the dense little mass of pews before him might have hidden many a horror.

His next movement was to turn his eyes to the gallery, and all round it he carried them until he came to the window again, but he saw nothing.

"Who knows," he muttered, "who knows after all, but that the wind, in some odd sort of way, may have blown the curtain on one side. I — I wish I had the courage to go up to the gallery, and see, but I — I don't think I should like to do that."

He hesitated. He knew that it would sound well on the morrow for him to be able to say that he went up, and yet it was rather a fearful thing.

"A — hem!" he said at length, "is any one here?"

As he made this inquiry, he took care to keep himself ready to make a dart out at the door into the churchyard, but as there was no response to it, he was a little encouraged. The gallery staircase was close to where he stood, and after the not unnatural hesitation of a few moments more, he approached them, and began slowly to ascend.

Nothing interrupted him, all was profoundly still, and at length he did reach the south window, and he found that the curtain was most deliberately drawn on one side, and that the window was fast, so that no vagary of the wind could have accomplished the purpose.

"Now I'll go — I'll go at once," he said, "I can't stand this any longer! I'll go and alarm the village — I'll — I'll make a disturbance of some sort."

"Awake!" said a deep, hollow voice.

Will sunk upon his knees with a groan, and mechanically his eyes wandered to the direction from whence the sound came, and he saw in a pew just beneath him, and on which the moonlight now fell brightly, a human form.

It wa lying in a strange huddled up position in the pew, and a glance showed the experienced eyes of the sexton that it was arrayed in the vestments of the dead.

He tried to speak — he tried to scream — he tried to pray, but all was in vain. Intense terror froze up every faculty of his body, and he could only kneel there with his face resting upon the front of the gallery, and glare with aching eyes, that would not close for a moment, upon the scene below.

"Awake!" said a deep, strange voice again, "awake."

It was quite clear that that voice did not come from the figure in the pew, but from some one close at hand. The sexton soon saw another form.

In the adjoining pew, standing upright as a statue, with one hand pointing upwards to the window, where came in the moonlight, was a tall figure, enveloped in a cloak. It was from the lips of that figure, that the sound came,

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so deeply, and so solemnly.

"Sister," it said, "be one of us — let the cold chaste moonbeams endow thee with your new, and strange, and horrible existence. Be one of us. Be one of us! Hours must yet elapse, ere the faint flash of morning will kill the moonbeams. There is time, sister. Awake, be one of us."

There was a passing cloud that swept for an instant over the face of the moon obscuring its radiance, and the figure let its arm fall to its side. But when the silvery beams streamed into the church, it again pointed to the window.

"'Tis done. She moves," he said. "I have fulfilled my mission. Ha! ha! ha!"

The laugh was so terrific and unmirthful that it froze the very blood in the veins of Will, and he thought he was surely at that moment going mad.

But still he did not close his eyes, still he moved not from the position which he had first assumed when the horrible noise met his ears.

"'Tis done," said the figure, and the arm that had been outstretched was let fall to his side.

Will Stephens looked in the pew, where he had seen what appeared to be a corpse. It had altered its position. He saw it move and waive its arms about strangely and deep sighs came from its lips. It was a dreadful sight to see, but at length it rose up in the grave clothes, and moved to the door of the pew.

The figure in the adjoining pew opened the door and stood on one side, and the revived corpse passed out.

Slowly and solemnly it passed down the aisle. It reached the door at which Will Stephens had entered, and then it passed away from his sight. The tall figure followed closely, and Will Stephens was alone in the church.

What could he do? How could he give a sufficient alarm? Would the two horrible personages return or not? Alas! poor Will Stephens, never was an unhappy mortal sexton in such frightful tribulation before. He knelt and shook like an aspen. At length a lucky thought entered his head.

"The bell. The bell," he cried, all at once finding his voice. "To the bell."

He sprung to his feet, for what he was now about to do, did not involve the necessity of going down again into the body of the church. There was a narrow staircase at the corner of the gallery, leading to the belfry. It was up that staircase that Will now struggled and tore.

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Chapter CCX. THE ALARM FROM THE BELFRY. -- THE BEADLE IN A QUANDARY.

"The belfry," cried Will Stephens. "Oh! if I could but reach the belfry."

He went stumbling on, now falling, then gathering himself up again to renewed exertions, for the stairs were steep and narrow, and although the little church tower was by no means very high yet the place where the bell hung was not to be reached in a moment.

Perseverance, however, will do wonders, and it was reached at last. Yes, he stood panting in a little square building in the very centre of which hung a thick rope. It was the means of tolling the bell. To seize it was the work of a moment. The bell swung round and its iron tongue gave forth a loud and stunning sound. Again and again -- bang -- bang -- bang! went the bell, and then feeling that at all events he had given an alarm, Will Stephens turned to retrace his steps."

He was half stupified by his previous fears. The noise of the bell, so close as he had been to it, had been stunning and bewildering, and Will Stephens reeled like a drunken man. The ale too might have a little to do with that, but certainly he made a false step, and down he went head foremost from top to bottom of those old steep, narrow belfry stairs. ****

Will Stephens was right when he considered that the tolling of the bell would give an alarm. Most persons in the neighbourhood were awakened by it, and they listened to the seven or eight pealing sounds in surprise. What could they mean? Who was doing it? It could not be fire. Oh dear no. The alarm would not leave off if it were. Somebody dead -- ah, yes, it was some great person in the state dead, and the news had been brought there, and so the bell was tolled, and we shall hear all about it in the morning. And so those who had been awakened went to sleep again, and the unhappy sexton was left to his fate at the foot of the little stairs leading up to the belfry, where he had gone with so much trouble, and produced so little effect.

The long weary hours of the night crept on, and at last the faint dawn of early morning showed itself upon the ocean, and in faint streaks of light in the glowing east.

The fishermen began to ply their hazardous and hardy trade. The birds in the gardens, and in the old lime and yew trees that shaded the church-yard, shook off their slumbers. Gradually the light advanced, and a new day began.

But there lay poor Stephens, the victim of what he had seen and heard in the old church, and he was doomed to lie some time longer yet.

There was a Mr. Anthony Dorey, who was parish beadle, and he had awakened, and heard the sound of the tolling of the well-known bell.

"I say, mother Dorey," he had said to better half, "what's that?"

"How should I know, idiot," was the polite rejoinder.

"Oh, very good."

"You had better get up and see."

"Oh dear no. It's no business of mine; Master Wiggins is bell-ringer; I dare say it's something though."

This was a wise conclusion for the beadle to come to, and he turned to go to sleep again, which was wise likewise, only more easy in the conception than in the execution, for his mind was more disturbed than he had thought it possible anything could disturb it, by the tolling of the bell.

Whenever he found himself just going off to sleep, he jumped awake again quite wide, crying, --

"Eh! eh! Was that the bell?"

This sort of thing, varied by a great number of punches in the ribs from Mrs. Dorey, went on until the morning had sufficiently advanced to make it quite light enough to see objects with ordinary distinctness, and then, fancying that all his attempts to sleep would be futile, the vexed beadle rose.

"I can't sleep, that's a clear case," he said, "so I will go and see what the bell was tolled for at such an odd time of the night. The more I think of it, the more I don't know what to think."

Full of this resolution, he went post haste to Mr. Wiggins's and knocked loudly at his cottage door.

"Hillo! hillo! Wiggins."

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"Well," said Wiggins, looking out of his bed-room window with his head picturesquely adorned by a red night-cap, "Well what's the matter now?"

"That's what I want to know. Why did you toll the bell in the middle of the night?"

"I toll the bell!"

"Yes, to be sure, I heard it."

"Yes, and I heard it too, but it was none of my tolling, and if I had not been rather indisposed, Mr. Dorey, I should have got up myself and seen what it was all about. As it is you find me cleaning myself rather early."

"I'll wait for you, then," said Dorey.

Wiggins soon made his appearance, and he and Dorey walked off together to the church, much pondering as they went, upon the mysterious circumstance that took them there, for if neither had rung the bell they could not think who had, for although the name of Will Stephens certainly occurred to them both, they thought it about one of the most unlikely things in the world that he would take the trouble to perform upon the great bell in the middle of the night, when it was none of his business to do so under any circumstances whatever.

"Nonsense," said the beadle; "I hardly ever knew him do a very civil thing."

"Nor I either, so you may depend, neighbour Dorey, it's not him."

"It's a great mystery, neighbour Wiggins. That's what it is, and nothing else."

"I hope it don't bode none of us no harm, that's all. Times are quite bad enough, without anything happening to make 'em worse."

This sentiment, as any grumbling one always is, was acceded to by the beadle, and so they went on conversing until they reached the church door; and then the surprise of finding the smaller entrance open struck them, and they stood staring at each other for some moments in profound silence.

"There's somebody here," said Wiggins at last.

"In course."

"What shall we do, Mr. Dorey? Do you think it's our duty to -- to go in and see who it is, or -- or run away? You know I aint a constable, but you are, so perhaps it alters the case so far as you are concerned, you see."

"Not at all; you are a strong man, Mr. Wiggins, a very strong man; but suppose we try to make some one answer us. Here goes."

The beadle advanced close to the threshold of the door, and in as loud a tone of voice as he could command, he said, --

"Ahem! -- ahem! -- Hilloa, hilloa! -- What are you at there? -- Come, come, I'm down upon you."

"What do they say?" inquired Wiggins.

"Nothing at all."

"Then, perhaps, it's nobody."

"Well, do you know, if I thought that, I'd go in at once, like a roaring lion -- I would -- and show 'em who I was -- ah!"

"So would I -- so would I."

After listening for some short time longer, most intently, and hearing nothing, they came to the conclusion, that although some one had evidently been there, there was no one there now; so it would be quite safe to go into the church, always taking care to leave the door open, so that, in the event of any alarm, they could run away again, with all the precipitation in the world.

It certainly was not one of the most hazardous exploits in the whole history of chivalrous proceedings to inter a church in day-light, as it then was, in search of some one, who it was very doubtful was there. But to have seen the beadle and Mr. Wiggins, anybody would have thought them bound upon an enterprise of life or death, and the latter the most likely of the two, by a great deal.

"Ahem!" cried Mr. Dorey again; "we are two strong, bold fellows, and we have left our six companions -- all six feet high, at the door -- ahem!"

No effect was produced by this speech, which Mr. Dorey fully intended should strike terror into somebody, and after a few minutes search, they both felt convinced that there was no one hidden in the lower part of the church, and there was only the gallery to search.

And yet that was a ticklish job, for the nearer they approached the belfry, of course the nearer they approached the spot from whence the alarm had been given. It was therefore with rather a backwardness in going forward,

that they both slowly proceeded up the staircase, and finally reached the gallery, where they saw no one; and much to their relief the want of any discovery was.

"It's all right," said the beadle. "There's nobody here. Oh, how I do wish the rascals had only stayed, that's all. I'd a shewn them what a beadle was -- I'd a took 'em up in a twinkling -- I would. Lord bless you, Mr. Wiggins, you don't know what a desperate man I am, when I'm put to it, that you don't."

"Perhaps not, but there don't seem to be any danger."

"Not the least. Eh? eh? -- oh, the Lord have mercy upon us! I give in -- what's that? -- take my everything, but, oh! spare my life -- oh! oh! oh!"

This panic of the beadle's was all owing to hearing somebody give a horrible groan -- such a groan that it was really dreadful to hear it. Mr. Wiggins, too, was much alarmed, and leant upon the front rail of the gallery, looking dreadfully pale and wan. The beadle's face looked quite of a purple hue, and he shook in every limb.

"I -- I thought I saw a groan," he said.

"So -- so -- did -- I -- oh, look -- then don't you hear a horrible bundle up in that corner. Oh, mercy! I begin to think we are as good as dead men -- that we are -- oh, that we are. What will become of us? -- what will become of us?"

By this time, Will Stephens, who, the reader is aware, was there to make the groan, had got up from the foot of the belfry--stairs, and he began to drag his bruised and stiffened frame towards the beadle and Mr. Wiggins, which they no sooner perceived than they set off as hard as they could scamper from the place, crying out for help, as if they had been pursued by a thousand devils.

In vain Stephens called after them; they did not hear his voice, nor did they stop in their headlong flight until they reached the door of the clergyman, concerning whose power to banish all evil spirits into the Red Sea, they had a strong belief, and as the reverend gentleman was at breakfast, the first thing they both did was to rush in, and upset the tea-tray which the servant had just brought in.

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Chapter CXCVII. THE CLERGYMAN'S VISIT TO THE VAULT. -- RESCUE OF THE SEXTON.

"What the devil! sounds!"

Yes; that was what the parson said. With all due respect for his cloth, we cannot help recording the fact that the words at the commencement of this chapter were precisely those that came from the lips of the reverend gentleman upon the occasion of the sudden and rather alarming irruption of the beadle and the bell-ringer into his breakfast parlour at the parsonage.

"We beg your pardon, sir," said the beadle, "but-- -- "

"Yes, sir, we beg your pardon," add the bell-ringer, "but-- -- "

"What?" cried the parson, as he looked at the remains of his breakfast lying upon the hearth-rug in most admired disorder at his feet.

"The bell, sir -- the church -- the gallery -- a groan -- a ghost -- a lot of ghosts."

Such were the incoherent words that came, thick as hail, from the beadle and the bell-ringer. In vain the clergyman strove to get to the rights of the story. He was compelled to wait until they were both very nearly tired out, and then he said, --

"Very well, I don't understand, so you may both go away again."

"But, sir-- -- "

"But, sir-- -- "

"If one of you will speak while the other listens I will attend, and not otherwise. This is Sunday morning, and I neither can, nor will waste any more time upon you."

Nothing is so terrible to a professed story teller, and the beadle was something of that class, as to tell him you won't listen to him, so Mr. Dorey at once begged that Wiggins would either allow him to tell what had happened, or tell it properly himself. Mr. Wiggins gave way, and the beadle as diffusely as possible told the tale of the bell tolling, and the visit to the church, with the awful adventure that there occurred.

"What do you think of it, sir?" he concluded by asking.

"I have no opinion formed as yet," replied the clergyman, "but I will step down to the church now, and see."

"You'll take plenty o' people with you, sir."

"Oh dear no, I shall go alone. I don't gather from what you have said that there is any danger. Your own fears, too, I am inclined to think, have much exaggerated the whole affair. I dare say it will turn out, as most of such alarms usually do, some very simple affair indeed."

The parson took his hat, and walked away to the church as coolly as possible, leaving Mr. Dorey and Mr. Wiggins to stare at each other, and to wonder at a temerity they could not have thought it possible for any human being to have practised.

But the clergyman was supported by a power of which they knew little -- the power of knowledge, which enabled him at once in his own mind to divide the probable from the impossible, and therefore was it that he walked down to the church fully prepared to hear from somebody a very natural explanation of the mysterious bell-ringing in the night, which was the only circumstance that made him think that there was anything to explain, for he had heard that himself.

When he reached the sacred building, he found the door open, as the beadle and the bell-ringer had left it, and the moment he got into the body of the church, he heard a voice say, --

"Help! help! will nobody help me?"

"Yes," he replied, "of course, I will."

"Oh! thank Heaven!"

"Where are you?"

"Here, sir, I think that's your voice, Mr. Bevan."

"Ah, and I think that's your voice, Will Stephens; I thought this would turn out some very ordinary piece of business, so you are up stairs; and did you ring the bell in the night?"

"I did, sir."

"Just so — come down then."

"I'm afraid I can't, sir, without some help. I have had a very bad fall, and although, thank God, no bones are broken, I am sadly shaken and bruised, so that it is with great pain, sir, I can crawl along, and as for getting down the stairs, why — I — I rather think I couldn't by myself, if there was a hundred pound note waiting for me below, just for the trouble of fetching, sir."

"Very well, I'm coming, don't move."

Mr. Bevan ascended the staircase, and without "a bit of pride," as Will Stephens said afterwards, in telling the story, helped the bruised sexton down the gallery steps to the body of the church, and then he made him sit down on one of the forms, and tell him all that had happened, which Will did from first to last, quite faithfully, not even omitting how he had stayed rather late at the ale-house, and how terrified he had been by the curious events that took place while he was in the church, ending by his fall from the stairs leading up to the belfry.

"Will, Will," said Mr. Bevan, "the ringing of the bell is good proof that you have been in the belfry, but you will scarcely expect me to believe the remainder of your dream."

"Dream, sir?"

"Yes, to be sure. You surely don't think now, in broad daylight, that it is anything else, do you?"

"I — I don't know, sir; of course, sir, if you say its a dream — why — why — "

"There, that will do. I will convince you that it was nothing more, or else you will go disturbing the whole neighbourhood with this story, that it is quite a mercy, I have first heard."

"Convince me, sir?"

"Yes; come with me to the vault."

Will Stephens shrunk from this proposal and his fear was so manifest, that Mr. Bevan was, at all events, convinced that he had told him nothing but what he himself believed, and accordingly he felt still more anxious to rid Will of his nervous terror.

"You surely," he said, "cannot be timid, while I am with you. Come at once, and if you do not find that the late Miss Crofton, poor girl, is quiet enough in her coffin, I promise you upon my sacred word, that I will never cease investigating this affair, and bringing it to some conclusion. Come at once, before any curious persons arrive at the church."

So urgent a request from the clergyman of the parish to Will Stephens, the sexton of the parish, almost might be said to amount to a command, so Will did not see how he could get out of it, without confessing an amount of rank cowardice that even he shrunk from.

"Well, sir," he said, "of course with you I can have no objection."

"That's right. Come along; there are means of getting a light into the vestry; wait here a moment."

Will would not wait; he stuck close by Mr. Bevan, who went into the vestry, and soon procured a candle, lighted from materials he kept there under lock and key; and they went together to the vault, the stone of which was just as it had been left when Will emerged with so much fright.

"I will go first," said Mr. Bevan.

"Thank you, sir."

The clergyman descended, and Will Stephens followed, trembling, about two stairs behind him. Little did he expect when he emerged from that vault previous to his adventures in the church, that he should revisit it again so quickly. Indeed he had made a mental resolve that nothing should induce him to go down those stairs again, and yet there he was actually descending them.

So weak are the resolutions of mortals!

"Needs must," thought Will, "when the — parson, I mean, drives!"

"Come on, Will," said Mr. Bevan.

Will looked about him, but no coffin-lid was visible. There was Miss Crofton's coffin in its proper niche, with the lid on, and looking as calm and undisturbed as any respectable coffin could look. Will was amazed. He looked at the coffin, and he looked at the parson, and then he looked uncommonly foolish.

"Never mind it, Will," said Mr. Bevan, "never mind it, I say. The story need go no further. You can keep your own counsel if you like. You have come here under the influence of strong ale, and you have gone to sleep most likely in this very vault, and in your sleep, having a very vivid dream, you have walked up into the gallery, and thence into the belfry, where no doubt you did ring the bell under the influence of your dream; and then you fell

down the belfry stairs, I believe, as you say you did."

"Ah!" said Will, "bless you, sir. It may be so, but— — "

"You are not convinced."

"Not quite, sir,"

"Well, Will, you are quite right never to pretend to be convinced when you are not. I do not blame you for that, but in a short time, when the effect of the affair has worn off, you will entertain my opinion."

"I hope, sir, I may."

"That will do. Now the stone must be put over this vault."

"Sir, if you wouldn't mind, sir."

"What, Will?"

"Staying a moment or two, while I empty the bag of sawdust on the floor, sir, I shan't be a minute, no — not half a minute, and then I shall have done with the vault altogether I hope, sir."

"Very well."

Will set to work, and although at any other time he would have been rather ashamed of letting Mr. Bevan see what a wonderfully small quantity of sawdust made up a guinea's worth, superior considerations now prevailed, and he would not have spared the clergyman's company on any account.

"Now I've done, sir."

"Very well, follow me."

Will did not like to ask the clergyman to follow him, so in that difficulty, for as to his remaining behind it was out of the question, he made a rush and reached the church before Mr. Bevan could ascend two of the steps. When that gentleman did reach the church he made no remark about the precipitancy, and apparent disrespect of Will, for he put it down to its right cause, but he left the church in order to make the usual preparations for the morning service, which would now commence in an hour—and-a-half.

Will walked home with his empty bag, for the little exercise he had had sufficed to convince him that he was not so much hurt as he thought, and that the stiffness of his limbs would soon pass away.

"It's all very well," he said to himself, "for Mr. Bevan to talk about dreams, but if that was one, nothing real, has ever, happened to me yet, that's all."

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Chapter CXVIII. THE YOUNG LOVER'S MIDNIGHT WATCH.

Did the clergyman really think what he said? Had he no suspicions, that after all there was a something more even than he was quite willing to admit in the story told by Will Stephens?

We shall see in good time, but at all events one thing is evident, that the parson thought it good sound policy, and it was, to endeavour to nip the thing in the head, and by ascribing it to a dream, put it down as a subject of speculation in the place.

He knew that nothing could be more dangerous than allowing any such story to pass current as a wonderful fact, and well he knew that in a short time, if such were the case, it would receive so many additions and so many embellishments, that the mischief it might produce upon the mind of an ignorant population might be extreme, and of a most regretful character indeed.

All this he felt hourly, and therefore Will Stephens' story was to be put down as a dream.

Now Mr. Bevan, it will be recollected, had urged Will to keep his own counsel, and to say nothing of the affair to any one, but he had faint hopes only that Will would do that, very faint hopes indeed, for after all he, Will, was the hero of the story, and there would be a something extremely gratifying in telling it, and in stating what he would have done, had not his foot slipped as he came down the narrow stairs from the old belfrey, and so completely stunned him by the fall. Mr. Bevan therefore had very few if any compunctions in adopting the course he did, which was, in the evening, when there was no service at the church, to call at the Grange, to see Sir George Crofton upon the subject.

