

The Anaconda

Matthew G. Lewis

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'The Lord in heaven forbid!' exclaimed the old man, while every limb was convulsed with horror, the blood forsook his cheeks, and he clasped his hands in agony; 'but the thing is impossible!' he resumed, after a few moments passed in reflection, 'absolutely impossible! What! Everard? a boy, whose childhood was passed under my own roof, under my very eye? whose manners are so mild, who was ever so gentle, so grateful, so kind; whose heart I know as well as I do my own. Bless my soul, sister Milman, what a fright you have given me! But it's no great matter now, for, when I reflect upon this history of yours, I see clearly that the thing is quite impossible, and so there's an end of it.'

'Now was there ever anything so provoking! Brother, brother, let me tell you, that at your time of life it is quite a shame to suffer yourself to be so blinded by prejudice. His childhood was passed under your roof, forsooth! but where did he pass his youth, I should be glad to know? why, among tigers and alligators that swallow up poor dear little children at a mouthful, and great ugly black-a-moor monsters, who eat nothing but human flesh, heaven bless us! and where's the great wonder, that living in such graceless company Everard should have picked up some of their bloody tricks? Nay, brother, to tell you a bit of my mind, for my own part I always suspected, that there was something awkward in the manner by which he came y such a sight of money; though, to be sure, I never imagined that the business was half so bad as it proves to be.'

'Proves to be, sister! proves to be, indeed! Let me remind you that you have proved nothing, though God knows you have asserted enough to make every hair on my head stand on end: and as to his fortune, I make no doubt that Everard can give as satisfactory an account of his making it, as the honestest man within the bills of mortality.'

'I should be glad to know then, why he so obstinately refuses to give any account at all? It's above a year since he returned from the East Indies, and yet there isn't a human being a bit better informed on the subject than we were on the first day of his landing; though I'm sure it's not for want of asking, for many and many a good hour have I passed in pumping, and pumping, and yet here do I sit at this moment no whit the wiser! He always puts on such a solemn look, and takes the first opportunity of turning the conversation to something else: nay, the other day, when I wouldn't be fobbed off with a cock-and-a-bull story about heaven knows what, and put the question home to him in so many words, -- "By what means did you, Everard Brooke, get so much money?" He turned his back plump upon me, and stalked out of the room; which was no great proof of his good-breeding, you'll say; but mercy upon us! good-breeding isn't what the gentleman values himself upon, for it was but last Friday that he bounced out of the room to call Towser off, who was barking at a little dirty beggarboy, though he saw that I had dropped my teaspoon, and was obliged to stoop for it myself! a great bear! but indeed I expected nothing better from a man who has lived so long among Hottentots.'

'Well, sister! I dare say that he ought to have stopped to pick up your teaspoon; though to be sure I can't find in my heart to blame him very much for having gone first to rescue the beggar- boy, being afraid that I should have committed exactly the same fault myself. But you know I never pretended to good-breeding, and in all matters of politeness, sister Milman, I must give way to your better judgement and experience. However, I cannot be equally submissive respecting the material point; and in spite of all that you have advanced I must still maintain my opinion, that Everard came by his money honestly, whatever you may have heard to the contrary.'

'Then why won't he let a body know how he came by it? Let me tell you, brother, that when a man has anything good to tell of himself he isn't so fond of holding his tongue; nay, for that matter, to hold one's tongue at all isn't natural and I warrant you, whoever does so has some good reason at bottom for submitting to such a disagreeable restraint, if one could but get him to own it: and so think the Williamsons, and the Joneses, and my cousin Dickins, and all the family of the Burnabys: for I am not of so uncommunicative a temper as your darling Everard, Heaven be praised for it! No; if I get a bit of information, I am too generous to keep it to myself, and

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have no peace, till all my neighbours are as well informed as I am. So this morning, I no sooner got possession of this bloody story, than I ordered my chariot, and drove round the village to communicate it to all our friends and relations. To be sure, they were mightily shocked at the account, as who wouldn't be? But they confessed, that they always expected to find something wrong at the bottom of this mystery, and they think it a mercy that I should have discovered the truth, before things were gone too far between Everard and your daughter Jessy.'

'And so you have been carrying this fine story all round the village? I protest now, sister Jane, it seems to me, that you have been giving yourself a great deal of very unnecessary trouble; and if, after all, your assertions should prove to be unfounded, I know not what recompence you can make poor Everard for this attempt to blast his character. The most innocent circumstances may be so construed as to wear an awkward appearance: there are always enough ill-natured people in the world ready to spread about scandalous reports, and Everard has too much merit not to have excited plenty of enemies; and here you have just now picked up a strange, unaccountable, rigmarole tale from one of these; and —'

'From one of his enemies,' exclaimed Mrs Milman, fanning herself violently; 'very fine truly! when I heard the whole story with these ears of mine from the mouth of his own little coffee-coloured barbarian! Yes, to be sure! Mirza is a violent enemy of Mr Everard's, that cannot be denied!'