Mr. Bevan was always a welcome guest at the Grange, and he was on those intimate and good terms with the family, that he could always call whenever he pleased, so that a mere announcement of his presence by no means had the effect of preparing Sir George for any communication.

"Ah, Mr. Bevan," he said, when the clergyman entered the room, "I am glad to see you."

"And I to see you, Sir George."

"You come to a house of mourning, sir. But that will be the case here for a long, long time. Time may and will, no doubt, do much to assuage our grief, but the blow is as yet too recent."

Tears started to the eyes of Sir George Crofton, as he made this allusion to his daughter, and he turned his head aside to hide such evidences of emotion from the parson, from whom, however, he need have expected nothing but the most friendly sympathy that one human being could bestow upon another. Mr. Bevan was a man of refinement and consideration, and he let grief always have its way, seldom doing more than merely throw out, in the form of a suggestion for consideration as it were, that death was not the great evil it was thought to be.

In such a way he generally succeeded in bring persons smarting under the infliction of the loss of dear friends and relations much sooner to proper sense of the subject, than if he had indulged in all the canting religious exhortations that some divines think applicable to such occasions.

Sir George Crofton was alone, for his two sons had gone for a stroll in the grounds. Ringwood who still remained with the family, was in the library, where now he passed most of his time, in trying by reading to withdraw his mind from a too painful and fixed contemplation of his loss.

He was still weak, but might be considered now quite convalescent.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Bevan," said Sir George. "Believe me, I take it very kindly of you to come so often."

"Pray dear sir, don't say another word about it — I — I am very sorry to feel myself obliged to allude to anything of an uncomfortable nature."

"Think nothing of doing so, my friend. Think nothing of it, I have a master grief which drowns all others."

"But it is concerning that master grief, sir, that I come to speak."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir, will you kindly hear me?"

"Certainly, certainly."

"You told me on the day following the melancholy death of your daughter, as a friend, the peculiar circumstances attendant upon that death. Now I do not mean to say that what I am going to relate to you has any connection at all with those circumstances, nor would I tell you what I come to tell at all, were I not fearful that

the same story with some of the usual exaggerations of ignorance would reach you from other quarters, for it is not a matter consigned to my bosom only, or there it should remain."

"You alarm me."

"That I feared, but deeply regret. Listen to me, and remember always as you do so, that I think the whole affair is a mere dream — a disturbed slumberer's vision — nothing more."

Sir George Crofton did listen with breathless eagerness, and Mr. Bevan, without detracting anything or adding anything to the narrative of Will Stephens, told him the whole story just as Will had told it to him, concluding by saying, —

"That is all my dear sir, and I felt that my duty powerfully called upon me to be your informant upon the subject, simply that we might be forewarned against any coarse version of the story."

Sir George drew a long breath.

"More horrors! More horrors!"

"Nay, why should you say that?"

"Is it not so?"

"Nay I have already given my opinion, by saying, that I look upon the whole affair as but the phantasma of dream."

"Oh! Mr. Bevan, do not trifle with me. Is that really and truly your opinion, sir, or only said from kindness to me."

"It is the best opinion that I can come to."

"I thank you, sir; I thank you. Clara, Clara, my child, my child!"

The old man was overcome with grief, and at the interesting moment, Ringwood entered the room, with a book in his hand. He was astonished, as well he might be to see such a fearful relapse of grief on the part of Sir George Crofton, and he looked from him to Mr. Bevan, and from Mr. Bevan to him, for some few moments in silence, and then he said, —

"Surely all here have suffered enough, and there is no new calamity come upon this house."

"Tell him all," cried Sir George; "tell him all. It is fit that he should know; he is one of us now, he loved my child, and loves her memory still. I pray you, Mr. Bevan, to tell all to Ringwood, for I have not the heart to do so."

"I wonder," said Ringwood, calmly, "to hear you speak thus. I wonder to see that any new grief can come so near to that which we have already suffered. The image of my lost one fills up each crevice of my heart. I shall listen to you Mr. Bevan with respect, but my grief, I fear is selfish, and cannot feel more than its own miseries."

Ringwood seemed to imagine that what the parson had to say referred to something with which Clara had nothing to do; but when, as the story proceeded, he found how intimately connected she was with the affair, his cheek flushed for a moment, and then grew of a death-like paleness, and he sat trembling and looking in the face of Mr. Bevan, as he proceeded with his most strange relation.

When he had concluded Ringwood gave a deep groan.

"You are much affected, sir," said Mr. Bevan.

"Crushed! crushed!" was the reply. "Oh God!"

"Nay now this is not manly, sir, you feel this thing too much; if you are so crushed how can any one expect that from you is to proceed the necessary exertion to prove that the story in all its particulars is but a falsehood?"

Ringwood caught at this idea in a moment.

"Exertion from me?" he said. "What exertions would I not make to prove such a horror to be but a creation of the fancy? What would I not do! What would I not suffer? You have warned me, sir. Yes, I have a duty to do — a duty to Clara's memory; a duty to you Sir George, and a duty to myself, for did I not love her, and does not her gentle image still sit in my inmost heart enshrined? I will prove that this most monstrous story is a delusion. Bear with me, gentlemen, I must think. To-morrow you shall know more, but not until to-morrow."

He rose, and left the room.

"What does he mean," said Sir George, vacantly.

"I cannot tell you, sir; but wait until to-morrow. Perhaps by then he may have proposed some plan of action, that you or I may not think of. You will use your own discretion, about communicating the strange affair to your sons or not, sir. Upon such a point as family confidence, I never venture an opinion. Allow me to call upon you to-morrow morning, sir, when I hope to find you in better spirits."

The clergyman would not have been in such haste to leave Sir George; but as he saw Ringwood leave the room; that young man made a sign to him, that he wished to see him before he left, and accordingly Mr. Bevan was anxious to know what it was he had to say to him.

When he left Sir George, he asked a servant where Mr. Ringwood was, and being told he was in the library, Mr. Bevan, being quite familiar with the house, followed him there at once, and found him pacing that apartment in great agitation, and with disordered steps.

"Thank heaven you have come, sir," cried Ringwood, "tell me, oh, tell me, what would you advise me to do, Mr. Bevan."

"I think," replied the clergyman, "you have already half decided upon a course."

"I have, I have."

"Then follow it, if it be such a one as in its result will produce a conviction of the truth. Do not, Mr. Ringwood, allow anything to turn you aside from a course which you feel to be right; you will always find strength enough to persevere if you have that strong conviction upon you. What is your plan?"

"It is this night to watch in the church?"

"Be it so; I will, if you like, keep watch with you."

"Oh, no, no! let me be alone. All I ask of you, sir, is to provide me with the means of getting into the sacred edifice at midnight."

"That I will do. You shall have a private key that I have for my own use; you can let yourself in without any one knowing of your presence. But do you think you have nerve enough to go alone? if you have the smallest doubt or hesitation, let me accompany you."

"No, no — I thank you, but let me go alone, and say nothing of this to Sir George. I had it in my mind when I told him I would speak to him to-morrow about what you had communicated. I would fain, if these horrors be really true, keep him in ignorance that I have verified them. But if I keep my night watch quite undisturbed, then he shall have the satisfaction of knowing that it has been so kept.

"You are right in that; I will send the key to you in the course of another hour and remember I am at your service if you should alter your mind, and wish for company. Do not hesitate about disturbing my rest."

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Chapter CXCIX. THE HORRORS OF THE GRAVE. -- A FRIGHTFUL ADVENTURE.

One would have thought that young Ringwood might with effect and with discretion have disclosed his plan of watching in the old church to one of the brothers of Clara, but he shrunk from doing that.

In the first place he thought he should be put down as a visionary, and as one who was disposed to insult the memory of Clara by imagining that the story of the sexton could be true, and in the second place, if anything did happen, he was afraid that the feelings of the brother might clash with his.

"No," he said, "I will go alone -- I will not rest again until I have thoroughly satisfied myself that this tale is but a fabrication of the fancy. Oh, Clara! can it be possible -- no, no. The thought is by far too -- too horrible."

It may really be considered a fortunate thing that the communication of the clergyman was made in the evening, for had it been earlier in the day, the hours of frightful anxiety which Ringwood would have endured until the night came must have been most painful.

As it was, however, the hours that would elapse ere he could venture to go to the church on his strange and melancholy errand were not many, and they passed the more quickly, that during some of them, he was making up his mind as to what he should do.

"Yes, Clara, my best beloved Clara," he said, "I will rescue your sweet memory from this horrible doubt that is cast upon it, or I will join you in the tomb. Welcome, a thousand times welcome death, rather than that I should live to think that you are -- God, no -- no! I cannot pronounce the dreadful word. Oh, what evil times are these, and what a world of agony do I endure. But courage, courage; let fancy sleep, I must not allow my imagination to become sufficiently excited to play me any pranks to-night. Be still my heart, and let me go upon this expedition as a spectator merely. Time enough will it be to become an actor, when I know more, if indeed there be more to know."

The clergyman sent the key, according to his promise, by a confidential servant, who had orders to ask for Mr. Ringwood and to give it into his own hands, so that the young man was fully prepared to go, when the proper time should arrive for him to start upon his expedition.

He purposely kept very much out of the way of Sir George Crofton and his two sons during the remainder of the evening, for such was the ingenuous nature of young Ringwood, and so unused was he to place any curb upon his speech, that he dreaded letting slip some information regarding his intention to keep watch in the old church that night; in such a case it would have been difficult to refuse company.

Sir George took the advice of the clergyman and said nothing to any one of the dreadful communication that had been made to him. But he could not conceal from the family and his servants, that some unusual grief was preying upon him, beyond even the sadness that had remained after the death of his daughter. He retired to rest unusually early, that he might escape their curious and inquiring glances.

The clock struck eleven.

"It is time," said Ringwood, as he sprung from his seat in his bed-room. "It is time. For the love of thee, my Clara, I go to brave this adventure, Mine are you in death as in life. My heart is widowed, and can know no other love."

He armed himself with a pair of loaded pistols, for he made up his mind that if any trickery was at the bottom of the proceeding, the authors of such a jest should pay dearly for their temerity, and then cautiously descending from his bed-room, he crossed the dining-room, and passing through a conservatory, easily made his way out of the house, and into a flower-garden that was beyond.

He thought that if he went out of the grounds by the way of the porter's lodge, it might excite some remark, his not returning again, so he went to a part of the wall which he knew was low and rugged.

"There," he said, "I can easily climb over, and by getting into the meadows make my way into the road."

This, to a young man, was not by any means a difficult matter, and he in a few minutes more found himself quite free of the house and grounds, and making his way very rapidly towards the church, the tower of which, he could just see.

The night was again a cloudy one; although nothing had as yet fallen, the wind was uncertain, and no one

could with any safety have ventured to predict whether it would be fair, or rain. Of the two, certainly, Ringwood would have preferred moonlight, for he wished in the church to be able to see well about him, without thinking of the necessity of a light.

"No," he said, as he pursued his way, "I must have no light; that would ruin all."

By the time he reached the church, he had a better opinion of the weather, and from a faint sort of halo that was in the sky, he was led to believe that the moon's light would soon be visible, and enable him to see everything that might take place.

The key that the parson had given him opened the same little door by which Will Stephens, the sexton, had entered, and there was no difficulty in turning the lock, for it was frequently used.

The young man paused for a moment, debating with himself, whether he should fasten the door securely on the inner side, or leave it open, and at last he thought, that considering all things, the latter was the best course to pursue."

"I do not wish," he said, "to stop any proceedings, so much as I wish to see what they are. There shall therefore be every facility for any one coming into the church, who may chance to have an intention so to do."

He still, it will be seen, clung a little to the hope that it was a trick.

When he pushed open the door that was covered with green baize, he found that in consequence of the cloth curtain being entirely drawn aside from before the south window, that there was not near the amount of darkness within the building that he had anticipated finding there.

When his eyes got a little accustomed to it, he could even see, dimly to be sure, but still, sufficiently to distinguish the several shapes of the well-known objects in the church. The pulpit, the communion table, the little rails before it, and some of the old monuments against the walls.

The stone slab that covered the opening to the vault of the Crofton family, had been before the commencement of the morning service properly secured, so that that entrance could be walked over with perfect safety, and Ringwood carefully ascertained that such was the fact.

"Surely, surely," he said, "it is as Mr. Bevan says. That man must have come here half stupified by ale, and have gone to sleep, The only thing that gives the slightest semblance to such a tale, is the adventure of that most mysterious man who was reclaimed from the sea."

Yes, Ringwood was right. That was the circumstance, full of dread and awful mystery as it was, which sufficed to make anything else probable, and possible.

And what had become of him? Since the time when he made his escape from the Grange, nothing had been seen or heard of him unless that were he indeed, who was in the church pointing to the moonlight when the terrified Will Stephens was there.

And yet Stephens, although he might be supposed to be in a position to know him, did not recognise him, for we do not find in his account of the affair that he made any mention of him, or insinuated any opinion even, that the Mr. Smith of the bone-house, was the same person who had played so strange a part in the church.

The reader will have his own opinion.

"Where shall I bestow myself," thought Ringwood, "I ought to be somewhere from whence I can get a good view of the whole church."

After some little consideration, and looking about him as well as the semi-darkness would permit him, he thought that he could not by any possibility do better than get into the pulpit. From there he could readily turn about in any direction from whence any noise might proceed, at the same time, that it was something like a position which could not be very well attacked except with fire arms, and if such weapons were used against him, he should have the great advantage of seeing who was his assailant.

Accordingly he ascended the pulpit stairs, and soon ensconced himself in that elevated place.

There was something very awful, and solemn, and yet beautiful about the faint view he got of the old conventicle-looking church from its pulpit, and irresistible had he chosen to resist it, there came to his lips a prayer to Heaven for its aid, its protection, and its blessing upon his enterprise.

How much calmer, and happier he felt after that. How true it is, as Prospero says, that prayer,

— — "Pierces so that it assaults

Mercy itself, and frees all faults."

Who is there in the wide world who has not felt the benign influence of an appeal to the great Creator of all

things, under circumstances of difficulty, and of distress. Let us pity the heart, if there be such a one in existence, that is callous to such a feeling.

But there are none. A reliance upon divine mercy is one of the attributes of humanity, and may not be turned aside, by even all the wickedness and the infidelity that may be arrayed against it.

"All is still," murmured Ringwood. "The stillness of the very grave is here, Oh, my Clara; methinks without a pang of mortal fear, I could converse in such an hour as this, with thy pure and unsullied spirit!"

In the enthusiasm of the moment, no doubt, Ringwood could have done so, and it is a wonder that his most excited imagination did not conjure up some apparent semblance of the being whom he loved so devotedly, and whose image he so fondly cherished, even although she had gone from him.

"Yes, my Clara," he cried, in tones of enthusiasm. "Come to me, come to me, and you will not find that in life or in death the heart that is all your own, will shrink from you!"

This species of mental exaltation was sure soon to pass away, and it did so. The sound of his own voice convinced him of the impropriety of such speeches, when he came there as an observer.

"Hush! hush!" he said. "Be still, be still."

It was evident to him that many clouds were careering over face of the moon, for at times the church would get very dark indeed, and everything assumed a pitchy blackness, and then again a soft kind of light would steal in, and give the whole place a different aspect.

This continued for a long time, as he thought, and more than once he tried to ascertain the progress of the hours by looking at his watch, but the dim light baffled him.

"How long have I been here?" he asked himself; "I must not measure the time by my feelings, else I should call it an age."

At that moment the old church clock began to chime, and having proclaimed the four quarters past eleven, it with its deep-toned solemn bell struck the hour of twelve -- Ringwood carefully counted the strokes, so that, although it was too dark to see his watch, he could not be deceived.

Chapter CC. THE MIDNIGHT HOUR. -- THE STONE SLAB. -- THE VAMPIRE.

Yes, it was twelve o'clock, that mysterious hour at which it is believed by many that

"Graves give up their dead,
And many a ghost in church-yard decay,
Rise from their cold, cold bed

To make night horrible with wild vagary." Twelve, that hour when all that is human feels a sort of irksome dread, as if the spirits of those who have gone from the great world were too near, loading the still night air with the murky vapours of the grave. A chilliness came over Ringwood and he fancied a strange kind of light was in the church, making objects more visible than in their dim and dusky outlines they had been before.

"Why do I tremble?" he said, "why do I tremble? Clouds pass away from before the moon, that is all. Soon there may be a bright light here, and lo, all is still; I hear nothing but my own breathing; I see nothing but what is common and natural. Thank heaven, all will pass away in quiet. There will be no horror to recount -- no terrific sight to chill my blood. Rest Clara, rest in Heaven."

Ten minutes passed away, and there was no alarm; how wonderfully relieved was Ringwood. Tears came to his eyes, but there were the natural tears of regret, such as he had shed before for her who had gone from him to the tomb, and left no trace behind, but in the hearts of those who loved her.

"Yes," he said, mournfully "she has gone from me, but I love her still. Still does the fond remembrance of all that she was to me, linger at my heart. She is my own, my beautiful Clara, as she ever was, and as, while life remains, to me she ever will be."

At the moment that he uttered these words a slight noise met his ears.

In an instant he sprung to his feet in the pulpit, and looked anxiously around him.

"What was that?" he said. "What was that?"

All was still again, and he was upon the point of convincing himself, that the noise was either some accidental one, or the creation of his own fancy, when it came again.

He had no doubt this time. It was a perceptible, scraping, strange sort of sound, and he turned his whole attention to the direction from whence it came. With a cold creeping chill through his frame, he saw that that direction was the one where was the family vault of the Croftons, the last home of her whom he held still in remembrance, and whose memory was so dear to him.

He felt the perspiration standing upon his brow, and if the whole world had been the recompense to him for moving away from where he was he could not have done so. All he could do was to gaze with bated breath, and distended eyes upon the aisle of the church from whence the sound came.

That something of a terrific nature was now about to exhibit itself, and that the night would not go off without some terrible and significant adventure to make it remembered he felt convinced. All he dreaded was to think for a moment what it might be.

His thoughts ran on Clara, and he murmured forth in the most agonising accents, --

"Anything -- any sight but the sight of her. Oh, no, no, no!"

But it was not altogether the sight of her that he dreaded; oh no, it was the fact that the sight of her on such an occasion would bring the horrible conviction with it, that there was some truth in the dreadful apprehension that he had of the new state of things that had ensued regarding the after death condition of that fair girl.

The noise increased each moment, and finally there was a sudden crash.

"She comes! she comes!" gasped Ringwood.

He grasped the front of the pulpit with a frantic violence, and then slowly and solemnly there crossed his excited vision a figure all clothed in white. Yes, white flowing vestments, and he knew by their fashion that they were not worn by the living, and that it was some inhabitant of the tomb that he now looked upon.

He did not see the face. No, that for a time was hidden from him, but his heart told him who it was. Yes, it was his Clara.

It was no dream. It was no vision of a too excited fancy, for until those palpable sounds, and that most

fearfully palpable form crossed his sight, he was rather inclined to go the other way, and to fancy what the sexton had reported was nothing but a delusion of his overwrought brain. Oh, that he could but for one brief moment have found himself deceived.

"Speak!" he gasped; "speak! speak!"

There was no reply.

"I conjure you, I pray you though the sound of your voice should hurl me to perdition — I implore you, speak."

All was silent, and the figure in white moved on slowly but surely towards the door of the church, but ere it passed out, it turned for a moment, as if for the very purpose of removing from the mind of Ringwood any lingering doubt as to its identity.

He then saw the face, oh, so well-known, but so pale. It was Clara Crofton!

"'Tis she! 'tis she!" was all he could say.

It seemed, too, as if some crevice in the clouds had opened at the moment, in order that he should with an absolute certainty see the countenance of that solemn figure, and then all was more than usually silent again. The door closed, and the figure was gone.

He rose in the pulpit, and clasped his hands. Irresolution seemed for a few moments to sway him to and fro, and then he rushed down into the body of the church.

"I'll follow it," he cried, "though it lead me to perdition. Yes, I'll follow it."

He made his way to the door, and even as he went he shouted, —

"Clara! Clara! Clara!"

He reached the threshold of the ancient church; he gazed around him distractedly, for he thought that he had lost all sight of the figure. No — no, even in the darkness and against the night sky, he saw it once again in its sad-looking death raiments. He dashed forward.

The moonbeams at this instant being freed from some dense clouds that had interposed between them and this world, burst forth with resplendant beauty.

There was not a tree, a shrub, nor a flower, but what was made distinct and manifest, and with the church, such was the almost unprecedented lustre of the beautiful planet, that even the inscriptions upon the old tablets and tombs were distinctly visible.

Such a refulgence lasted not many minutes, but while it did, it was most beautiful, and the gloom that followed it seemed doubly black.

"Stay, stay," he shouted, "yet a moment, Clara; I swear that what you are, that will I be. Take me over to the tomb with you, say but that it is your dwelling-place, and I will make it mine, and declare it a very palace of the affections."

The figure glided on.

It was in vain that he tried to keep up with it. It threaded the churchyard among the ancient tombs, with a gliding speed that soon distanced him, impeded, as he continually was, by some obstacle or another, owing to looking at the apparition he followed, instead of the ground before him.

Still, on he went, heedless whether he was conveyed, for he might be said to be dragged onward, so much were all his faculties both of mind and body intent upon following the apparition of his beloved.

Once, and once only, the figure passed, and seemed to be aware that it was followed for it flitted round an angle made by one of the walls of the church, and disappeared from his eyes.

In another moment he had turned the same point.

"Clara, Clara!" he shouted. "'Tis I — you know my voice, Clara, Clara."

She was not to be seen, and then the idea struck him that she must have re-entered the church, and he too, turned, and crossed the threshold. He lingered there for a moment or two, and the whole building echoed to the name of Clara, as with romantic eagerness, he called upon her by name to come forth to him.

Those echoes were the only reply.

Maddened — rendered desperate beyond all endurance, he went some distance into the building in search of her, and again he called.

It was in vain; she had eluded him, and with all the carefulness and all the energy and courage he had brought to bear upon that night's proceedings, he was foiled. Could anything be more agonising than this to such a man as

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Ringwood — he who loved her so, that he had not shrunk from her, even in death, although she had so shrunk from him.

"I will find her — I will question her," he cried. "She shall not escape me; living or dead, she shall be mine. I will wait for her, even in the tomb."

Before he carried out the intention of going actually into the vault to await her return, he thought he would take one more glance at the churchyard with the hope of seeing her there, as he could observe no indications of her presence in the church.

With this view he proceeded to the door, and emerged into the dim light. He called upon her again by name, and he thought he heard some faint sound in the church behind him. To turn and make a rush into the building was the work of a moment.

He saw something — it was black instead of white — a tall figure — it advanced towards him, and with great force, before he was aware that an attack was at all intended, it felled him to the ground.

The blow was so sudden, so unexpected, and so severe, that it struck him down in a moment before he could be aware of it. To be sure, he had arms with him, but the anxiety and agony of mind he endured that night, since seeing the apparition come from the tomb had caused him to forget them.

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Chapter CCI. THE YOUNG GIRL IN THE VILLAGE, AND THE AWFUL VISIT.

It is now necessary that we draw the reader's attention to a humbler place of residence than the Grange, with its spacious chambers and lordly halls.

Situated not very far from the church, and almost close to the churchyard, upon which its little garden abutted, was a cottage, the picture of rural neatness and beauty. In the winter it was beautiful and picturesque, but in the summer time, when its porch was overrun with the woodbine and the sweet clematis, it was one of the sweetest of abodes that content and happiness could ever live in.

This cottage was inhabited by an old woman and her only child, a young girl of sixteen, beautiful as a rose, and as guileless as an angel. They contrived to live upon a small annuity that the mother had from a family in whose service she spent the best years of her life, and who, with a generosity that would be well to be abundantly and extensively imitated, would not see their old dependant want.

These two innocent and blameless persons had retired to rest at nine o'clock, their usual hour, and had slept the calm sleep of contentment until about half-past one, when the mother was awakened by a loud and piercing shriek from her daughter's chamber.

To spring from her humble couch was the work of a moment.

"Anna, Anna! my child, Anna!" she shrieked.

As she did so, she rushed across the small stair landing which separated the two, and the only two upper rooms of the cottage, and was about to enter her daughter's room, when the door of it was opened from within, and the old dame's heart died within her, as she saw a figure upon the threshold, attired in the vestments of the grave, and opposing her entrance.

Was it a dream, or did she really see such a sight?

Aghast and trembling the mother stood, unable for a moment or two to speak, and as she fell fainting upon the landing, she thought that something passed her, but she could not be quite sure, as it was at the instant her faculties were flitting from her.

How long she lay in that seeming death she knew not, and when she recovered, it was some few minutes before recollection came back to her, and she really remembered what had so completely overpowered her.

But when her reason did resume its sway, and she recollected that it was some danger to Anna, which had first alarmed her, she called her loudly by her name.

"Anna, Anna, speak to me."

"Mother, mother," replied the young girl. "Oh, come to me."

These words supplied strength to the old woman, and rising she made her way immediately into the chamber of her daughter, whom she found in an agony of fear; a light was procured, and then Anna flung herself upon her mother's neck, and wept abundantly.

"Oh, mother, tell me, convince me that it was only a dream."

"What, my child? oh what?"

The girl trembled so much that it was only by the utmost persuasion that the following account was got from her, of the cause of her fright.

She said that she had gone to sleep as usual within a very few minutes after going to bed, that she enjoyed a calm, and uninterrupted slumber, the duration of which she had no means whatever of guessing, but she was partially awakened by a noise at the window of her room.

She instantly rose and stood looking at the window, on which a sort of shadow seemed to pass without, which alarmed her exceedingly.

Still as it did not come gain, and as she certainly had not been fully awake when she sprung from her bed, she had thought it quite possible that all might be a dream, and had forbore from making any alarm upon the subject.

After some hesitation she had persuaded herself to go to bed again, and when there, although she sometimes started awake fancying she heard something, she at length yielded to sleep, and again slept, soundly for a time, until a new circumstance awakened her.

She thought she felt something touching her about the neck, and after opening her eyes, the moonlight, which

at that moment happened to be very bright, disclosed to her a white figure standing by the side of her bed, the face of which figure was leaning over her, and within a very few inches of her own.

Terror at first deprived her of all power of speech or motion, but as the figure did not move, she at length gave utterance to her fears in that shriek which had come from her lips, and so much alarmed the mother.

This was all the young girl could say, with the exception that the figure when she shrieked appeared to glide away, but where to she had no means of telling, for some clouds at that moment came again over the face of the moon.

The mother was much affected and terrified, and at first she thought of calling up her neighbours, but at length as the night was considerably advanced, and the intruder gone, they agreed to let the matter rest till morning, and the mother retired to her room again.

How long it was before the shriek from her daughter's room came again she did not know, but come again it did.

Yes, again came the dreadful shriek. It was — it could be no delusion now — and the mother once more sprung from her couch to rush to the rescue of her child.

Confused and bewildered, she darted onward to the chamber, but the door was fast, nor could all her exertions suffice to open it.

"Anna, Anna!" she shouted, "speak to me. One word only, my child, my child."

All was still. The trembling mother placed her ear to the door, and she heard a strange sucking sound, as if an animal was drinking with labour and difficulty. Her head seemed to be on fire, and her senses were upon the point of leaving her, but she did manage to reach her own room. She flew to the little casement — she dashed it open.

"Help! help! help! — for the love of God, help!"

There was no reply.

Again she raised her voice in shrieking wild accents.

"Help! — murder! — help!"

"What is it?" shouted a man's voice. It was one who was going some distance to take in his fishing nets.

"Oh! thank God, some human being hears me. Come in, come in."

"How am I to get in?"

"Stay a moment, and I will come down and open the cottage door for you. For the love of mercy do not go away."

Trembling and terrified to a dreadful excess, the old woman went down stairs and let the man into the cottage, when they both proceeded up to the chamber of the daughter.

"What do you suppose is the matter?" asked the fisherman.

"Oh! I know not — I know not; but twice to-night — twice has this dreadful alarm happened. Do not leave us — oh, do not."

"I don't want; but I should hardly think thieves would find it worth their while to come here at all for what they would get. You must have been dreaming."

"Oh, that I could think so!"

Anna's chamber was reached; and there, to the horror of the mother, she was found lying perfectly insensible on her bed, with a quantity of blood smeared about her neck.

"Why, it's a murder!" cried the fisherman; and firmly impressed with such a belief, he ran out of the house to spread an alarm.

The window of the chamber was wide open, and from that the mother now cried aloud for help; so that between her and the fisherman, such a disturbance was made all over the neighbourhood, that they were soon likely to have more assistance than could be useful.

The people living the nearest were soon roused, and they roused others, while the distracted woman, who believed Anna was dead, called for justice and for vengeance.

The alarm spread from house to house — from cottage to hall — and, in the course of half-an-hour, most of the inhabitants of the village had risen to hear the old dame's account of the horrible proceeding that had taken place that night in the cottage.

Exaggeration was out of the question. The fact itself was more than sufficient to induce the greatest amount of horror in the minds of all who heard it, and there was one, and only one, whose information enabled him to give a

name to the apparition that had assaulted Anna. That one was the schoolmaster of the place, and he, after hearing the story, said, —

"If one could persuade oneself at all of the existence of such horrors, one would suppose that a vampire had visited the cottage."

This was a theme that was likely to be popular. The schoolmaster foolishly gave way to the vanity, and explained what a vampire was — or was supposed and said to be; and soon the whole place was in a state of the most indescribable alarm upon the subject.

As yet the horrible news had not reached the Grange, but it was destined soon to do so; and better would it have been that any one had at once plunged a dagger in the heart of poor Sir George Crofton than that there should be thought to be such a horrible confirmation of his worst fears.

To be sure, his daughter was not named, but he received the news with a scream of anguish, and fell insensible into the arms of his son.

All was confusion. The servants ran hither and thither, not knowing what to do, and it was not until Mr. Bevan arrived that something like order was restored. He as a privileged friend assumed for the nonce a kind of dictatorship at the Grange, and gave orders, which were cheerfully and promptly obeyed. Then he desired a strictly private interview with Sir George.

It was, of course, granted to him; but the old baronet begged that Charles and Edwin might now know all. It was Emma alone from whom he wished to keep the awful truth.

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Chapter CCII. THE AWFUL SUPPOSITION -- A RESOLUTION.

It was with some reluctance that the clergyman spoke.

"Sir," he said to the old baronet, "and you, my young gentleman, I am afraid -- very much afraid, that I am doing anything but right in countenancing a supposition so utterly at variance with all my own notions and feelings; but my abhorrence of a secret impels me to speak.

"Say on, sir -- say on," cried Sir George. "Perhaps we are better prepared to hear what you have to tell, than you imagine."

After this Mr. Bevan had less reluctance to speak, he said, --

"I was aware, although you all were not, that Mr. Ringwood intended to keep watch last night in the church, in order to test the truth of what had been told by Will Stephens, the sexton. I did all I could to persuade him from making the attempt, but when I found that nothing else would satisfy him, I thought it prudent to give him the means of carrying out what had become such a fixed intention with him, that to oppose it was to do far more mischief than to grant it all the aid I had in my power to do."

Sir George gave a nod of assent.

"He went there," continued Mr. Bevan, "with a private key of my own, and took his place in the church."

"I wish, sir, you had been with him," said Edwin.

"Yes," added Charles. "If you, with your cool, calm, unbiassed judgment had been there, we should have been much better able to come to a correct conclusion about what occurred; for that something did occur, or was supposed by Ringwood to do so, we can well guess."

"I wish, indeed, I had been there," said Mr. Bevan, "but he begged so earnestly to be allowed to go alone, that I had not the heart to refuse him."

"And what happened, sir?"

"I will tell you. I gave him a key which admitted him to the church, by the small private entrance, at which I usually go in myself; in fact, it was my own private key, for I at times visit the church, and wish to do so, when I am not expected by those who have the ordinary charge of it."

"We have heard as much."

"No doubt. Well, then, I say I gave him that key, but it was my sympathy with his evident distress rather than my judgment which consented to do so, and I had hardly done it, when I began to busy myself with conjectures, and to deeply regret that I had yielded to him so easily. 'What if he, in his excited and grief-stricken state of mind, should come to some serious mischief?' I said to myself, 'should not I be very much to blame? Would not all prudent persons say that I did very wrong to send a man in such a condition of mind into a church at midnight, alone?'"

"Your motives and your known character, sir, would protect you," said Charles.

"I hope so," continued Mr. Bevan. "I think it would from all other charges, but imprudence; and if any great mischance had befallen Ringwood, I should not so readily have forgiven myself, as others might have been induced to forgive me."

"I understand that feeling," said Sir George.

"Well, then, with such sensations tugging at my heart, no wonder I could not rest, and so at a little after twelve, I rose, and hastily dressing myself, I left my house as noiselessly as possible, and made my way towards the church. The moon's light was at that time obscured, but every spot was so familiar to me, that I was able to go with speed, and I soon reached the venerable building. I walked round it, until I came to the door, the key of which I had given to Mr. Ringwood; it was open, but the moment I crossed the threshold, I stumbled on his insensible form."

"Go on! go on! He had seen something terrible," gasped Sir George; "I am nerved, I think, for the very worst; I pray you, sir, go on, and tell me all."

"I will, Sir George, because I feel convinced it is my duty to conceal nothing in this transaction, and because I think you had better more calmly and dispassionately, and without exaggeration, hear from me all that is to be told."

"That is a good reason, sir," said Edwin. "We should, of course, hear all from other sources, and probably, with all the aids that a feeling for the marvellous could append to it."

"That is my impression. When, then, I stumbled over a person lying just within the little private door of the church, I had no immediate means of knowing who it was; I tell you it was Ringwood, because I afterwards discovered as much. I had the means of getting a light; when I did so, I found Ringwood lying in a swoon, while at the same time, I could not but notice a large bruise upon his forehead.

"Of course, my first duty was to look after him, instead of troubling myself about his assailant, and having placed him in as convenient a posture as I could, I hurried home again, and roused up my servants. With their assistance I got him to my house, and placed him in bed."

"And did you search the church, sir?"

"I did. I went back and searched it thoroughly, but found nothing at all suspicious. Everything was in its right place, and I could not account for the affair at all, because of the wound that Ringwood had. I was most anxious to hear from him that he had had a fall."

"But — but," said Sir George, falteringly, "he told a different story."

"He did."

"A story which you will not keep from us."

"I do not feel myself justified, as I have said, in keeping it from you. this is it."

The clergyman then related to the family of the Croftons what is already known to the reader concerning the adventures of Ringwood in the old church, and which that morning, upon his recovery, Ringwood had told to him most circumstantially.

We need scarcely say that this recital was listened to with the most agonized feelings. Poor Sir George appeared to be most completely overcome by it. He trembled excessively, and could not command himself sufficiently to speak.

The two brothers looked at each other in dismay.

"Now, I pray you all to consider this matter more calmly," said Mr. Bevan, "than you seem inclined to do."

"Calmly," gasped Sir George, "calmly."

"Yes — what evidence have we after all that the whole affair is anything more than a dream of Mr. Ringwood's?"

"Does he doubt it?"

"No — I am bound to tell you that he does not; but we may well do so for all that. He is the last person who is likely to give in to the opinion that it is a mere vision, so strangely impressed as it is upon his imagination. Recollect always that he went to the church prepared to see something."

"Oh, if we could but think it unreal," said Sir George, glancing at his sons, as if to gather their opinions of the matter from their countenances.

"I will cling to such a thought," said Charles, "until I am convinced otherwise through the medium of my own senses."

"And I," said Edwin.

"You are right," added Mr. Bevan, "I never in the whole course of my experience heard of anything of which people should be so slow of believing in, as this most uncomfortable affair. You now know all, and it is for yourselves, of course, to make whatever determination you think fit. If I might advise, it would be that you all take a short tour, perhaps on the continent for a time."

"Mr. Bevan," said Sir George, in a kindly tone, "I am greatly obliged to you. The suggestion I know springs from the very best and friendly motives; but it carries with it a strong presumption that you really do think there is something in all this affair which it would be as well to have settled in my absence."

The clergyman could not deny but that some such feeling was at the bottom of his advice; but still he would not admit that he was at all convinced of the reality of what was presumed to have happened, and a short pause in the conversation ensued, after which Sir George spoke with a solemn air of determination, saying to his sons, as well as to his friend and pastor, Mr. Bevan,

"When I tell you that I have made a determination from which nothing but the hand of heaven visiting me with death shall move me, I hope no one here will try to dissuade me from carrying it out."

After such an exordium it was a difficult thing to say anything to him, so he continued, —

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"My child was dear — very dear to me in life, and I have no superstitious fears concerning one who held such a place in my affections. I am resolved that to-night I will watch her poor remains, and at once convince myself of a horror that may drive me mad or take a mountain of grief and apprehension off my heart."

"Father," cried Charles, "you will allow me to accompany you."

"And me," added Edwin.

"My sons, you are both deeply interested in this matter — you would be miserable while I was gone if you were not with me. Moreover, I will not trust my own imagination entirely — we will all three go, and then we cannot be deceived. This is my most solemn resolution."

"I have only one thing to say regarding it," said Mr. Bevan, "that is, to prefer an earnest request that you will allow me to be one of the party — you shall sit in a pew of the church, that shall command a view of the whole building."

"Accompany us, Mr. Bevan, if you will," said Sir George, "but I sit in no pew."

"No pew?"

"No. But my child's coffin, in the vault where repose the remains of more than one of my race who had been dear to me in life, will I take my place."

There was an earnest resolved solemnity about Sir George's manner, which showed that he was not to be turned from his purpose, and Mr. Bevan accordingly did not attempt to do so. He had done what he scarcely expected, that is, got a consent to accompany him to the night vigil, and at all events let what would happen, he as a more disinterested party than the others, would be able, probably to interfere and prevent any disastrous circumstances from arising.

"Say nothing of what has been determined on to any one," said Sir George, "keep it a profound secret, sir, and this night will put an end to the agony of doubt."

"Depend upon me. Will you come to my house at eleven o'clock, or shall I come here?"

"We will come to you; it is in the way."

Thus then the affair was settled, so far satisfactorily, that there was to be a watch actually now in the vault, so that there could be no delusion, no trick practised. — What will be the result will be shown very shortly; in the meantime we cannot but tremble at what that attached and nearly heart-broken father may have still to go through.

The excitement too in the village was immense; for the story of the vampyre's attack upon the young girl was fresh in everybody's mouth, and it lost nothing of its real horrors by the frequency with which it was repeated, and the terror-stricken manner in which it was dilated upon.

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Chapter CCIII. THE GRAND CONSULTATION AT THE ALE-HOUSE. -- THE AWFUL SUGGESTION.

Sir George Crofton and his family could form no idea, owing to not being in a position to know, of the state of excitement produced in the village by the mysterious and frightful attack which had been made upon the widow's daughter.

When people are very much absorbed with their own grief, they are apt to set a lighter value upon those of others, and thus it was that the family of the Croftons was so entirely taken up with what itself felt and had to do that there was little room for sympathy with others.

Mr. Bevan likewise, from his peculiar and respectable position, was not likely to be made the depository of gossiping secrets; the inhabitants of that little place were in the habit of approaching him with respect, so that, although, as we are aware, he had heard from Will Stephens, the sexton, a full and particular account of what had happened to him in the old church, and was likewise cognizant of the story of the midnight attack upon the widow's daughter, he was not fully aware of the startling effect which those circumstances had had upon the small population of that fishing village.

We are bound to believe that if he had had any idea of the real result of those operations or of what was contemplated as their result -- he would have done his best to adopt some course to prevent any disastrous collision.

We, however, with all the data and materials of this most singular narrative before us, are enabled to detail to the reader facts and occurrences as they took place actually, without waiting the arrival of those periods at which they reached the knowledge of those actors in the gloomy drama of real life.

Our readers, then, will please to know that the excitement among the inhabitants of the place was of that violent and overbearing description, that all the occupations of the villagers were abandoned, and a spirit of idleness, sadly suggestive of mischief, began to be prevalent among them.

This feeling was increased by frequent visits to the ale-house, the liquor of which was well esteemed by Will Stephens, as may be readily imagined; and towards evening the large old-fashioned parlour of that place of entertainment became crowded with a motley assemblage, whose sole purpose in meeting together was to drink strong ale, and discuss the irritating and exciting subject of the appearance of the vampyre in the village.

This discussion, from being at first a sober, serious, and alarmed one, became noisy and violent; and at length a blacksmith, who was a great man in the politics of the place, and who of all things in the world most admired to hear his own voice, rose and addressed his compeers in something of a set speech.

"Listen to me," he said; "are we to have the blood sucked out of all our bodies by a lot of vampyres? Is our wives and daughters to be murdered in the middle of the night?"

"No, no, no," cried many voices; "certainly not."

"Is we to be made into victims, or isn't we? What's Sir George Crofton and his family to us? To be sure he's the landlord of some of us, and a very good landlord he is, too, as long as we pay our rent."

"Here, hear, hear."

"But there's no saying how long he might be so, if we didn't."

"Bravo, Dick!" cried the master of the place, handing the orator a pot; "bravo, Dick! take a pull at that, old fellow."

"Thank you, Muggins. Now, what I proposes is -- "

"Stand on a chair, and let's all hear you."

"Thank you," said the blacksmith; and getting upon a chair, he was about to commence again, when some one advised him to get upon the table, but in an effort to accomplish that feat, he unfortunately trod upon what was a mere flap of the table, which had not sufficient power to support his weight, and down he came amid an assemblage of pots, jugs, and glasses, which made a most alarming crash.

This roused the fury of the landlord, who had no idea of being made such a sufferer in the transaction, and he accordingly began to declaim heavily at his loss.

A dispute arose as to how he was to be repaid, and it was finally settled that a general subscription would be

the best mode of reimbursing him.

If anything was wanting to work up the feelings of the toppers at the public-house to the highest pitch of aggravation, it certainly was their having to disburse for breakages a sum of money which, if liquified, would have trickled most luxuriously down their throats. They were consequently ripe and ready for anything which promised vengeance upon anybody.

The blacksmith was not discomfited by his fall. When is a man who is fond of hearing himself talk discomfited by anything? and he soon resumed his oration in the following words: —

"Is we to be put upon in this kind of way? Why, we shan't be able to sleep in our beds. All I asks is, is we to put up with it?"

"But what are we to do?" said one.

"Ah! there's the question," said the blacksmith, "I don't know exactly."

"Let's ask old Timothy Brown," said the butcher, "he's the oldest man here."

This was assented to; and accordingly the individual mentioned was questioned as to his ideas of the way of avoiding the alarming catastrophe which seemed to be impending over them. He advised them to wait patiently till the next night, and keep awake till the unwelcome nocturnal visitor made its appearance, when whoever it might visit was boldly to assail it, without any fear of the consequences to himself, till further assistance could be procured. After Timothy Brown had delivered himself of this piece of advice, a dead silence ensued among the late boisterous company. There were many dissentients, and a few who seemed in favour of a trial of the practicability of the plan. Both parties seemed to give some consideration to the proposition, and they were by far too much engaged in thinking of the advice which had been given them, to pay much attention to the quarter from whence it had emanated; more particularly, too, as from his age and infirmities, he was incapacitated from carrying it out or from giving any active assistance to those who were disposed to do so.

A great many efforts were made to get him to say more, particularly with reference to the case under consideration, as being no common one, but the octogenarian had made his effort, and he only replied to the remonstrances of those who, alternately by coaxing and bullying, strove to get information from him, by a vacant stare.

"It's of no use," said the butcher, "you'll get nothing more now from old Timothy; he's done up now, that's quite clear, and ten to one if the excitement of to-night won't go a good way towards slaughtering him before his time."

"Well, it may be so," cried the blacksmith, "but still it's good advice, and as I said before it comes to this — is we to be afraid to lay down in our beds at night, or isn't we?"

Before any reply could be made to this interrogatory, the old clock that was in the public-house parlour struck the hour of eleven, and another peal of thunder seemed to be answering to the tinkling sounds.

"It's a rough night," said one, "I thought there would be a storm before morning by the look of the sun at setting — it went down with a strange fiery redness behind a bank of clouds. I move for going home."

"Who talks of going home," cried the blacksmith, "when vampires are abroad? hasn't old Timothy said, that a stormy night was the very one to settle the thing in."

"No," cried another, "he did not say night at all."

"I don't care whether he said night or day; I've made up my mind to do something; there's no doubt about it but that a vampyre is about the old church. Who'll come with me and ferret it out? it will be good service done to everybody's fireside."

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Chapter CCIV. THE NIGHT WATCH. -- THE VAULT.

It was each moment becoming a more difficult affair to carry on any conversation in the public-house parlour, for not only did the thunder each moment almost interrupt the speakers with its loud reverberations, but now and then such a tremendous gust of wind would sweep round the house that it would be quite impossible for any one to make himself heard amidst its loud howling noise.

These were circumstances however, which greatly aided no doubt, in the getting up of a superstitious feeling in the minds of the people there assembled, which made them ripe for any proposition, which perhaps in their soberer moments they would have regarded with considerable dismay; hence when the blacksmith rushed to the door, crying, --

"Who will follow me to the old church and lay hold of the vampyre?" about half-a-dozen of the boldest and most reckless, -- and be it told to their honour (if there be any honour in such an enterprise, which after all, was a grossly selfish one,) they were the worst characters in the village -- started to their feet to accompany him thither.

There are many persons who waver about an enterprise, who will join it when it has a show of force, and thus was it with this affair. The moment it was found that the blacksmith's proposition had some half-dozen stout adherents, he got as many more -- some of whom joined him from curiosity, and some from dread of being thought to lack courage by their companions if they held off.

There was now a sufficiently large party to make a respectable demonstration, and quite elated with his success, and caring little for the land storm that was raging, the blacksmith, closely followed by the butcher, who had no objection in life to the affair, especially as he was at variance with the parson concerning the tithes of a little farm he kept, called out, --

"To the church -- to the church!" and followed by the rabble, rushed forward in the direction of the sacred edifice. * * * * *

As the hour of eleven has struck, and as the reader is aware that at that hour Sir George Crofton and his two sons, accompanied by Mr. Bevan, had agreed to go to the church on their melancholy errand, we will leave the noisy brawlers of the alehouse for the purpose of detailing the proceedings of those whose fortunes we feel more closely interested in.

The baronet was by no means wavering in his determination, notwithstanding it had been made at a time of unusual excitement, when second thoughts might have been allowed to step in, and suggest some other course of proceeding.

Now, Mr. Bevan was not without his own private hopes that such would be the case; for what he dreaded above all other things was, the truth of the affair, and that Sir George would have the horror of discovering that there was much more in the popular superstition than, without ocular demonstration, he would have been inclined to admit.

Although a man of education and of refined abilities, the evidence that had already showed itself to him of the existence at all events of some supernatural being, with powers analogous to those of the fabled vampyre, was such that he could not wholly deny, withough stultifying his intellect, that there might be such things.

It is a sad circumstance when the mind is, as it were, compelled to receive undeniable evidence of a something which the judgment has the strongest general reasons for disputing, and that was precisely the position of Mr. Bevan, and a most unenviable one it was.

That night's proceedings, however, in the vault, he felt must put an end to all doubts and perplexity upon the subject, and so with a fervent hope that, in some, at present inexplicable manner, the thing would be found to be a delusion, he waited more anxiously the arrival of the Croftons at the parsonage.

At half past ten o'clock, instead of eleven, for as the evening advanced, Sir George Crofton had shown such an amount of nervousness that his sons had thought it would be better to bring him to the parsonage, they arrived, and Mr. Bevan perceived at once what a remarkable effect grief and anxiety had already had upon the features of the baronet.

He was a different man to what, but a few days since, he had been, and more than ever the kind clergyman felt inclined to doubt the expediency of his being present on such an occasion, and yet how to prevent him if he were

really determined, was a matter of no small difficulty.

"My dear friend," said Mr. Bevan, "will you pardon me if I make an effort now to persuade you to abandon this enterprise?"

"I can pardon the effort easily," said Sir George Crofton, "because I know it is dictated by the best of motives, but I would fain be spared it, for I am determined."

"I will say no more, but only with deep sincerity hope that you may return to your dwelling, each relieved from the load of anxiety that now oppresses you."

"I hope to Heaven it may be so."

"The night looks strange and still," said Charles, who wished to draw his father's attention as much as possible from too close a contemplation of the expedition on which they were bound.

"It does," said Edwin; "I should not be surprised at a storm, for there is every indication of some disturbance of the elements."

"Let it come," said Sir George, who fancied that in all those remarks he detected nothing but a wish to withdraw him from his enterprise; "Let it come. I have a duty to perform, and I will do it, though Heaven's thunders should rock the very earth — the forked lightning is not launched at the father who goes to watch at the grave of his child."

Charles and Edwin, upon finding that Sir George was in the mood to make a misapplication of whatever was said to him, desisted from further remarks, but left Mr. Bevan quietly to converse with him, in a calm and unirritating manner.

It was the object of the clergyman to put off as much time as possible before proceeding to the church, so that the period to be spent in the family vault of the Croftons should be lessened as much as possible, for he felt assured that each minute there wasted would be one of great agony to the bereaved father, who would feel himself once again in such close approximation to that daughter on whom he had placed some of his dearest affections.

Sir George, however, defeated this intention, by promptly rising when his watch told him that the hour of eleven had arrived, and it was in vain to attempt to stultify him into a belief that he was wrong as regarded the time, for the church was sufficiently near for them to hear the hour of eleven pealed forth from its ancient steeple.

"Come," said Sir George, "the hour has arrived. I pray you do not delay. I know you are all anxious and fearful concerning me, but I have a spirit of resolution and firmness in this affair which shall yet stand me in good stead. I shall not shrink, as you imagine I shall shrink. Come, then, at once — it is suspense and delay which frets me, and not action."

These words enforced a better spirit into both his sons and Mr. Bevan, and in a few moments the party of four, surely sufficiently strong to overcome any unexpected obstacles, or to defeat any trickery that might be attempted to be passed off upon them, proceeded towards the church.

It will be recollected that it was just a little after that time that the storm commenced, and, in fact, the first clap of thunder, that seemed to shake the heavens, took place just as they reached the old grave-yard adjoining to the sacred building.

"There!" exclaimed Charles, "I thought that it would come."

"What matter?" said Sir George, "come on."

"Humour him in everything," said Mr. Bevan, "It is madness now to contradict him — he will not recede under any circumstances."

The natural senses of Sir George Crofton appeared to be preternaturally acute, for he turned sharply, and said quickly, but not unkindly, —

"No, he will not recede — come on."

After this, nothing was said until they reached the church door, and then while Mr. Bevan was searching in his pockets for the little key which opened the small private entrance, some vivid flashes of lightning lit up with extraordinary brilliancy the old gothic structure — the neighbouring tombs and the melancholy yew trees that waved their branches in the night air.

Perhaps the delay which ensued before Mr. Bevan could find the key, likewise arose from the wish to keep Sir George as short a time as possible within the vault, but he at length produced it, for any further delay could only be accounted for by saying that he had it not.

The small arched doorway was speedily cleared, and as another peal of thunder broke over head in awful

grandeur of sound, they entered the church.

Mr. Bevan took the precaution this time to close the door, so that there could be no interruption from without.

"Now, Sir George," he said, "remember your promise. You are to come away freely at the first dawn of day, and if nothing by then has occurred to strengthen the frightful supposition which, I suppose I may say, we have all indulged in, I do hope that for ever this subject will be erased from your recollection."

"Be it so," said Sir George; "be it so."

Mr. Bevan then busied himself in lighting a lantern, and from beneath one of the pews, where they were hidden, he procured a couple of crowbars, with which to raise the stone that covered the entrance to the vault.

These preparations took up some little time, so that the old clock had chimed the quarter past eleven, and must have been rapidly getting on to the half-hour, before they stood in the aisle close to the vault.

"This marble slab," said Sir George, as he cast his eyes upon it, "always hitherto has been cemented in its place. Why is it not so now?"

"Is it not?" said Mr. Bevan.

"No -- lend me the light."

Mr. Bevan was averse to lending him the light, but he could not very well refuse it; and when Sir George Crofton had looked more minutely at the marble slab, he saw that it had been cemented, but that the cement was torn and broken away, as if some violence had been used for the purpose of opening the vault; but whether that violence came from within or without was a matter of conjecture.

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Chapter CCV. THE MADMAN. -- THE VAMPYRE.

"What does this mean?" cried Sir George Crofton, excitedly.

"Hush!" said Mr. Bevan, "I pray you be calm, sir. If you are to make any discovery that will give you peace of mind, rest assured it will not be made by violence."

"You do not answer my question."

"I cannot answer it." Remember that I know no more than you do, and that, like yourselves, I am an adventurer here in search of the truth."

Sir George said no more upon that head, but with clasped hands and downcast eyes he stood in silence, while his two sons, armed with the crowbars that Mr. Bevan had provided for the occasion, proceeded to lift up the marble slab that covered the vault where lay their sister's remains.

The work was not one of great difficulty, for the slab was not very large, and as it was not cemented down, it yield at once to the powerful leverage that was brought to play against it, and in a few minutes it was placed aside, and the yawning abyss appeared before them.

"Oh! sir," said Mr. Bevan, "even now at this late hour, and when the proceedings have commenced, I pray you to pause."

"Pause!" cried Sir George, passionately, "pause for what?"

"Disturb not the dead, and let them rest in peace. Absolve your mind from the dangerous and perhaps fatal fancies that possess it, and let us say a prayer, and close again this entrance to the tomb."

The sons hesitated, and they probably would have taken the clergyman's advice, but Sir George was firm.

"No, sir," he said, "already have I suffered much in coming thus far; I will not retreat until I have effected all my purpose. I swear it, by Heaven, whose temple we now are in. You would not, Mr. Bevan, have me break such an oath."

"I would not; but I regret you made it. Since, however, it must be so, and this rash adventure is determined upon, follow me; I will lead you the way into these calm regions, where you can sleep, I trust, in peace."

Sir George Crofton made a step forward, as if he would have arrested Mr. Bevan's progress and lead the way himself, but already the clergyman had descended several steps, so he had nothing to do but to follow him.

This they all did, Sir George going immediately after him, and his two sons, with pale anxious-looking faces, as if they had a suspicion that the adventure would end in something terrific, came last and they glanced nervously and suspiciously about them; but they said not a word, nor if they had spoken, it would have been to express great apprehension, and that was what they were ashamed to do.

Mr. Bevan carried the light, and when he felt that he was at the bottom of the stone steps, by finding that he was treading upon the sawdust that was strewn on the floor of the vault, he turned and held the lamp up at arm's length, so that his companions might see their way down the steps.

In another minute they all stood on the floor of the vault.

The light burnt with rather a faint and sickly glare, for so rapidly were noxious gases evolved in that receptacle for the dead, that notwithstanding it had been so frequently opened as it had been lately, they had again accumulated.

In a few moments, however, this was partially remedied by the air from the church above, and the light burnt more brilliantly -- indeed, quite sufficiently so to enable them to look around them in the vault.

Sir George Crofton's feelings at that moment must have been of the most painful and harrowing description. He had lived long enough to be a witness of the death and the obsequies of many members of his family whom he had loved fondly, and there he stood in that chamber of death, surrounded by all the remains of those beings, the memory of whose appearance and voices came now freshly upon his mind.

Mr. Bevan could well guess the nature of the sad thoughts that transpired in the breast of the baronet, and the sons having by accident cast their eyes upon the coffin that contained the remains of their mother, regarded it in silence, while memory was busy, too, within them in conjuring up her image.

"And it has come to this," said Sir George, solemnly.

"We must all come to this," interposed Mr. Bevan; "this is indeed a place for solemn and holy thoughts -- for

self-examination, for self-condemnation."

"But there is peace here."

"There is — the peace that shall be eternal."

"Hark! hark!" said Charles; "what is that?"

"The wind," said Mr. Bevan; "nothing but the wind howling round and through the old belfry — you will remember that it is a boisterous night."

"Turn, turn, father."

Sir George turned and looked at Charles, who pointed in silence to the coffin which contained the corpse of his mother. The light gleamed upon the plate on which was engraved her name. Sir George's features moved convulsively as he read it, and he turned aside to hide a sudden gush of emotion that came over him.

After a few minutes, he touched Mr. Bevan on the arm, and said in a whisper, —

"Where did they place my child?"

The clergyman pointed to the narrow shelf on which was the coffin of Clara Crofton, and then Sir George, making a great effort to overcome his feelings, said, —

"Mr. Bevan, our worthy minister and friend, and you, likewise, my boys, hear me. You can guess to some extent, but not wholly — that can only be known by God — the agony that a sight of the poor remains of her who has gone from me in all the pride of her youth and beauty, must be to me; yet now that I am here I consider it to be my duty to look once again upon the face of my child — my — my lost Clara."

"Oh! father, father," said Edwin, "forego this purpose."

"You will spare us this," cried Charles.

"Repent you, sir," said Mr. Bevan, "of the wish. Let her rest in peace. The dead are sanctified."

"The dead are sanctified, — but I am her father."

"Nay, Sir George, let me implore you."

"Implore me to what, sir? Not to look upon the face of my own child? Peace — peace. It is no profanation for one who loved her as I loved her to look upon her once again. Urge me no more."

"This is in vain," said Charles.

"You are right — it is in vain."

A shriek burst from the lips of Edwin at this moment, and flinging his arms around his father, he held him back. Mr. Bevan, too, gave a cry of terror, and Charles stood with his hands clasped, as if turned to stone.

Their eyes were all bent upon Clara's coffin.

The lid moved, and a strange sound was heard from within that receptacle for the dead — the clock of the old church struck twelve — the coffin lid moved again, and then sliding on one side, it eventually fell upon the floor of the vault.

The four spectators of this scene were struck speechless for the time with terror. Then they stood gazing at the coffin as if they were so many statues.

And now the light which Mr. Bevan still for a miracle held in his trembling grasp, shone on a mass of white clothing within the coffin, and in another moment that white clothing was observed to be in motion. Slowly the dead form that was there rose up, and they all saw the pale and ghastly face. A streak of blood was issuing from the mouth, and the eyes were open.

Sir George Crofton lifted up both his hands, and struck his head, and then he burst into a wild frightful laugh. It was the laugh of insanity.

Mr. Bevan dropped the light, and all was darkness.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sir George Crofton. "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" and the horrible laugh was taken up by many an echo in the old church, and responded to with strange and most unearthly reverberations. "Ha, ha, ha, ha!" Oh what a dreadful sound that was coming at such a time from the lips of the father.

"Fly Edwin — oh, fly," cried Charles.

Edwin screamed twice, for he was full of horror, and then he fell on the floor of the vault in a state of insensibility.

Charles had just sense left him to spring towards the steps, and make a frantic effort to reach the church; in his hurry he fell twice, but each time rising again with a shout of despair, he resumed his efforts, and all the while the horrible laugh of his maniac father sounded in his ears, a sound which he felt that he should never forget.

By a great effort he did reach the aisle of the church, and when there, he called aloud.

"Mr. Bevan, Mr. Bevan, help — oh help! For the love of God speak. Help, help, Mr. Bevan, where are you, speak, I implore you? Am I too going mad? Oh yes, I shall — I must. What mortal intellect can stand such a scene as this. Help, help — oh, help!"

The church was suddenly lit up by a flash of light, and turning in the direction from whence it proceeded, Charles saw Mr. Bevan approaching with a light, which he had procured from the chancel, and it would appear that immediately upon dropping in his horror the light in the vault, he had ran up the stairs with the intent of getting another.

"Who calls me? Who calls me?" he cried.

"I — I," said Charles. "Oh God, what a dreadful night is this."

The clergyman was trembling violently, and was very pale, but he made his way up to Charles, from whose brow the perspiration was falling in heavy drops, and then again they heard the mad Sir George laughing in the vault.

"Ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh God, is not that horrible?" said Charles.

"Most horrible," responded Mr. Bevan.

Bang — bang — bang! at this moment came a violent knocking at the church door, and then several voices were heard without shouting.

"The vampyre — the vampyre — the vampyre."

"What is that? What is that?" said Charles.

"Nay, I know not," replied Mr. Bevan, "I am nearly distracted already. Where is your brother? Did he not escape from the vault? Where is he? Oh, that horrible laugh. Good God! that knocking too at the church door. What can be the meaning of it? Heaven in its mercy guide us now what to do."

The reader will understand the meaning of the knocking, although those bewildered persons who heard it in the church did not. The fact is, that the party from the alehouse headed by the valiant blacksmith, and heated by their too liberal potations had just arrived at the church, and were clamouring for admission.

They had seen through one of the old pointed windows, the reflection of the light which Mr. Bevan carried, and that it was that convinced them some one was there who might if he would pay attention to the uproarous summons.

The knocking lasted with terrible effect, for the old door of the sacred edifice shook again, it seemed as if certainly it could not resist the making of such an attack.

Mr. Bevan was confounded. A horrible suspicion came across him, of what was meant by those violent demands for admission, and he shook with brutal trepidation as he conjectured what might be the effect of the proceedings of a lawless mob.

"Now Heaven help us," he said, "for we shall soon I fear be powerless."

"Good God! what mean you?" said Charles.

"I scarcely know how to explain to you all my fears. They are too dreadful to think of, but while that knocking continues, what can I think?"

"I understand"! they call for my sister."

"Oh call her not now by that name. Remember, and remember with a shudder what she now is."

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Chapter CCVII. THE HUNT OF THE VAMPYRE.

All these occurrences which have taken a considerable time in telling, occurred as simultaneously, that although it would appear Mr. Bevan and Charles Crofton, rather neglected Sir George and Edwin who were still in the vault, they had really not had time to think of them, to say nothing of making any effort to extricate them from the frightful situation in which they were placed.

Probably, after procuring a light, Mr. Bevan would have rushed to their rescue had not that incessant knocking at the church door suggested a new and more horrible danger, still, from the evil passions of an infuriated multitude.

"Oh, Mr. Charles," he said, "if we could but get your father away from the church, there is no knowing what an amount of misery he might be spared."

"Misery, sir; surely there is no more misery in store for us — have we not suffered enough — more than enough. Oh, Mr. Bevan we have fallen upon evil times, and I dread to think what will yet be the end of those most frightful transactions."

The knocking at the church door continued violently, and Charles indicated a wish to proceed there to ascertain what it was, but Mr. Bevan stopped him, saying, —

"No, Charles — no — let them be, I hardly think they will venture to break into the sacred edifice, but whether they do or not, remember that your duty and mine, yours being the duty of a son, and mine that of a friend, should take us now to your father's vault.

"That is true, sir," said Charles, "lead on I will follow you."

Mr. Bevan, who had all the intellectual courage of a man of education, and of regular habits, led the way again to the vault, with the light in his hand. It was a great relief that the insane and horrible laugh of Sir George Crofton had ceased, the best friend of any man could almost have wished him dead, ere their ears had drunk in such horrible sounds.

The shouts and cries from without now became incessant, and it seemed as if some weapon had been procured, wherewith to hammer violently upon the church door, for the strokes were regular and incessant, and it was evident that if they continued long that frail defence against the incursions of the rabble rout without must soon give way.

The only effect, however, which these sounds had upon Mr. Bevan was to make him hasten his progress towards the vault, for anything in the shape of a collision between those who wanted to take the church by storm, and Sir George Crofton, was indeed most highly to be deprecated.

The steps were not many in number, and once again the clergyman and Charles Crofton stood upon the sawdust that covered the flooring of the vault.

At first, in consequence of the flaring of the light, the state of affairs in that dismal region could not be ascertained; but as soon as they could get a view, they found Sir George lying apparently in a state of insensibility across the coffin of his daughter Clara, while Edwin was in a swoon close to his feet.

"Sir George, Sir George," cried Mr. Bevan, "arouse yourself; it is necessary that you leave this place at once."

The baronet got up and glanced at the intruders. Charles uttered a deep groan, for the most superficial observation of his father's face was sufficient to convince him that reason had fled, and that wildness had set up his wild dominion in his brain.

"Father — father," he cried, "speak to me, and dissipate a frightful thought."

"What would you have of me," said Sir George; "I am a vampyre, and this is my tomb — you should see me in the rays of the cold moon gliding 'twixt earth and heaven, and panting for a victim. I am a vampyre."

At this moment Edwin seemed to be partially recovering, for his eyes opened as he lay upon the floor, and he looked around him with a bewildered gaze, which soon settled into one of more intelligence as memory resumed her sway, and he recollected the various circumstances that had brought him into his present position.

"Rouse yourself, Edwin, rouse yourself," cried Mr. Bevan, "you must aid us to remove your father."

"Do you talk of me?" said Sir George, "know you not that I am one of those supernatural existences known as the death and despair-dealing vampyres — it's time I took my nightly prow to look for victims. I must have

blood — I must have blood."

"Gracious Heaven! he raves," said Charles.

"Heed him not," said Mr. Bevan — "heed him not, and touch him not, so that he leave the place — when we have him once clear of the church we can procure assistance, and take him to his own home.

"Edwin," whispered Charles, "what of our sister."

Edwin shook his head and shuddered. "I know nothing but that I saw her — oh, horrible sight, rising from her coffin, and then in a convulsion of terror my senses fled — a frightful ringing laugh came on my ears, and from that time till now, be the period long or short, I have been blessed by a death-like trance."

"Blessed indeed," said Mr. Bevan; "tarry one moment."

Sir George Crofton was ascending the steps of the vault, but his two sons paused for an instant at the request of Mr. Bevan, and then the latter approaching Clara's coffin slightly removed the lid, and was gratified as far as any feeling could be considered gratification under such circumstances, to find that the corpse occupied an ordinary position in its narrow resting place.

"All's right," he said, "let us persuade ourselves that this too has been but a dream, that we have been deceived, and that imagination has played us tricks it is accustomed to play to those who give it the rein at such hours as these — let us think and believe anything rather than that what we have seen to-night is real."

As he spoke these words, he ascended hastily the steps in pursuit of Sir George, who, by this time had alone reached the —

The heavy strokes against the door of the church had ceased, but an odd sort of scraping, rattling sound at the lock convinced the clergyman that a workman of more skill than he who had wielded the hammer, was now at work, endeavouring to force an entrance.

"Oh, if we could but get out," he said, "by the small private entrance, all might be well; Charles, urge your father, I pray you."

Charles did so to the best of his ability, but the blacksmith who had originally incited the crowd to attack the church, in order to get possession of the body of the vampyre, had sent to his workshop for the tools of his craft, and soon quietly accomplished by skill what brute force would have been a long time about, namely, the opening of the church-door.

It was flung wide open, before Sir George Croton and his sons could reach the small private entrance, of which Mr. Bevan had the key.

The sight of the multitude of persons, for they looked such crowds in the church porch, materially increased the incipient sadness of the bereaved father.

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Chapter CCVII. THE FATE OF SIR GEORGE. -- THE CROSS ROAD.

Sir George, when he saw the crowd of persons, seemed to have some undefined idea that they were enemies, but this would not have been productive of any serious consequences, if it had not most unfortunately happened that a most formidable weapon was within his grasp.

That weapon consisted of one of the long iron crowbars which had been successfully used by his own sons in order to force a passage to the family vault, where such horrors had been witnessed.

Suddenly, then, seizing this weapon, which, in the hands of a ferocious man was a most awful one, he swung it once round his head, and then rushed upon those he considered his foes.

He dealt but three blows, and at each of those one of the assailants fell lifeless in the church porch.

To resist, or, to attempt to contend with a man so armed, and apparently possessed of such preternatural strength, was what some of the party wished, and accordingly a free passage was left for him, and he rushed out of the church into the night air shouting for vengeance, and still at interval, accusing himself of being a vampyre, as most dangerous theme to touch upon, considering the then state of feeling in that little district.

Anxiety for the safety of Sir George induced his sons and Mr. Bevan to rush after him, regardless of all other consequences, so that the church, the vaults, and everything they contained, were left to the mercy of a mob infuriated by superstition, rendered still more desperate by the loss of three of their number in so sudden and exemplified a manner.

They opposed no obstacle to the leaving of those persons, who thus for dearer considerations abandoned the old church, but they rushed with wild shouts and gesticulations into the building.

"The vampyre, the vampyre," cried the blacksmith, "death to the vampyre -- death and destruction to the vampyre."

"Hurrah!" cried another, "to the vaults this way to Sir George Crofton's vault."

There seemed to be little doubt now, but that this disorderly rabble would execute summary vengeance upon the supposed nocturnal disturber of the peace of the district.

Ever and anon, too, as these shouts of discord, and of threatening vengeance, rose upon the night air, there would come the distant muttering of thunder, for the storm had not yet ceased, although its worst fury had certainly passed away.

Dark and heavy clouds were sweeping up from the horizon, and it seemed to be tolerably evident that some heavy deluge of rain would eventually settle the fury of the elements, and reconcile the discord of wind and electricity.

Several of the rioters were provided with links and matches, so that in a few moments the whole interior of the church was brilliantly illuminated, while at the same time it presented a grotesque appearance, in consequence of the unsteady and wavering flame from the links, throw myriads of dancing shadows upon the walls.

There would have been no difficulty under any ordinary circumstances in finding the entrance to the vault, where the dead of the Crofton family should have lain in peace, but now since the large flagstone that covered the entrance to that receptacle of the grave was removed, it met their observation at once.

It was strange now to perceive how, for a moment, superstition having led them on so far, the same feeling should induce them to pause, ere they ventured to make their way down these gloomy steps.

It was a critical moment, and probably if any one or two had taken a sudden panic, the whole party might have left the church with precipitation, having done a considerable amount of mischief, and yet as it is so usual with rioters, having left their principal object unaccomplished.

The blacksmith put an end to this state of indecision, for, seizing a link from the man who was nearest to him, he darted down the steps, exclaiming as he did so, --

"Whoever's afraid, need not follow me."

This was a taunt they were not exactly prepared to submit to, and the consequence was, that in a very few moments the ancient and time honoured vault of the Crofton's was more full of the living than of the dead.

The blacksmith laid his hand upon Clara's coffin.

"Here it is," he said, "I know the very pattern of the cloth, and the fashion of the nails, I saw it at Grigson's the

undertaker's before it was taken to the Grange."

"Is she there — is she there," cried half a dozen voices at once.

Even the blacksmith hesitated a moment ere he removed the lid from the receptacle of death, but when he did so, and his eyes fell upon the face of the presumed vampyre, he seemed rejoiced to find in the appearances then exhibited some sort of justification for the act of violence of which already he had been the instigator.

"Here you are," he said, "look at the bloom upon her lips, why her cheeks are fresher and rosier than ever they were while she was alive, a vampyre my mates, this is a vampyre, or may I never break bread again; and now what's to be done."

"Burn her, burn her," cried several.

"Well," said the blacksmith, "mind its as you like. I've brought you here, and shown you what it is, and now you can do what you like, and of course I'll lend you a hand to do it."

Any one who had been very speculative in this affair, might have detected in these last words of the blacksmith, something like an inclination to creep out of the future consequences of what might next be done, while at the same time shame deterred him from exactly leaving his companions in the lurch.

After some suggestions then, and some argumentation as to the probability or possibility of interruption — the coffin itself, was with its sad and wretched occupant, lifted from the niche where it should have remained until that awful day when the dead shall rise for judgement, and carried up the steps into the graveyard, but scarcely had they done so, when the surcharged clouds burst over their heads, and the rain came down in perfect torrents.

The deluge was of so frightful, and continuous a character, that they shrank back again beneath the shelter of the church porch, and there waited until its first fury had passed away.

Such an even down storm seldom lasts long in our climate, and the consequence was that in about ten minutes the shower had so far subsided that although a continuous rain was falling it bore but a very distant comparison to what had taken place.

"How are we to burn the body on such a night as this?"

"Aye, how indeed," said another; "you could not so much as kindle a fire, and if you did, it would not live many minutes."

"I'll tell you what to do at once," said one who had as yet borne but a quiet part in the proceedings; "I'll tell you what to do at once, for I saw it done myself; a vampyre is quite as secure buried in a cross-road with a stake through its body, as if you burned it in all the fires in the world; come on, the rain won't hinder you doing that."

This was a suggestion highly approved of, and the more so as there was a cross road close at hand, so that the deed would be done quick, and the parties dispersed to their respective homes, for already the exertion they had taken, and the rain that had fallen, had had a great effect in sobering them.

And even now the perilous and disgusting operation of destroying the body, by fire or any other way, might have been abandoned, had any one of the party suggested such a course — but the dread of a future imputation of cowardice kept all silent.

Once more the coffin was raised by four of the throng, and carried through the church-yard, which was now running in many little rivulets, in consequence of the rain. The cross-road was not above a quarter of a mile from the spot, and while those who were disengaged from carrying the body, were hurrying away to get spades and mattocks, the others walked through the rain, and finally paused at the place they thought suitable for that ancient superstitious rite, which it was thought would make the vampyre rest in peace.

It is hard to suppose that Sir George Crofton, his sons, and Mr. Bevan were all deceived concerning these symptoms of vitality which they had observed in the corpse of Clara; but certainly now, there was no appearance of anything of the kind, and the only suspicious circumstances appeared to be the blood upon the lips, and the very fresh-like appearance of the face.

If it were really a fact that the attack of Varney the Vampyre upon this fair young girl had converted her into one of those frightful existences, and that she had been about to leave her tomb for the purpose of seeking a repast of blood, it would appear that the intention had been checked and frustrated by the presence of Sir George and his party in the vault.

At last a dozen men now arrived well armed with spades and picks, and they commenced the work of digging a deep, rather than a capacious grave, in silence.

A gloomily and apprehensive spirit seemed to come over the whole assemblage, and the probability is that this

was chiefly owing to the fact that they now encountered no opposition, and that they were permitted unimpeded to accomplish a purpose which had never yet been attempted within the memory of any of the inhabitants of the place.

The grave was dug, and about two feet depth of soil was thrown in a huge mound upon the surface; the coffin was lowered, and there lay the corpse within that receptacle of poor humanity, unimprisoned by any lid for that had been left in the vault, and awaiting the doom which they had decreed upon it, but which they now with a shuddering horror shrunk from performing.

A hedge-stake with a sharp point had been procured, and those who held it looked around them with terrified countenances, while the few links that had not been extinguished by the rain, shed a strange and lurid glare upon all objects.

"It must be done," said the blacksmith, "don't let it be said that we got thus far and then were afraid."

"Do it then yourself," said the man that held the stake, "I dare not."

"Aye, do," cried several voices; "you brought us here, why don't you do it -- are you afraid after all your boasting."

"Afraid -- afraid of the dead; I'm not afraid of any of you that are alive, and it's not likely I'm going to be afraid of a dead body; you're a pretty set of cowards. I've no animosity against the girl, but I want that we shall all sleep in peace, and that our wives and children should not be disturbed nocturnally in their blessed repose. I'll do it if none of you'll do it, and then you may thank me afterwards for the act, although I suppose if I get into trouble I shall have you all turn tail upon me."

"No, we won't -- no, we won't."

"Well, well, here goes, whether you do or not. I -- I'll do it directly."

"He shrinks," cried one.

"No," said another; "he'll do it -- now for it, stand aside."

"Stand aside yourself -- do you want to fall into the grave."

The blacksmith shuddered as he held the stake in an attitude to pierce the body, and even up to that moment it seemed to be a doubtful case, whether he would be able to accomplish his purpose or not; at length, when they all thought he was upon the point of abandoning his design, and casting the stake away, he thrust it with tremendous force through the body and the back of the coffin.

The eyes of the corpse opened wide -- the hands were clenched, and a shrill, piercing shriek came from the lips -- a shriek that was answered by as many as there were persons present, and then with pallid fear upon their countenances they rushed headlong from the spot.

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Chapter CCVIII. THE SOLITARY MAN. -- VARNEY'S DESPAIR.

There lay the dead, alone, in that awful grave, dabbled in blood, and the victim of the horrible experiment that had been instituted to lay a vampire. The rain still fell heavily.

On, surely, pitying Heaven sent those drops to wash out the remembrance of such a deed. The grave slowly began to be a pool of water; it rose up the sides of the coffin, and in a few minutes, more nothing of the ghastly and the terrible contents of that grave could have been seen.

Before that took place, a man of tall stature and solemn gait stepped up and stood upon the brink of the little excavation.

For a time he was as still as that sad occupant of the little space of earth that served her for a resting place, but at length in a tone of deep anguish he spoke, --

"And has it come to this?" he said, "is this my work? Oh, horror! horror unspeakable. In this some hideous dream or a reality of tragedy, so far transcending all I looked for, that if I had tears I should shed them now; but I have none. A hundred years ago that fount was dry. I thought that I had steeled my heart against all gentle impulses; that I had crushed -- aye, completely crushed dove-eyed pity in my heart, but it is not so, and still sufficient of my once human feelings clings to me to make me grieve for thee, Clara Crofton, thou victim!"

We need not tell our readers now, that it was no other than Varney the Vampyre himself from whom these words came.

After thus, then, giving such fervent utterance to the sad feeling that had overcome him, he stood for a time silent, and then glancing around him as well as he could by the dim light, he found the spades, by the aid of which the grave had been dug, and which the men had in their great fight left behind them.

Seizing one, he commenced, with an energy and perseverance that was well adapted to accomplish the object, to fill up the grave.

"You shall now rest in peace," he said.

In the course of about ten minutes the grave was levelled completely, so that there were no signs or indications of any one having been there interred.

The rain was still falling, and notwithstanding that circumstance, he continued at his work, until he had stamped down the earth to a perfect level; and then, even, as if he was still further anxious to thoroughly destroy any indication of the deed that had been done, he took the loose earth that was superfluous, and scattered it about.

"This done," he said, "surely you will now know peace."

He cast down the spade with which he had been working, and lingered for a few brief moments. Suddenly he started, for he heard, or thought he heard, an approaching footstep.

His first impulse appeared to be to fly, but that he soon corrected, and folding his arms solemnly across his breast, he waited for the man that was now evidently making speed towards that spot.

In a few moments more he saw the dusky outline of the figure, and then Mr. Bevan, the clergyman, stood before him.

Mr. Bevan did not at the moment recognize in the form before him the man who had been the guest of Sir George Crofton, and from whom it was supposed had sprung all the mischief and horror that had fallen upon the family, at the Grange.

"Who are you?" he cried; "can you give me information of an outrage that has been committed hereabouts."

"Many," said Varney.

"Ah! I know the voice. Are you not he who was rescued from the sea by the two sons of Sir George Crofton."

"Well."

"Now I know you, and I am glad to have met with you."

"You will try to kill me?"

"No, no -- peace is my profession."

"Ah! you are the priest of this place. Well, sir, what would you with me?"

"I would implore you to tell me if it be really true that -- that -- "

Mr. Bevan paused, for he disliked to show that the fear that it might be true there were such creatures as

vampyres, had taken so strong a hold of him.

"Proceed," said Varney.

"I will. Are you then a vampyre?"

"A strange question for one living man to put to another! Are you?"

"You are inclined to trifle with me. But I implore you to answer me. I am perhaps the only man in all this neighbourhood to whom you can give an answer in the affirmative with safety."

"And why so?"

"Because I question not the decrees of Heaven. If it seems fit to the great Ruler of Heaven and of earth that there should be ever such horrible creatures as vampyres, ought I his creature to question it?"

"You ought not --- you ought not. I have heard much from priests, but from your lips I hear sound reason. I am a vampyre."

Mr. Bevan shrunk back, and shook for a moment, as he said in a low faltering tone, ---

"For how long --- have you --- "

"You would know how long I have endured such a state of existence. I will tell you that I have a keen remembrance of being hunted through the streets of London in the reign of Henry the Fourth."

"Henry the Fourth?"

"Yes, I have seen all the celebrities of this and many other lands from that period. More than once have I endeavoured to cast off this horrible existence, but it is my destiny to remain in it. I was picked up by the brothers Crofton after one of my attempts to court death. They have been repaid."

"Horribly!"

"I cannot help it --- I am what I am."

There was a strange and mournful solemnity about the tones of Varney that went to the heart of Mr. Bevan, and after a few moments pause, he said, ---

"You greatly, very greatly awake my interest. Do not leave me. Ask yourself if there is anything that I can do to alleviate your destiny. Have you tried prayer?"

"Prayer?"

"Yes. Oh! there is great virtue in prayer."

"I pray? What for should I pray but for that death which whenever it seems to be in my grasp has them flitted from me in mockery, leaving me still a stranded wretch upon the shores of this world. Perhaps you have at times fancied you have suffered some great amount of mental agony. Perhaps you have stood by the bed-side of dying creatures, and heard them howl their hopelessness of Heaven's mercy, but you cannot know --- you cannot imagine --- what I have suffered."

As he spoke, he turned away, but Mr. Bevan followed him, saying, ---

"Remain --- remain, I implore you,"

"Remain --- and wherefore?"

"I will be your friend --- it is my duty to be such; remain, and you shall if you wish it, have an asylum in my house. If you will not pray yourself, to Heaven, I will pray for you, and in time to come you will have some hope. Oh, believe me, earnest prayer is not in vain."

"My friend!"

"Yes, your friend; I am, I ought to be the friend of all who are unhappy."

"And is there really one human being who does not turn from me in horror and disgust? Oh, sir, you jest."

"No --- on my soul, that which I say I mean. Come with me now, and you shall if you please, remain in secret in my house --- no one shall know you are with me --- from the moment that you cross the threshold you shall hope for happier days."

The vampyre paused, and it was evident that he was deeply affected by what Mr. Bevan said to him, for his whole frame shook.

**Chapter CCIX. THE STRANGE GUEST. -- THE LITTLE CHAPEL. --
VARNEY'S NARRATIVE.**

Mr. Bevan could not but see that he had made some impression, even upon the obdurate heart of Varney, and he was determined to follow that impression up by every means in his power.

"Always have in mind," he said, that by trusting me, you trust one who is not in the habit of condemning his fellows. You will be safe from anything like sanctified reproach, for to my thinking, religion should be a principle of love and tenderness, and not a subject upon which people who, perhaps are themselves liable and obnoxious to all sorts of reproach, should deal forth denunciations against their neighbours."

"Is that indeed your faith?"

"It is; and it is the real faith, taught by my Great Master."

"You are as one among many thousands."

"Nay, you may have been unfortunate in meeting with bad specimens of those who are devoted in the priesthood. Do not condemn hastily."

"Hastily! I have been some hundreds of years in condemning."

"You will come with me."

"I will for once again put faith in human nature."

"Tell me then, before we leave this spot, if you know aught of what has happened to, or become of the body of Clara Croton."

"I can tell you; it was left here buried, but uncovered."

"Indeed -- the ground is level, and I see no trace of a grave."

"No; I have obliterated all such traces, I have placed the earth upon her -- may she now rest in peace. Oh, that such a flower should have been so rudely plucked, and I the cause. Is not that enough to make Heaven's angels mutiny if I should essay to pass the golden gates."

"Say no more of that. I thank God that the body is so disposed of, and that it will not come in the way of any of the Crofton family. This affair had far better now be let sink into oblivion -- alas! poor Sir George is now the most pitiable sufferer."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; madness has seized upon him. He only sits and smiles to himself, weaving in his imagination strange fancies."

"And call you that unhappy?"

"It is called, and considered so."

"Oh, fatal error -- he is happy. Reason! boasted, God-like reason -- what are you but the curse of poor humanity. The maniac, who will in his cell, fancy it a gorgeous hall, and of the damp straw that is his couch make up a glittering coronet, is a king indeed, and most happy."

"This is poetical," said Mr. Bevan, "if not true."

"It is true."

"Well, well; we will talk on that as well as other themes at our leisure. Come on, and I will at once take you to my home, where you will be safe, and I hope more happy."

"Are you not afraid?"

"I am not."

"You are right, confidence is safety -- lead on, sir, I'll follow you, although I little thought to make any human companionship to-night."

Mr. Bevan walked only about a step in advance as they proceeded towards the parsonage house, and on the way he conversed with Varney with calmness which considering the very peculiar circumstances, few men could have brought to bear upon the occasion.

But Mr. Bevan was no common man. He looked upon nature, and all the living creatures that make up its vital portion with peculiar eyes, and if the bishop of his diocese had known one half of what Mr. Bevan thought, he would not have suffered him to remain in his religious situation.

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But he kept the mass of his liberal opinions to himself, although he always acted upon them, and a man more completely free from sectarian dogmas, and illiberal fancies of superstition, which are nicknamed faith, could not be.

There was still, notwithstanding all the circumstances, a hope lingering in his mind that Varney might after all not be even what he thought himself to be, but some enthusiast who had dreamt himself into a belief of his own horrible powers.

We know that such was not the case. But it was natural enough for Mr. Bevan to hold as long as he could by such an idea.

And so those two most strangely assorted beings, the clergyman and the vampyre, walked together towards the pretty and picturesque dwelling of the former.

"The distance is short," said Mr. Bevan.

"Nay, that matters not," replied Varney.

"I spoke because I thought you seemed fatigued."

"No, my frame is of iron. My heart is bowed down with many griefs, but the physical structure knows no feeling of dejection. The life I possess is no common one. Oh! would that it were so, that I might shuffle it off as any ordinary men can do."

"Do not say that. Who knows but that after all your living accomplishes better things?"

"I cannot say that it accomplishes aught completely but one thing."

"And that?"

"That is my most exquisite misery."

"Even that may pass away. But here we are at my little garden gate. Come in, and fear nothing; for if you will seek Heaven, as I would wish you, you will find this place such a haven of peace, and such a refuge against the storms of life, as you hardly fancied existed, I dare say, in this world."

"Not for me. I did not fancy that there existed a spot on earth on which I could lie down in peace, and yet it may be here."

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Chapter CXCVII. VARNEY OPENS THE VAST STORE-HOUSE OF HIS MEMORY.

A more singular conversation than that which took place between Varney, the Vampyre, and this minister of religion, could not be conceived. If there was any one particle of goodness existing in Varney's disposition, we may suspect it would now be developed.

Perhaps the whole domestic history of the world never yet exhibited so remarkable an association as that between Mr. Bevan and Varney; and when they sat down together in the little cheerful study of the former, never had four walls enclosed two beings of the same species, and yet of such opposite pursuits.

But we can hardly call Varney, the Vampyre, human — his space of existence had been lengthened out beyond the ordinary routine of human existence, and the kind of vitality that he now enjoyed, if one might be allowed the expression, was something distinct and peculiar.

It speaks volumes, however, for the philanthropy and liberality of the minister of any religion who could hold out the hand of fellowship to so revolting and to so horrible an existence.

But Mr. Bevan was no common man. His religion was doctrinal, certainly, but it was free from bigotry; and his charity to the feelings, opinions, and prejudices of others was immense.

He was accustomed to say "may not my feelings be prejudices," and one of the sublimest precepts of the whole Scriptures was to him that which says, "Judge not, lest ye, too, should be judged."

Hence it was that he would not allow himself to revolt at Varney. It had seemed right to the great Creator of all things that there should be such a being, and therefore, he, Mr. Bevan, would neither question nor contemn it.

"Look about you," he said to Varney with a disordered gaze; "you seem to look very about you as if there was danger in the atmosphere you breathe, but be assured you are safe here; it shall be my life for your life if any harm should be attempted to be done you."

Varney looked at him for a few moments silence, and then in his deep and sepulchral voice he spoke, saying,

"My race is run."

"What mean you by that expression?"

"I mean I shall no longer be a terror to the weak, nor a curiosity to the strong. In time past, more than once I have tried to shuffle off the evil of this frightful existence, but some accident, strange, wild, and wonderful, has brought me back to life again."

"Perhaps not an accident," said Mr. Bevan.

"You may be right, but when I have sought to rid the world of my own bad company, I have been moved to do so by some act of kindness and consideration, most contrary to my deserts; and then again when I have been cast back by the waves of fate upon the shores of existence, my heart is burdened, and I have begun to plan to work mischief and misery and woe to all."

"I can understand how your feelings have alternated, but I hope that our association will have better result."

"Yes, a better result, for with consummate art, with cool perseverance and extended knowledge, I trust I may think of some means which cannot fail of changing this living frame to that dust from which it sprung, and to which it should long since have returned."

"You believe in that, but do you not think there is a pure spirit that will yet live, independent of the grovelling earth?"

"There are times when I have hoped that even that fable were true; but you have promised me rest, will you keep your word?"

"That will I most certainly; but will you keep yours? You have promised me some details of your extraordinary existence, and as a divine, and I hope in some degree as a philosopher, I look for them with some degree of anxiety."

"You shall have them — leave me pens, ink and paper, and in the solitude of this room, until to-morrow morning, and you shall have what I believe to be the origin of this most horrible career."

"Your wishes shall be consulted — but, will you not take refreshment?"

"Nothing — nothing. My refreshment is one I need not name to you, and when forced by the world's customs and considerations of my own safety, I have partaken of man's usual food, if has but ill accorded with my preternatural existence, I eat not — drink not — here. You know me as I am."

As he continued speaking, Varney evidently grew weaker, and Mr. Bevan could scarcely persuade himself that it was not through actual want of nourishment, but the Vampyre assured him that it was not so, and that rest would recruit him, to which opinion, as the experience of human nature generally afforded no index to Varney's peculiar habits, he was forced to subscribe.

There was a couch in the room, and upon that Varney laid himself, and as he seemed indisposed for further conversation, Mr. Bevan left him, promising to return to him as he himself requested in the morning, with the hope of finding that he had completed some sort of narrative to the effect mentioned.

It can scarcely be said that Mr. Bevan had thoroughly made up his mind to leave his guest for so long a period, and as there was a window that looked from the study in his little garden, he thought, that by now and then peeping in, to see that all was right, he could scarcely be considered as breaking faith with his mysterious guest.

"He will surely attempt nothing against his own life," thought Mr. Bevan, "for already he seems to be impressed with the futility of such an attempt, and to think that when he has made them he has been made the sport of circumstances that had forced him back to life again, despite all his wishes to the contrary."

Mr. Bevan reasoned thus, but he little knew what was passing in the mind of Varney the Vampyre.

After about two hours more, when the night was profoundly dark, the liberal-minded but anxious clergyman went into his garden, for the purpose of peeping into his study, and he then saw, as he supposed, his visitor lying enveloped in his large brown cloak, lying upon the couch.

He was better pleased to see he was sleeping, and recovering from the great fatigue of which he complained, instead of writing, although that writing promised to be of so interesting a character, and he crept softly away for fear of awakening him.

The hour had now arrived at which Mr. Bevan usually retired to rest, but he delayed doing so, and let two hours more elapse, after which, he again stole out of his garden, and peeped into the study.

There lay the long, gaunt, slumbering figure upon the couch.

"I am satisfied," said Mr. Bevan to himself; "fatigue has completely overcome him, and he will sleep till morning now. I long much to become acquainted with his strange eventful history."

After this, Mr. Bevan retired to rest, but not until in prayer he had offered up his thanks, and stated his hopes of being able to turn aside from the wicked path he had been pursuing, the wretched man who at that moment was slumbering peacefully beneath his roof.

We should have less of opposition to churchmen, if they were all like Mr. Bevan, and not the wily, ravenous, illiberal, grasping crew they really are. There was no priestcraft in him, he was almost enough to make one in love with his doctrines, be they what they might, so that they were his.

Although we say that he retired to rest, we should more properly say he retired to try to rest; for, after all, there were feelings of excitement and anxiety about him which he could not repress wholly; and although he had every reason to believe his guest was sleeping, and clamy sleeping too, yet he found he was becoming painfully alive to the slightest sound.

He became nervously alive to the least interruption, and kept fancying that he heard the slightest indications of movements in the house, such as at any other time he would have paid no attention to.

It always happened too, provokingly, that just as he was dropping into a slight slumber, that he thought he heard one of these noises, and then he would start, awake, and sit up in his bed, and listen attentively, until tired nature forced him to repose again.

Those who have passed such a night of watchfulness need not be told how very very exciting it becomes, and hour after hour becomes more intense and acute, and the power of escaping its fell influence less and less.

Indeed, it was not until the dawn of morning that Mr. Bevan tasted the sweets of sound repose, then, as is generally usual after nights of fever and disquietude, the cool, pure, life-giving air of early morn, produced quite a different state of feeling, and his repose was calm and serene.

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Chapter CCXI. THE FLIGHT OF THE VAMPYRE. -- THE MASS.

As was to be expected, in consequence of the sleepless state in which he had been in the early part of the night, Mr. Bevan did not awaken at his usually early hour; and as his confidential servant had stolen into his room upon tip-toe, and seeing that she was sleeping quietly and soundly, she did not think proper to disturb him.

An autumnal sun was gleaming into his lattice window when he spontaneously awoke, and the reflection of the sunlight upon a particular portion of the wall convinced him that it was late.

For a moment or two, he lay in that dreamy state when we are just conscious of where we are, without having the smallest pretensions to another idea; and probably he would have dropped to sleep again had it not been that his servant again opened the door, the lock of which had the infirmity of giving a peculiar snap every time it was used, and that thoroughly awakened him.

"Oh, you are awake, sir?" said his old servant, "I never knew you sleep so long. Breakfast has been ready an hour and a half. It's a cool morning, sir, and what's worse, I can't get into your study to light you a bit of fire, which I thought you would want."

The interruption altogether, and the mention of the study, served completely to arouse Mr. Bevan to a remembrance of the events of the preceding evening, and he cried, --

"What's the time? What's the time?"

"It's after nine, and as for the study -- "

"Never mind the study -- never mind the study, I will be down directly."

Scarcely ever had Mr. Bevan dressed himself with such precipitation as he now did.

"How provoking," he thought, "that upon this particular occasion, when I should like to have been up and stirring earlier than usual, I am a good hour and a half later. It can't be helped though, and if my guest of last night is to be credited, he won't be waiting for his breakfast."

The simple toilet of the kind-hearted clergyman was soon completed, and then he ran down stairs to the lower part of his house, and finding that his servant was in the kitchen, he thought he might at once proceed to his study, to speak to the extraordinary inmate.

He had furnished Varney with the means of locking himself in for the night, and it would seem that the vampyre had fully availed himself of those means, for when Mr. Bevan tried the door, he found himself as much at fault as his servant had been, and could not by any means effect an admittance.

"He said his fatigue was great," remarked Mr. Bevan, "and so it seems it was, for surely he is yet sleeping. It is a comfort when one oversleeps oneself that the necessity for one's rising has been put off by the same means."

Unwilling to disturb Varney, and not hearing from the slightest movement from within that he had yet done so, Mr. Bevan went to his breakfast, much better satisfied than he had been a quarter of an hour since, and as the breakfast room adjoined the study, he had every opportunity if the vampyre should be stirring, of hearing and attending to him.

Not above ten minutes elapsed in this kind of way, when Mr. Bevan, although he saw nothing of his guest, heard something of the approach of a visitor, by the trampling of feet upon the gravel walk, and upon looking through the window, he saw that it was his friend Sir George Crofton from the hall.

It was rather an early hour for visitors, but still under the peculiar circumstances, Sir George might be supposed not to stand upon ceremony in calling upon the clergyman of his parish and upon his old friend, combining, as Mr. Bevan did, both these characters in one.

It was rather, though, placing the clergyman in a situation of difficulty, for while there was nothing he so much hated as mystery and concealment, he yet could not, upon the spur of the moment, decide whether he ought to inform Sir George of the presence of Varney or not.

After the frightful manner in which the baronet and his family had suffered from what might be called the machinations of the vampyre, it could scarcely be supposed that his feelings were otherwise than in a most exasperated state, and it might, for all he knew, be actually dangerous for the personal safety of that guest whom he had pledged his honour to protect, to allow Sir George Crofton to know at all that he was beneath his roof.

While he was engaged in these considerations, and before he could come to anything like a conclusion

concerning them, Sir George was announced, and shown as a privileged visitor into the parlour.

We cannot but pause to make a remark upon the stupendous change that had taken place in the appearance of that unhappy man. When first we presented him to the reader, he was as good a specimen of the hale hearty English gentleman, as we could wish to see; good humour and good health beamed forth on every feature of his face; and well they might do so, for although the past had not been unchequered by trials, the future wore to him a sunny aspect, and some of the feelings of his youth were returning to him, in the happiness of his children.

But what a change was now. Twenty years of ordinary existence, with extraordinary vicissitudes, would scarcely have produced the effect that the events of the last fortnight had upon that unhappy father.

He appeared to be absolutely sinking into the grave with grief, and not only was his countenance strangely altered, but the tones of his voice were completely changed from what they had been.

Alas! poor Sir George Crofton, never will the light of joy again illumine your face. There are griefs, inevitable griefs, which time will heal, griefs which the more we look upon them the more we find our reason array itself against them. But his sorrows were of a different complexion, and were apt to grow more gigantic from thought.

"Good morning, Mr. Bevan," he said, "I am an early visitor, sir."

"Not more early than welcome, Sir George. I pray you to be seated."

"You are very good," said the baronet, "but when one comes at an hour like this, I am of opinion that he ought to come with something like a good excuse for his intrusion."

"There is none needed, I assure you."

"But I have been thinking upon the advice which you have given me, Mr. Bevan, to leave this part of the country, and try the endeavour, by the excitement and changes of foreign travel, to lessen the weight of my calamities."

"I think your determination is a good one, Sir George."

"Probably it is the best I could adopt, but I must confess that I should set about it in better spirit, but I am haunted by apprehensions."

"Apprehensions, Sir George! is not the worst passed?"

"It may be, and I hope to Heaven it is, but I have another child, another daughter, fair and beautiful as my lost Clara; but what security have I that that dreadful being may not pursue her, and with frightful vindictiveness drive her to the grave."

Mr. Bevan was silent two or three minutes, and the idea crossed him that if he could get Sir George in the proper state of mind, it would be, perhaps, better that he should know that the vampyre was in the house, and in such a state of mind as not to renew any outrages against him or his family, than that he should go abroad with the dread clinging to him of being still followed and persecuted by that dreadful being.

"Sir George," said Mr. Bevan, in an extremely serious voice, "Sir George, did you ever reason with yourself calmly and seriously, and in a Christian spirit, about this affair?"

"Calmly, Mr. Bevan! how could I reason calmly?"

"I have scarcely put my question as I ought; what I meant to ask was, what are your personal feelings towards the vampyre? We must recollect that even he, dreadful existence as he is, was fashioned by the same God that fashioned us; and who shall say but he may be the victim of a horrible and stern necessity? Who shall say but he may be tortured by remorse, and that the circumstances connected with your daughter, of which you so justly complain, may be to him sources of the bitterest reflection? What if you were to be assured that never more would that mysterious man cross your path, if man we can call him? Do you think that you could then forgive him?"

"It is hard to say, but the feeling that my other child was safe would prompt me much."

"Sir George, I could make a communication to you if I thought you would listen to it patiently; if you will swear to me to be calm."

"I swear, tell me -- oh, tell me!"

"The vampyre is in this house."

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Chapter CCXII. THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

One may form some sort of judgment of the astonishment with which Sir George Crofton heard this statement. He looked indeed a few moments at Mr. Bevan, as if he had a stong suspicion that he could not possibly have heard aright, so that the good clergyman was induced to repeat his statement, which he did, by saying, --

"Sir George, I assure you, however remarkable such a circumstance may be, and however much you may feel yourself surprised at it, that in the extreme bitterness of spirit, and feeling all the compunction that you could possibly wish him to feel, Varney the Vampyre is now an inmate of this house."

Had a bomb-shell fallen at his feet, Sir George Crofton could not have felt more surprised, and he exhibited that surprise by several times repeating to himself, --

"Varney the Vampyre an inmate of this house! Varney the Vampyre here!"

"Yes," said Mr. Bevan, "here, an inmate of this house. He is within a few paces of you, slumbering in the next apartment, and from his own lips you shall have the assurance that never again will you have any trouble on his account, and that he most bitterly and most deeply regrets the suffering he had brought upon you and yours."

"Will that regret," said Sir George, excitedly, "restore the dead? Will that regret give me my child again? Will it open the portals of the grave, and restore her to me who was the life and joy of my existence? Tell me, will it do that? If not, what is his regret to me?"

"No, Sir George, no, his regret will not do that. There is such power, but it is not upon earth. Heaven delegates not such fearful responsibilities to any of its creatures, and the only reason which has induced me to make this confidence was to take from you the fearful anxiety of fancying yourself followed by that dreadful being."

"Vengeance," replied Sir George Crofton, "vengeance shall be mine. In the name of my lost child, I cry for vengeance. Shall he not perish who has made her whom I love perish? Make way, Mr. Bevan, make way."

"No, Sir George, no, this is my house. I, as a Christian minister, offered the hospitality of its roof to Varney the Vampyre, and I cannot violate my word."

"You speak, sir, to a desperate man," cried "Sir George; "no roof to me is sanctified, beneath which the murderer of my child finds a shelter. Mr. Bevan, the respect that one man has for another, or ever has had for another, cannot exceed the respect I have for you; but with all that, sir, I cannot forget my own personal wrongs; the shade of my murdered Clara beckons me."

"Fly, Varney, fly," cried Mr. Bevan, "fly."

"Is it so?" said Sir George; "do you then side with my direst foe?"

"No -- no, I side with Sir George Croton against his own furious unbridled passions."

Neither from profession nor practice was Mr. Bevan one who was likely to force to resist Sir George, and at the moment the baronet was about to lay hands upon him to hurl him from his path, he slipped aside.

"Rash man," he said, "the time will come when you will repent this deed."

The door of the study was still fast, but to the infuriated Sir George, that opposed but a very frail obstacle, and with the effort of a moment he forced it open, and rushed into the apartment.

"Varney, monster," he cried, "prepare to meet your doom. Your career is at an end."

Mr. Bevan was after him, and in the room with him in a moment, fully expecting that some very dreadful scene would ensue, as a consequence of the unbridled passion of Sir George Crofton.

Sir George Crofton was standing in the centre of the apartment with Varney's large brown cloak in his grasp, which he had dragged from the sofa, but the vampyre himself was not to be seen.

"Escaped!" he cried, "escaped!"

"Thank Heaven, then," said Mr. Bevan, "that this roof has not been desecrated by an act of violence. Oh, Sir George, it is a mercy that time has been given to think he has escaped."

"I'll follow him, were it to perdition."

Sir George was about to open the window and rush into the garden, thinking, of course, it was by that means by which the vampyre escaped, but Mr. Bevan laid his hand upon the smooth gravel path that was immediately below the casement.

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"Behold," he said, "one of the first results of an autumnal night. That this coating of fleecy sleet, you see, is undisturbed; it fell about midnight; nine hours have since elapsed, and you perceive there is no foot mark upon it, and in what direction would you chase Varney the Vampyre while he has such a start of you?"

Infuriated with passion, as was Sir George Crofton, the reasonableness of this statement struck him forcibly, and he became silent. A revulsion of feeling took place; he staggered to a seat, and wept.

"Yes, he is gone," he said. "Yes, the murderer of my child is gone; vengeance is delayed, but perhaps not altogether stopped. Oh, Mr. Bevan, Mr. Bevan, why did you tell me he was here?"

"I do now regret having done so, but I believed him to be here, and his departure is as mysterious to me as it can be to you."

Mr. Bevan cast his eyes upon the table, and there he saw a large packet addressed to himself. Sir George saw it too, at the same moment, and pointing to it, said, --

"Is that the vampyre's legacy to his new friend?"

"Sir George," said Mr. Bevan, "let it suffice that the packet is addressed to me."

All the good breeding of the gentleman returned, and Sir George Crofton bowed as he left the room, closely followed by the clergyman, who was as much bewildered by the disappearance of Varney as even Sir George could possibly be. He had a most intense desire to examine the packet, with the hope that there he should find some explanation or solution of the mystery; but not being aware, of course, of what it contained, he could not tell if it would be prudent to trust Sir George at that time with its contents.

As may be well supposed, there was a sort of restraint in the manner of both of them after what had happened, and they did what was very rare with them both, parted without making any appointment for the future.

But whatever might be the feelings of Sir George Crofton then, a little reflection would be quite sure to bring him back again to a proper estimation of what was due to such a friend as Mr. Bevan, and we cannot anticipate any serious interruption to their general friendly intercourse.

The moment the clergyman found himself alone, he with eager steps went into his study, and eagerly seized upon the packet that was left to him by the vampyre, the outside of which merely bore the superscription of -- "These to the Rev. Mr. Bevan, and strictly private."

With eagerness he tore open the envelope, and the first thing that attracted his attention was a long, narrow slip of paper, on which were written the following words: --

"It was not my intention to trespass largely upon your hospitality; it would have been unjust -- almost approaching to criminality so to do. I could only think of taking a brief refuge in your house, so brief as should just enable me to avail myself of the shadows of night to escape from a neighbourhood where I knew I should be hunted.

"The few hours which I have quietly remained beneath your roof have been sufficient to accomplish that object, and the few papers that I leave you accompanying this, contain the personal information concerning me you asked. They had been previously prepared, and are at your service.

"To attempt to follow me would be futile, for I have as ample means of making a rapid journey as you could possibly call to your aid, and I have the advantage of many hours' start; under these circumstances I have no hesitation in telling you that my destination is Naples, and that perhaps the next you hear of me will be, that some stranger in a fit of madness has cast himself into the crater of a burning mountain, which would at once consume him and all his sorrows.

"VARNEY THE VAMPYRE."

One may imagine the feelings with which Mr. Bevan read this most strange and characteristic epistle -- feelings that for some moments kept him a prisoner to the most painful thoughts.

All that he had hoped to accomplish by the introduction of Varney to his house was lost now. He had but in fact given him a better opportunity of carrying out a terrible design -- a design which now there really did not appear to be any means of averting the consummation of.

"Alas! alas!" he said, "this is most grievous, and what can I do now, to avert the mischief -- nothing, absolutely nothing. If it be true that he has, as he says he has, the means of hastening on his journey, all pursuit would be utterly useless."

This was taking a decidedly correct view of the matter. Varney was not the sort of man, if he really intended to reach Naples quickly, to linger on his route, and then there was another view of the subject which could not but

occur to Mr. Bevan, and that was, that his mentioned destination might be but a blind to turn off pursuit.

Chapter CCXIII. VARNEY GIVES SOME PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF.

Never had Mr. Bevan in all his recollection been in such a state of hesitation as now.

He was a man usually of rapid resolves, and very energetic action; but the circumstances that had recently taken place were of so very remarkable a nature, that he was not able to bring to bear upon them any portion of his past experience.

He felt that he could come to no determination, but was compelled by the irresistible force of events to be a spectator instead of an actor in what might ensue.

"I shall hear," he thought, "if any such event happens at Naples as that to which Varney has adverted, and until I do so, or until a sufficient length of time has elapsed to make me feel certain that he will not plunge into that burning abyss, I shall be a prey to every kind of fear; and then again as regards Sir George Crofton. What am I to say to him? Shall I show him this note or not?"

Even that was a question which he could not absolutely decide in his own mind, although he was strongly inclined to think that it would be highly desirable to do so, and while he was considering the point, and holding the note in his hand, his eye fell upon the other papers which had been enclosed with it, and addressed to him.

Hoping and expecting that there he should find something that would better qualify him to come to an accurate conclusion, he took up the packet, and found that the topmost paper bore the following endorsement: —

"SOME PARTICULARS CONCERNING MY OWN LIFE."

"There, then," said Mr. Bevan, "is what he has promised me."

It was to be expected that Mr. Bevan should take up those papers with a very considerable amount of curiosity, and as he could not think what course immediately to pursue that would do good to Varney or anybody else, he thought he had better turn his attention at once to the documents that the vampyre had left to his perusal.

Telling his servant, then, not to allow him to be disturbed unless the affair was a very urgent one indeed, he closed the door of his study, and commenced reading one of the most singular statements that ever created being placed upon paper. It was as follows: —

* * * * *

During my brief intercourse — and it has always been brief when of a confidential nature with various persons — I have created surprise by talking of individuals and events long since swallowed up in the almost forgotten past. In these few pages I declare myself more fully.

In the reign of the First Charles, I resided in a narrow street, in the immediate neighbourhood of Whitehall. It was a straggling, tortuous thoroughfare, going down to the Thames; it matters little what were my means of livelihood, but I have no hesitation in saying that I was a well-paid agent in some of the political movements which graced and disgraced that period.

London was then a mass of mean-looking houses; with here and there one that looked like a palace, compared with its humbler neighbours. Almost every street appeared to be under the protection of some great house situated somewhere in its extent, but such of those houses as have survived the wreck of time rank now with their neighbours, and are so strangely altered, that I, who knew many of them well, could now scarcely point to the place where they used to stand.

I took no prominent part in the commotions of that period, but I saw the head of a king held up in its gore at Whitehall as a spectacle for the multitude.

There were thousands of persons in England who had aided to bring about that result, but who were very far from expecting it, and who were the first to fall under the ban of the gigantic power they had themselves raised.

Among these were many of my employers; men, who had been quite willing to shake the stability of a throne so far as the individual occupying it was concerned; but who certainly never contemplated the destruction of monarchy; so the death of the First Charles, and the dictatorship of Cromwell, made royalists in abundance.

They had raised a spirit they could not quell again, and this was a fact which the stern, harsh man, Cromwell, with whom I had many interviews, was aware of.

My house was admirably adapted for the purposes of secrecy and seclusion, and I became a thriving man from

the large sums I received for aiding the escape of distinguished loyalists, some of whom lay for a considerable time perdu at my house, before an eligible opportunity arrived of dropping down the river quietly to some vessel which would take them to Holland.

It was to offer me so much per head for these royalists that Cromwell sent for me, and there was one in particular who had been private secretary to the Duke of Cleveland, a young man merely, of neither family nor rank, but of great ability, whom Cromwell was exceedingly anxious to capture.

I think there likewise must have been some private reasons which induced the dictator of the Commonwealth to be so anxious concerning this Master Francis Latham, which was the name of the person alluded to.

It was late one evening when a stranger came to my house, and having desired to see me, was shown into a private apartment, when I immediately waited upon him.

"I am aware," he said, "that you have been confidentially employed by the Duke of Cleveland, and I am aware that you have been very useful to distressed loyalists, but in aiding Master Francis Latham, the duke's secretary, you will be permitted almost to name your own terms."

I named a hundred pounds, which at that time was a much larger sum than now, taking into consideration the relative value. One half of it was paid to me at once, and the other promised within four-and-twenty hours after Latham had effected his escape.

I was told that at half-past twelve o'clock that night, a man dressed in common working apparel, and with a broom over his shoulder would knock at my door and ask if he could be recommended to a lodging, and that by those tokens I should know him to be Francis Latham. A Dutch lugger, I was further told, was lying near Gravesend, on board of which, to earn my money, I was expected to place the fugitive.

All this was duly agreed upon; I had a boat in readiness, with a couple of watermen upon whom I could depend, and I was far from anticipating any extraordinary difficulties in carrying out the enterprise.

I had a son about twelve years of age, who being a sharp acute lad, I found very useful upon several occasions, and I never scrupled to make him acquainted with any such affair as this that I am recounting.

Half-past twelve o'clock came, and in a very few minutes after that period of time there came a knock at my door, which my son answered, and according to arrangement, there was the person with a broom, who asked to be recommended to a lodging, and who was immediately requested to walk in.

He seemed rather nervous, and asked me if I thought there was much risk.

"No," said I, "no more than ordinary risk in all these cases, but we must wait half an hour 'till the tide turns. For just now to struggle against it down the river would really be nothing else but courting observation."

To this he perfectly agreed, and sat down by my fireside.

I was as anxious as he to get the affair over, for it was a ticklish job, and Oliver Cromwell, if he had brought anything of the kind exactly home to me, would as life order me to be shot as he would have taken his luncheon in the name of the Lord.

I accordingly went down to the water-side to speak to the men who were lying there with the boat, and had ascertained from them that in about twenty minutes the tide would begin to ebb in the centre of the stream, when two men confronted me.

Practised as I was in the habits and appearances of the times, I guessed at once who they were. In fact, a couple of Oliver Cromwell's dismounted dragoons were always well known.

"You are wanted," said one of them to me.

"Yes, you are particularly wanted," said the other.

"But, gentlemen, I am rather busy," said I. "In an hour's time I will do myself the pleasure, if you please, of waiting upon you anywhere you wish to name."

The only reply they made to this was the practical one, of getting on each side of me, and then hurrying me on, past my own door.

I was taken right away to St. James's at a rapid pace, being hurried through one of the court yards; we paused at a small door, at which was a sentinel.

My two guides communicated something to him, and he allowed us to pass. There was a narrow passage without any light, and through another door, at which was likewise a sentinel, who turned the glare of a lantern upon me and my conductors. Some short explanation was given to him likewise, during which I heard the words His Highness, which was the title which Cromwell had lately assumed.

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They pushed me through this doorway, closed it behind me, and left me alone in the dark.

Chapter CCXIV. A SINGULAR INTERVIEW, AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF PASSION.

Being perfectly ignorant of where I was, I thought the most prudent plan was to stand stock still, for if I advanced it might be into danger, and my retreat was evidently cut off.

Moreover, those who brought me there must have some sort of intention, and it was better for me to leave them to develop it than to take any steps myself, which might be of a very hazardous nature.

That I was adopting the best policy I was soon convinced, for a flash of light suddenly came upon me, and I heard a gruff voice, say, —

"Who goes there? come this way."

I walked on, and passed through an open doorway into a small apartment, in the centre of which, standing by a common deal table on which his clenched hand was resting, I found Oliver Cromwell himself.

"So, sirrah," he said, "royalists and pestilent characters are to ravage the land, are they so? answer me."

"I have no answer to make, your highness," said I.

"God's mercy, no answer, when in your own house the Duke of Cleveland's proscribed secretary lies concealed."

I felt rather staggered, but was certain I had been betrayed by some one, and Cromwell continued rapidly, without giving me time to speak.

"The Lord is merciful, and so are we, but the malignant must be taken by the beloved soldiers of the Commonwealth, and the gospel God-fearing men, who always turn to the Lord, with short carbines, will accompany you. The malignant shall be taken from your house, by you, and the true God-fearing dragoons shall linger in the shade behind. You will take him to the river side, where the Lord willing, there will be a boat with a small blue ensign, on board of which you will place him, wishing him good speed."

He paused, and looked fixedly upon me by the aid of the miserable light that was in the apartment.

"What then, your highness?" I said.

"Then you will probably call upon us to-morrow for a considerable sum, which will be due to you for this good service to the Commonwealth; yes, it shall be profitable to fight the battles of the Lord."

I must confess, I had expected a very different result from the interview, which I had been greatly in fear would have resulted, in greatly endangering my liberty. Cromwell was a man not to be tampered with; I knew my danger, and was not disposed to sacrifice myself for Master Latham.

"Your highness shall be obeyed," I said.

"Ay, verily," he replied, "and if we be not obeyed, we must make ourselves felt with a strong arm of flesh. What ho! God-fearing Simkins, art thou there?"

"Yes, the Lord willing," said a dragoon, making his appearance at the door.

Cromwell merely made him a sign with his hand, and he laid hold of the upper part of my arm, as though it had been in a vice, and led me out into the passage again where the sentinels were posted.

In the course of a few moments, I was duly in custody of my two guards again, and we were proceeding at a very rapid pace towards my residence.

It was not a very agreeable affair, view it in whatever light I might; but as regarded Cromwell, I knew my jeopardy, and it would be perceived that I had not hesitated a moment in obeying him. Moreover, I considered, for I knew he was generous, I should have a good round sum by the transaction, which added to the fifty pounds I had received from the royalists, made the affair appear to me in a pleasant enough light. Indeed, I was revolving in my mind as I went along, whether it would not be worth while, almost entirely to attach myself to the protector.

"If," I reasoned with myself, "I should do that, and still preserve myself a character with the royalists, I should thrive."

But it will be seen that an adverse circumstance put an end to all those dreams.

When we reached the door of my house, the first thing I saw was my son wiping his brow, as if he had undergone some fatigue; he ran up to me, and catching me by the arm, whispered to me.

I was so angered at the moment, that heedless of what I did, and passion getting the mastery over me, I with

my clenched fist struck him to the earth. His head fell upon one of the hard round stones with which the street was paved, and he never spoke again. I had murdered him. * * *

I don't know what happened immediately subsequent to this fearful deed; all I can recollect is, that there was a great confusion and a flashing of lights, and it appeared to me as if something had suddenly struck me down to the earth with great force.

When I did thoroughly awaken, I found myself lying upon a small couch, but in a very large apartment dimly lighted, and where there were many such couches ranged against the walls. A miserable light just enabled me to see about me a little, and some dim dusky-looking figures were creeping about the place.

It was a hospital that the protector had lately instituted in the Strand.

I tried to speak, but could not; my tongue seemed glued to my mouth, and I could not, and then a change came upon my sense of sight, and I could scarcely see at all the dim dusky-looking figures about me.

Some one took hold of me by the wrist, and I heard one say, quite distinctly, —

"He's entirely going, now."

Suddenly it seemed as if something had fallen with a crushing influence upon my chest, and then a consciousness that I was gasping for breath, and then I thought I was at the bottom of the sea. There was a moment, only a moment, of frightful agony, and then came a singing sound, like the rush of waters, after which, I distinctly felt some one raising me in their arms. I was dropped again, my limbs felt numbed and chill, an universal spasm shot through my whole system, I opened my eyes, and found myself lying in the open air, by a newly opened grave.

A full moon was sailing through the sky and the cold beams were upon my face; a voice sounded in my ears, a deep and solemn voice — and painfully distinct was every word it uttered.

"Mortimer," it said, for that was my name, "Mortimer, in life you did one deed which at once cast you out from all hope that anything in that life would be remembered in the world to come to your advantage. You poisoned the pure font of mercy, and not upon such as you can the downy freshness of Heaven's bounty fall. Murderer, murderer of that being sacredly presented to your care by the great Creator of all things, live henceforth a being accursed. Be to yourself a desolation and a blight, shunned by all that is good and virtuous, armed against all men, and all men armed against thee, Varney the Vampyre." * * * *

I staggered to my feet, the scene around me was a churchyard, I was gaunt and thin, my clothes hung about me in tattered remnants. The damp smell of the grave hung about them, I met an aged man, and asked him where I was. He looked at me with a shudder, as though I had escaped from some charnel house.

"Why this is Isledon," said he.

A peal of bells came merrily upon the night air.

"What means that?" said I.

"Why this is the anniversary of the Restoration."

"The Restoration! What Restoration?"

"Why of the royal family to the throne, to be sure, returned this day last year. Have you been asleep so long that you don't know that?"

I shuddered and walked on, determined to make further inquiries, and to make them with so much caution, that the real extent of my ignorance should scarce be surmised, and the result was to me of the most astonishing character.

I found that I had been in the trance of death for nearly two years, and that during that period, great political changes had taken place. The exiled royal family had been restored to the throne, and the most remarkable revulsion of feeling that had ever taken place in a nation had taken place in England.

But personally I had not yet fully awakened to all the horror of what I was. I had heard the words addressed to me, but I had attached no very definite meaning to them."

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Chapter CCXV. VARNEY'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED.

Mr. Bevan paused when he had got thus far, to ask himself if he ought to give credence to what he read, or put it down as the raving of some person, whose wits had become tangled and deranged by misfortune.

Had the manuscript come to him without other circumstances to give it the air of truthfulness, he would have read it only as a literary curiosity, but it will be remembered that he had been a spectator of the resuscitation of Clara Crofton, which afforded of itself a very frightful verification of Varney's story — a story so horrible in all its details, that but for the great interest which it really possessed, he would have deeply regretted the mixing it up in his memory with brighter subjects.

There was something yet to read in the papers before him, and thinking that it was better to know all at once than to leave his imagination to work upon matters so likely seriously to affect it, he resumed his perusal of these papers, which might be considered the autobiography of Varney. * * * *

I have already said that I was not yet fully alive to the horror of what I was, but I soon found what the words which had been spoken to me by the mysterious being who had exhumed me meant; I was a thing accursed, a something to be shunned by all men, a horror, a blight, and a desolation.

I felt myself growing sick and weak, as I traversed the streets of the city, and yet I loathed the sight of food, whenever I saw it.

I reached my own house, and saw that it had been burned down; there lay nothing but a heap of charred ruins where it once stood.

But I had an interest in those ruins, for from time to time I had buried considerable sums of money beneath the flooring of the lowest apartments, and I had every reason to believe, as such a secret treasure was only known to myself, that it remained untouched.

I waited until the moon became obscured by some passing clouds, and then having a most intimate knowledge of the locality, I commenced groping about the ruins, and removing a portion of them, until I made my way to the spot where my money was hidden.

The morning came, however, and surprised me at my occupation; so I hid myself among the ruins of what had once been my home for a whole day, and never once stirred from my concealment.

Oh, it was a long and weary day. I could hear the prattle of children at play, an inn or change-house was near at hand, and I could hear noisy drinkers bawling forth songs that had been proscribed in the Commonwealth.

I saw a poor wretch hunted nearly to death, close to where I lay concealed, because from the fashion of his garments, and the cut of his hair, he was supposed to belong to the deposed party.

But the long expected night came at last. It was a dark one, too, so that it answered my purpose well.

I had found an old rusty knife among the ruins, and with that I set to work to dig up my hidden treasure; I was successful, and found it all. Not a guinea had been removed, although in the immediate neighbourhood, there were those who would have sacrificed a human life for any piece of gold that I had hoarded.

I made no enquiries about any one that had belonged to me. I dreaded to receive some horrible and circumstantial answer, but I did get a slight piece of news, as I left the ruins, although I asked not for it.

"There's a poor devil," said one; "did you ever see such a wretch in all your life?"

"Why, yes," said another, "he's enough to turn one's canary sour, he seems to have come up from the ruins of Mortimers's house. By-the-by did you ever hear what became of him?"

"Yes, to be sure, he was shot by two of Cromwell's dragoons in some fracas or another."

"Ah, I recollect now, I heard as much. He murdered his son, didn't he?"

I passed on. Those words seemed to send a bolt of fire through the brain, and I dreaded that the speaker might expatiate upon them.

A slow misty rain was falling, which caused the streets to be very much deserted, but being extremely well acquainted with the city, I passed on till I came to that quarter which was principally inhabited by Jews, who I knew would take my money without any troublesome questions being asked me, and also I could procure every accomodation required; and they did do so, for before another hour had passed over my head, I emerged richly habited as a chevalier of the period, having really not paid to the conscientious Israelite much more than four

times the price of the clothing I walked away with.

And thus I was in the middle of London, with some hundreds of pounds in my pocket, and a horrible uncertainty as to what I was.

I was growing fainter and fainter still, and I feared that unless I succeeded in housing myself shortly, I should become a prey to some one who, seeing my exhausted condition, would, notwithstanding I had a formidable rapier by my side, rob me of all I possessed.

My career has been much too long and too chequered an one even to give the briefest sketch of. All I purpose here to relate is how I became convinced I was a vampyre, and that blood was my congenial nourishment and the only element of my new existence.

I passed on until I came to a street where I knew the houses were large but unfashionable, and that they were principally occupied by persons who made a trade by letting out apartments, and there I thought I might locate myself in safety.

As I made no difficulty about terms, there was no difficulty at all of any sort, and I found myself conducted into a tolerably handsome suite of rooms in the house of a decent-looking widow woman, who had two daughters, young and blooming girls, both of whom regarded me as the new lodger, with looks of anything but favour, considering my awful and cadaverous appearance most probably as promising nothing at all in the shape of pleasant companionship.

This I was quite prepared for — I had seen myself in a mirror — that was enough; and I could honestly have averred that a more ghastly and horrible looking skeleton, attired in silks and broad-cloth, never yet walked the streets of the city.

When I retired to my chamber, I was so faint and ill, that I could scarcely drag one foot after the other; and was ruminating what I should do, until a strange feeling crept over me that I should like — what? Blood! — raw blood, reeking and hot, bubbling and juicy, from the veins of some gasping victim.

A clock upon the stairs struck one. I arose and listened attentively; all was still in the house — still as the very grave.

It was a large old rambling building, and had belonged at one time, no doubt, to a man of some mark and likelihood in the world. My chamber was one of six that opened from a corridor of a considerable length, and which traversed the whole length of the house.

I crept out into this corridor, and listened again for full ten minutes, but not the slightest sound, save my own faint breathing, disturbed the stillness of the house; and that emboldened me so that, with my appetite for blood growing each moment stronger, I began to ask myself from whose veins I could seek strength and nourishment.

But how was I to proceed? How was I to know in that large house which of the sleepers I could attack with safety, for it had now come to that, that I was to attack somebody. I stood like an evil spirit, pondering over the best means of securing a victim.

And there came over me the horrible faintness again, that faintness which each moment grew worse, and which threatened completely to engulf me. I feared that some flush of it would overtake me, and then I should fall to rise no more; and strange as it may appear, I felt a disposition to cling to the new life that had been given to me. I seemed to be acquainted already with all its horrors, but not all its joys.

Suddenly the darkness of the corridor was cleared away, and soft and mellow light crept into it, and I said to myself, —

"The moon has risen."

Yes, the bright and beautiful moon, which I had felt the soft influence of when I lay among the graves, had emerged from the bank of clouds along the eastern sky, its beams descending through a little window. They streamed right through the corridor, faintly but effectually illuminating it, and letting me see clearly all the different doors leading to the different chambers.

And thus it was that I had light for anything I wished to do, but not information.

The moonbeams playing upon my face seemed to give me a spurious sort of strength. I did not know until after experience what a marked and sensible effect they would always have upon me, but I felt it even then, although I did not attribute it wholly to the influence of the queenly planet.

I walked on through the corridor, and some sudden influence seemed to guide me to a particular door. I know not how it was, but I laid my hand upon the lock, and said to myself, —

"I shall find my victim here."

Chapter CCXVI. THE NIGHT ATTACK. -- THE HORRIBLE CONCLUSION.

I paused yet a moment, for there came across me even then, after I had gone so far, a horrible dread of what I was about to do, and a feeling that there might be consequences arising from it that would jeopardise me greatly. Perhaps even then if a great accession of strength had come to my aid -- mere bodily aid I mean -- I should have hesitated, and the victim would have escaped; but, as if to mock me, there came that frightful feeling of exhaustion which felt so like the prelude to another death.

I no longer hesitated; I turned the lock of the door, and I thought that I must be discovered. I left it open about an inch, and then flew back to my own chamber.

I listened attentively; there was no alarm, no movement in any of the rooms -- the same death-like stillness pervaded the house, and I felt that I was still safe.

A soft gleam of yellow looking light had come through the crevice of the door when I had opened it. It mingled strangely with the moonlight, and I concluded correctly enough, as I found afterwards, that a light was burning in the chamber.

It was at least another ten minutes before I could sufficiently re-assure myself to glide from my own room and approach that of the fated sleeper; but at length I told myself that I might safely do so, and the night was waning fast, and if anything was to be accomplished it must be done at once, before the first beams of early dawn should chase away the spirits of the night, and perhaps should leave me no power to act.

"What shall I be," I asked myself; "after another four-and-twenty hours of exhaustion? Shall I have power then to make the election of what I will do or what I will not? No, I may suffer the pangs of death again, and the scarcely less pangs of another revival."

This reasoning -- if it may be called reasoning -- decided me; and with cautious and cat-like footsteps, I again approached the bed-room door which I had opened.

I no longer hesitated, but at once crossed the threshold, and looked around me. It was the chamber of the youngest of my landlady's daughters, who, as far as I could judge, seemed to be about sixteen years of age; but they had evidently been so struck with my horrible appearance, that they had placed themselves as little as possible in my way, so that I could not be said to be a very good judge of their ages or of their looks.

I only knew she was the youngest, because she wore her hair long, and wore it in ringlets, which were loose and streaming over the pillow on which she slept, while her sister, I remarked, wore her hair plaited up, and completely off her neck and shoulders.

I stood by the bed-side, and looked upon this beautiful girl in all the pride of her young beauty, so gently and quietly slumbering. Her lips were parted, as though some pleasant images were passing in her mind, and induced a slight smile even in her sleep. She murmured twice, too, a word, which I thought was the name of some one -- perchance the idol of her young heart -- but it was too indistinct for me to catch it, nor did I care to hear; that which was perhaps a very cherished secret, indeed, mattered not to me. I made no pretensions to her affections, however strongly in a short time I might stand in her abhorrence.

One of her arms, which was exquisitely rounded, lay upon the coverlet; a neck, too, as white as alabaster, was partially exposed to my gaze, but I had no passions -- it was food I wanted.

I sprung upon her. There was a shriek, but not before I had secured a draught of life blood from her neck. It was enough. I felt it dart through my veins like fire, and I was restored. From that moment I found out what was to be my sustenance; it was blood -- the blood of the young and the beautiful.

The house was thoroughly alarmed, but not before I had retired to my own chamber. I was but partially dressed, and those few clothes I threw off me, and getting into my bed, I feigned to be asleep; so that when a gentleman who slept likewise in the house, but of whose presence I knew nothing, knocked hardily at my door, I affected to awaken in a fright, and called out, --

"What is it? what is it? -- fof God's sake tell me if it is a fire."

"No, no -- but get up, sir, get up. There's some one in the place. An attempt at murder, I think, sir."

I arose and opened the door; so by the right he carried he saw that I had to dress myself -- he was but half attired himself, and he carried his sword beneath his arm.

"It is a strange thing," he said; "but I have heard a shriek of alarm."

"And I likewise," said I; "but I thought it was a dream."

"Help! help! help!" cried the widow, who had risen, but stood upon the threshold of her own chamber; "thieves! thieves!"

By this time I had got on sufficient of my apparel that I could make an appearance, and, likewise with my sword in my hand, I sallied out into the corridor.

"Oh, gentlemen — gentlemen," cried the landlady, "did you hear anything?"

"A shriek, madam," said my fellow-lodger; "have you looked into your daughters' chambers?"

The room of the youngest daughter was the nearest, and into that she went at once. In another moment she appeared on the threshold again with a face as white as a sheet, then she wrung her hands, and said, —

"Murder! murder! — my child is murdered — my child is murdered, Master Harding," — which I found was the name of my fellow-lodger.

"Fling open one of the windows, and call for the watch," said he to me. "and I will search the room, and woe be to any one that I may find within its walls unauthorised."

I did as he desired, and called the watch, but the watch came not, and then, upon a second visit to her daughter, the landlady found she had only fainted, and that she had been deceived in thinking she was murdered by the sudden sight of the blood upon her neck, so the house was restored to something like quiet again, and the morning began now near at hand, Mr. Harding retired to his chamber, and I to mine, leaving the landlady and her eldest daughter assiduous in their attentions to the younger.

How wonderfully revived I felt — I was quite a new creature when the sunlight came dancing into my apartment. I dressed and was about to leave the house, when Mr. Harding came out of one of the lower rooms, and intercepted me.

"Sir," he said, "I have not the pleasure of knowing you, but I have no doubt that an ordinary feeling of chivalry will prompt you to do all in your power to obviate the dread of such another night as the past."

"Dread, sir," said I, "the dread of what?"

"A very proper question," he said, "but one I can hardly answer; the girl states, she was awakened by some one biting her neck, and in proof of the story she actually exhibits the marks of teeth, and so terrified is she, that she declares that she shall never be able to sleep again."

"You astonish me."

"No doubt — it is sufficiently astonishing to excuse even doubts; but if you and I, who are both inmates of the house, were to keep watch to-night in the corridor, it might have the effect of completely quieting the imagination of the young girl, and perhaps result in the discovery of this nocturnal disturber of the peace."

"Certainly," said I, "command me in any way, I shall have great pleasure."

"Shall it be understood, then, that we meet at eleven in your apartment or in mine."

"Whichever you may please to consider the most convenient, sir."

"I mention my own then, which is the furthest door in the corridor, and where I shall be happy to see you at eleven o'clock."

There was a something about this young man's manner which I did not altogether like, and yet I could not come to any positive conclusion as to whether he suspected me, and therefore I thought it would be premature to fly, when perhaps there would be really no occasion for doing so; on the contrary, I made up my mind to wait the result of the evening, which might or might not be disastrous to me. At all events, I considered that I was fully equal to taking my own part, and if by the decrees of destiny I was really to be, as it were, repudiated from society, and made to endure a new, strange, and horrible existence, I did not see that I was called upon to be particular how I rescued myself from difficulties that might arise.

Relying, then, upon my own strength, and my own unscrupulous use of it, I awaited with tolerable composure the coming of night.

During the day I amused myself by walking about, and noting the remarkable changes which so short a period as two years had made in London. But these happened to be two years most abundantly prolific in change. The feelings and habits of people seemed to have undergone a thorough revolution, which I was the more surprised at when I learned by what thorough treachery the restoration of the exiled family was effected.

The day wore on; I felt no need of refreshment, and I began to feel my own proper position, and to feel that

occasionally a draught of delicious life-blood, such as I had quaffed the night before was fresh marrow to my bones.

I could see, when I entered the house where I had made my temporary home, that notwithstanding that I considered my appearance wonderfully improved, that feeling was not shared in by others, for the whole family shrunk from me as though there had been a most frightful contamination in my touch, and as though the very air I had breathed was hateful and deleterious. I felt convinced that there had been some conversation concerning me, and that I was rather more than suspected. I certainly could then have left the place easily and quietly, but I had a feeling of defiance, which did not enable me to do so.

I felt as if I were an injured being, and ought to resist a something that looked like oppression.

"Why," I said to myself, "have I been rescued from the tomb to be made the sport of a malignant destiny? My crime was a great one, but surely I suffered enough, when I suffered death as an expiation of it, and I might have been left to repose in the grave."

The feelings that have since come over me held no place in my imagination, but with a kind of defiant desperation I felt as if I should like to defeat the plan by which I was attempted to be punished, and even in the face of Providence itself, to show that it was a failure entailing far worse consequences upon others than upon me.

This was my impression, so I would not play the coward, and fly upon the first flash of danger.

I sat in my own room until the hour came for my appointment with Mr. Harding, and then I walked along the corridor with a confident step, and let the hilt end of my scabbard clank along the floor. I knocked boldly at the door, and I thought there was a little hesitation in his voice as he bade me walk in, but this might have been only my imagination.

He was seated at a table, fully dressed, and in addition to his sword, there was lying upon the table before him a large holster pistol, nearly half the size of a carbine.

"You are well prepared," said I, as I pointed to it.

"Yes," he said, "and I mean to use it."

"What do they want now?" I said.

"What do who want?"

"I don't know," I said, "but I thought I heard some one call you by name from below."

"Indeed, excuse me a moment, perhaps they have made some discovery."

There was wine upon the table, and while he was gone, I poured a glass of good Rhenish down the barrel of the pistol. I wiped it carefully with the cuff of my coat, so there was no appearance upon the barrel of anything of the sort, and when he came back, he looked at me very suspiciously, as he said, —

"Nobody called me, how could you say I was called."

"Because I thought I heard you called; I suppose it is allowable for human nature to be fallible now and then."

"Yes, but then I am so surprised how you could make such a mistake."

"So am I."

It was rather a difficult thing to answer this, and looking at me very steadily, he took up the pistol and examined the priming. Of course, that was all right, and he appeared to be perfectly satisfied.

"There will be two chairs and a table," he said, "placed in the corridor, so that we can sit in perfect ease. I will not anticipate that anything will happen, but if it should, I can only say that I will not be backward in the use of my weapons."

"I don't doubt it," said I, "and commend you accordingly. That pistol must be a most formidable weapon. Does it ever miss fire?"

"Not that I know of," he said, "I have loaded it with such extraordinary care that it amounts to almost an impossibility that it should. Will you take some wine?"

At this moment there came a loud knocking at the door of the house. I saw an expression of satisfaction come over his face and he sprung to his feet, holding the pistol in his grasp.

"Do you know the meaning of that knocking," said I, "at such an hour?" and at the same time with a sweep of my arm I threw his sword off the table and beyond his reach.

"Yes," he said, rather excitedly; "you are my prisoner, it was you who caused the mischief and confusion last night. The girl is ready to swear to you, and if you attempt to escape, I'll blow your brains out."

"Fire at me," said I, "and take the consequences — but the threat is sufficient, and you shall die for your

temerity."

I drew my sword, and he evidently thought his danger imminent, for he at once snapped the pistol in my face. Of course it only flashed in the pan, but in one moment my sword went through him like a flash of light. It was a good blade the Jew had sold me — the hilt struck against his breast bone, and he shrieked.

Bang! bang! bang! came again at the outer door of the house. I withdrew the reeking blade, dashed it into the scabbard just in time to prevent my landlady from opening the door, which she was almost in the act of doing. I seized her by the back of the neck, and hurled her to a considerable distance, and then opening the door myself, I stood behind it, and let three men rush into the house. After which I quietly left it, and was free."

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Chapter CCXVII. VARNEY DETAILS HIS SECOND DEATH.

The clergyman was perfectly amazed, as well he might be, at these revelations of the vampyre. He looked up from the manuscript that Varney had left him, with a far more bewildered look than he had ever worn when studying the most abstruse sciences or difficult languages.

"Can I," he said, — "ought I to believe it?"

This was a question more easily asked than answered, and after pacing the little room for a time, he thought he had better finish the papers of the vampyre, before he tortured his mind with any more suppositions upon the subject.

The papers continued thus, and the clergyman was soon completely absorbed in the great interest of the strange recital they contained. * * * *

I cared nothing as regarded my last adventure, so that it had one termination which was of any importance to me, namely, that termination which insured my safety. When I got into the street, I walked hurriedly on, never once looking behind me, until I was far enough off, and I felt assured all pursuit was out of the question.

I then began to bethink me what I had next to do.

I was much revived by the draught of blood I had already had, but as yet I was sufficiently new to my vampyre-like existence not to know how long such a renewal of my life and strength would last me.

I certainly felt vigorous, but it was a strange, unearthly sort of vigour, having no sort of resemblance whatever to the strength which persons in an ordinary state of existence may be supposed to feel, when the faculties are all full of life, and acting together harmoniously and well.

When I paused, I found myself in Pall Mall, and not far off from the palace of St. James, which of late had seen so many changes, and been the witness of such remarkable mutations in the affair of monarchs, that its real chronicles would even then have afforded an instructive volume.

I wandered right up to the gates of the royal pile, but then as I was about to enter the quadrangle called the colour court, I was rudely repulsed by a sentinel.

It was not so in the time of Cromwell, but at the same moment I had quite forgotten all that was so completely changed.

I always bow to authority when I cannot help it, so I turned aside at once, without making any remark; but as I did so I saw a small door open, not far from where I was, and two figures emerged muffled up in brown cloaks.

They looked nothing peculiar at the first glance, but when you came to examine the form and features, and to observe the manners of those two men, you could not but come to a conclusion that they were what the world would estimate as something great.

Adventure to me was life itself, now that I had so strangely shuffled off all other ties that bound me to the world, and I had a reckless disregard of danger, which arose naturally enough from my most singular and horrible tenure of existence. I resolved to follow these two men closely enough, and yet, if possible, without exciting their observation.

"Shall we have any sport?" said one.

"I trust that the ladies," replied the other, "will afford us some."

"And yet they were rather coy, do you not think, on the last meeting, Rochester?"

"Your majesty— —"

"Hush, man — hush! why are you so imprudent as to majesty me in the public streets. Here would be a court scandal if any eaves-dropper had heard you. You were wont to be much more careful than that."

"I spoke," said the other, "to recal your majesty to care. The name of Rochester, which you pronounced, is just as likely in the streets at such a time to create court scandal as that of —"

"Hush, hush! Did I say Rochester? Well — well, man, hold your peace if I did, and come on quickly — if we can but persuade them to come out, we can take them into the garden of the palace; I have the key of that most handy little door in the wall, which has served us more than once."

Of course, after this, I had no difficulty in knowing that the one speaker was the restored monarch, Charles the Second, and the other was his favourite, and dissolute companion, Rochester, of whom I had heard something,

although I had been far too short a time in the land of the living again, to have had any opportunity of seeing either of them before, but since they had now confessed themselves to be what they were, I could have no sort of difficulty in their recognition at any other time.

I had carefully kept out of sight while the little dialogue I have just recorded took place, so that although they more than once glanced around them suspiciously and keenly, they saw me not, and having quite satisfied them that their imprudent speech had done them no harm, they walked on hurriedly in the direction of Pimlico.

Little did Charles and his companion guess how horrible a being was following close upon their track. If they had done so they might have paused, aghast, and pursued another course to that which was occupying their attention I had a difficult part to play in following them, for although the king was incautious enough to have been safely and easily followed by any one, Rochester was not, but kept a wary eye around him, so that I was really more than once upon the point of being detected, and yet by dint of good management I did escape.

Pimlico at that time was rather a miserable neighbourhood, and far, very far indeed from being what it is now, but both the king and Rochester appeared to be well acquainted with it and they went on for a considerable distance until they came to a turning of a narrow dismal-looking character bounded on, each side not by houses but by the garden walls of houses, and to judge from the solidity and the height of those walls, the houses should have been houses of some importance.

"Bravo, bravissimo!" said the king, "we are thus far into the enemy territory without observation."

"So it seems," replied Rochester; "and now think you we can find the particular wall again."

"Of a surety, yes. Did I not ask them to hang out a handkerchief or some other signal, by which we might be this night guided in our search, and there it flutters."

The king pointed to the top of the wall, where a handkerchief waved and something certainly in the shape of a human head appeared against the night sky, and as sweet a voice as ever I heard in my life, said, —

"Gentlemen, I pray you to go away."

"What," said the king; "go away just as the sun has risen?"

"Nay, but gentlemen," said the voice, "we are afraid we are watched."

"We!" said Rochester, "you say we, and yet your fair companion is not visible."

"Fair sir," said the lady, "it is not the easiest task in the world for one of us to stand upon a ladder. It certainly will not hold two."

"Fair lady," said the king, "and if you can but manage to come over the wall, we will all four take one of the pleasantest strolls in the world; a friend of mine, who is a captain in the Royal Guard, will at my request, allow us to walk in the private garden of St. James's palace."

"Indeed."

"Yes, fair one. That garden of which you may have heard as the favourite resort of the gay Charles."

"But we are afraid," said the lady; "our uncle may come home. It's very improper indeed — very indiscreet — we ought not to think of such a thing for a moment. In fact, it's decidedly wrong gentlemen, but how are we to get over the wall?"

The party all laughed out together.

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Chapter CCXVIII. THE PALACE GARDEN IN ST. JAMES'S.

It was certainly a very ingenious speech which the lady on the wall had given utterance to, and sufficiently exemplified how inclination was struggling with prudence. It was just the sort of speech which suited those to whom it was addressed.

After the laughter had subsided a little Charles spoke, ---

"By the help of the ladder we have," he said, "you can easily leave where you are, and as easily return, but I perceive you lack the strength to lift it over this side so as to descend."

"Just so," said the lady, in a low voice.

"Well, I think that by the aid of my friend Smith here, I can get up to the top of the wall, and assist you."

Charles, by the aid of Rochester, contrived to scramble to the top of the wall, to the assistance of the two damsels who were so fearful, and yet so willing, to risk a little danger to their reputations, for the purpose of enjoying a walk in the king's garden at St. James's.

The idea came across me of doing some mischief, but I did not just then interfere as I wanted to see the result of the affair. The ladder was duly pulled over by the monarch after both the ladies had got on the top of the wall, and while Rochester steadied it below they descended in perfect safety, and the party walked hastily from the place in the direction of St. James's.

I followed them with great caution, after having removed the ladder to the all of a garden several doors from the proper one. They went on talking and laughing in the gayest possible manner, until they reached Buckingham house, and then they took a secluded path that led them close to the gardens of St. James's.

Some overhanging trees shed such an impervious shadow upon all objects that I found I might as well be quite near to the party as far off, so I approached boldly and heard that the ladies were beginning to get a little alarmed at this secret and strictly private mode of entrance to the garden.

"Gentlemen," said one, "don't go into the garden if you have no proper leave to do so."

"Oh, but we have," said the king. "Lately I have had proper leave I assure you; it did happen that for some time the leave was taken away, but I have it again along with a few other little privileges that I wanted much."

"You need fear nothing," said Rochester.

They all four stood in a group by the little door, while the king fumbled about with a key for some few minutes, before he could open the lock. At length, however, he succeeded in doing so, and the door swung open. The king dropped the key and was unable to find it again; so leaving the door as close as they could, the party passed onwards, and I soon followed in their footsteps.

The place was profoundly dark.

I could feel the soft grating of fine gravel under my feet, and feeling that such a sand might betray me, I stepped aside until I trod upon a border, as I found it to be, of velvet turf. The odour of sweet flowers came upon my senses, and occasionally as the night wind swept among the trees, there would be a pleasant murmuring sound quite musical in its effect.

The soft soil effectually prevented my footsteps from being heard, and I soon stood quite close to the parties, and found that they were at the entrance of a little gaudy pavilion, from a small painted window in which streamed a light.

The ladies seemed to be rather in a flutter of apprehension, and yet the whole affair no doubt to them presented itself in the shape of such a charming and romantic adventure, that I very much doubt if they would have gone back now, had they had all the opportunity in the world so to do.

Finally they all went into the pavillion. I then advanced, and finding a window, that commanded a good view of the interior I looked in and was much amused at what passed.

The place was decorated in a tasteful manner, although a little approaching to the gaudy, and the pictures painted in fresco upon the walls were not precisely what the strictest prudery would have considered correct, while at the same time there was nothing positively offensive in them.

A table stood in the centre, and was covered with rich confectionery, and wine, while the lamp that had sent the stream of light through the painted window was dependent from the ceiling by three massive gilt chains.

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood, Volume III

Take it for all in all, it certainly was a handsome place.

The king and Rochester were urging the ladies to drink wine, and now that for the first time I had an opportunity of seeing the countenances of the different persons whom I had followed so far, I confess that I looked upon them with much curiosity. The ladies were decidedly handsome, and the youngest who had fallen to the lot of the king was very pretty indeed, and had a look of great innocence and sweetness upon her face. I pitied her.

The king was a small, dark, sharp-featured man, and I thought that there was an obliquity in his vision. As for Rochester, he was decidedly ugly. His face was rather flat, and of a universal dirty looking white colour. He certainly was not calculated to win a lady's favour. But then for all I knew, he might have a tongue to win an angel out of heaven.

Such a capacity goes much further with a woman who has any mind than all the physical graces, and women of no mind are not worth the winning.

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Chapter CCXIX. AN ADVENTURE.—THE CARBINE SHOT.—THE DEATH.

"Nay," I heard the king say, "they ought, and no doubt do, keep choice wine here; drink, fair one."

The young girl shook her head.

"Nay, now," said Charles with a laugh, as he finished off himself the glass that the young girl took so small a sip of, "I will convince you that I think it good."

The lady with whom Rochester was conversing in a low tone, had no such scruples, for she tossed off a couple of glasses as fast as they were tendered to her, and talked quite at her ease, admiring the pavilion, the pictures, the hangings and furniture, and wondering whether the king ever came there himself.

Rochester began mystifying her, talking to her in a low tone, while I turned my attention to the king, and the younger, and certainly more estimable female of the two.

The king had been talking to her in a low tone, when she suddenly started to her feet, her face flushed with anger and alarm.

"Louisa," she said, "I claim your protection; you were left in care of me. Take me home, or I will tell my uncle how you basely betrayed your trust, by persuading me there was no harm in meeting those gentlemen."

"Pho! he child's mad," said Louisa.

"Quite mad," said the king, as he advanced towards her again; she fled to the door of the pavilion. I knew not what impluse it was that urged me on, but I left the window hastily, and met her, she fell into my arms, and the light fell strongly upon me as I confronted the king.

"The guard. The guard," he shouted.

"Louisa pretended to faint, and the ngyon grl young girl clung to me as her only protector, exclaiming, —

"Save me! save me; Oh save me!"

The garden door is open," I whispered to her, "follow me quickly, not a moment is to be lost." We both fled together.

I was about to pass through the doorway, when a shot from one of the guards struck me, and I fell to the ground as if the hand of a giant had struck me down. There was a rush of blood from my heart to my head, a burning sensation of pain for a moment or two, that was most horrible, and then a sea of yellow light seemed to be all around me.

I remembered no more.

It was afterwards that I found this was my second death, and that the favourite, Rochester, had actually directed that I should be shot rather than permitted to escape, for he dreaded more than the monarch did the exposure of his vices. I do not think that Charles, in like manner, had he been at hand, would have had my life taken, although it is hard to say what kings will do or what they will not when they are thwarted.

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Chapter CCXX. THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF VARNEY THE VAMPYRE, AND CONCLUSION.

The manuscript which the clergyman had read with so much interest, here abruptly terminated. He was left to conclude that Varney after that had been resuscitated; and he was more perplexed than ever to come to any opinion concerning the truth of the narration which he had now concluded.

It was one week after he had finished the perusal of Varney's papers that the clergyman read in an English newspaper the following statement.

"We extract from the *Algemeine Zeitung* the following most curious story, the accuracy of which of course we cannot vouch for, but still there is a sufficient air of probability about it to induce us to present it to our readers.

"Late in the evening, about four days since, a tall and melancholy-looking stranger arrived, and put up at one of the principal hotels at Naples. He was a most peculiar looking man, and considered by the persons of the establishment as about the ugliest guest they had ever had within the walls of their place.

"In a short time he summoned the landlord, and the following conversation ensued between him and the strange guest.

"I want,' said the stranger, 'to see all the curiosities of Naples, and among the rest Mount Vesuvius. Is there any difficulty?'

"None,' replied the landlord, 'with a proper guide.'

"A guide was soon secured, who set out with the adventurous Englishman to make the ascent of the burning mountain.

"They went on then until the guide did not think it quite prudent to go any further, as there was a great fissure in the side of the mountain, out of which a stream of lava was slowly issuing and spreading itself in rather an alarming manner.

"The ugly Englishman, however, pointed to a secure mode of getting higher still, and they proceeded until they were very near the edge of the crater itself. The stranger then took his purse from his pocket and flung it to the guide saying, --

"You can keep that for your pains, and for coming into some danger with me. But the fact was, that I wanted a witness to an act which I have set my mind upon performing.'

"The guide says that these words were spoken with so much calmness, that he verily believed the act mentioned as about to be done was some scientific experiment of which he knew that the English were very fond, and he replied, --

"Sir, I am only too proud to serve so generous and so distinguished a gentleman. In what way can I be useful?'

"You will make what haste you can,' said the stranger, 'from the mountain, inasmuch as it is covered with sulphurous vapours, inimical to human life, and when you reach the city you will cause to be published an account of my proceedings, and what I say. You will say that you accompanied Varney the Vampyre to the crater of Mount Vesuvius, and that, tired and disgusted with a life of horror, he flung himself in to prevent the possibility of a reanimation of his remains.'

"Before then the guide could utter anything but a shriek, Varney took one tremendous leap, and disappeared into the burning mouth of the mountain."

THE END

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