The old merchant's face underwent a considerable change at hearing these last sentences; he looked distressed, and rubbed his forehead for some moments in evident anxiety.

'Mirza!' he repeated after a pause; 'sister Jane, recollect yourself; this is no trifling matter! are you quite sure that Mirza asserts the truth of the story which I have just heard you relate?'

'I tell you, brother, for the second time, that I heard him tell it with my own ears! not indeed all at once, for the wicked little heathen knew too well how little it was to his master's credit that the fact should get abroad. Ah! he is a cunning hand, I promise you! But I went round about, and round about, and wormed and wormed, and kept beating the bush, till I got it all out of him. I confess I was obliged to promise faithfully that his master should never know a syllable about it, for he said that it would give him pain to hear it mentioned, as to be sure well it may; but, when I found what a horrible secret it was, I had a great deal too much conscience to keep my promise, and lost no time in making the monster's guilt known to the whole neighbourhood.'

'Well, well sister! I won't pretend to say that you did wrong, and I doubt not you acted from the best motives; but yet I can't help wishing that you had acted otherwise! This Everard — poor, dear, wicked fellow — he was once so good, so affectionate; I would have betted all I have in the world, that it wasn't in his nature to kill so much as a fly; and to murder a woman — a woman too that he had promised to marry!'

'Aye! and to murder her in such a shocking manner too! First to shoot at her from behind a hedge, and when he found the poor creature was only wounded, to have the heart to run up to her, and actually beat her brains out with a club! why, Mirza said, that he verily believed that she was above half an hour dying.'

'I never heard of anything so horrible.'

'But what is worst, he wasn't contented with destroying the poor girl's body; he had previously ruined her precious soul! It seems that her name was Nancy O'Connor; an Irish family, I suppose. I once knew an Irish officer of that name myself. I was but a girl then, and danced with him at the Hackney Assembly, and a mighty genteel comely-looking man he was, though he had but one eye; but that's neither here nor there. Well, as I was telling you, this Nancy was either the daughter or the wife of a rich planter, with whom Everard lived as clerk, or factor, or something of that kind. Well! and so this poor girl fell in love with Everard, and he on his side was wonderfully attentive to Nancy; for Mirza says, that he passed whole days and nights in watching her, and ogling her, so that she actually could hardly stir without his knowing it; till at last he worked himself so totally into her good graces, and got such an influence over her mind, that (knowing his patron to have made a will entirely in Nancy's favour) he persuaded her to poison poor Mr O'Connor, in order that she might share his wealth with her abominable lover.'

'Poison her father! monstrous!'

'Her father, or her husband, for (as I said before) I am not certain which; but I should rather suppose it was her father, for it seems the poor deceived old man made it his dying request to her, that she should make Everard her husband as soon as ever the funeral was over: so you may judge how artfully the hypocrite must have played his cards! Well! now it was supposed that Everard would immediately have made Nancy Mrs Brooke: the settlements were all drawn up; the clothes were bought; the wedding day was fixed: when, lo and behold, what do you think

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the ungrateful monster did? He persuaded the poor young creature to dispose of all her property; and when it was converted into money, and jewels, and such like, he enticed her into a wood, where he robbed and murdered her in the manner which you have just heard; and then, getting on board a vessel with his plunder in all haste, he managed to escape from Ceylon, before the officers of justice had time to discover what was become of him! The only thing which surprises me is, that he should have brought away Mirza with him; but as the young heathen was then quite a child, I suppose his master thought it probable that he knew nothing of this bloody business, or would certainly forget it during the voyage. And now, brother, what have you to say in behalf of your fine Mr Everard? Ah! how often have I told you, over and over again, I was certain that something bad would come out against him all in good time! But you were obstinate; you still let him come dangling about your house, and keep hankering and hankering after your daughter Jessy; and now you may think yourself well off if the girl's heart isn't fixed upon having the vagabond, and getting her brains knocked out in her turn, like poor Miss Nancy O'Connor.'

Partial as the old man was to Everard, he could not but feel his faith in him a good deal shaken by this long string of horrible circumstances, and by the positive manner in which they were advanced, And now flocked in one after another the Joneses, and the Williamsons, and all the family of the Burnabys, with their wondering, and their blessing themselves, and their exclamations, and their pity for poor Miss O'Connor, and their having long suspected nothing better. The good old man listened in silence, and sighed, while they assailed him thus on all sides but though he could not venture to contradict them he could not find it in his heart to join in their censures of the man whom he had so long esteemed and whom he still loved so tenderly But when at length cousin Dickins made his appearance, (a man of great importance in this family for he was rich a bachelor, advanced in years and Jessy's godfather) and announced his thorough belief in Mrs Milman's story, it was no longer in old Elmwood's power to remain neutral in the business He declared his submission to cousin Dickins' better judgement, and his intention of declining any further communication with Mr Brooke, for he no longer dared to call him by the familiar and affectionate appellation of Everard.

This declaration was received with great satisfaction by all present, and the resolution was pronounced nem. con. to be extremely judicious: the delinquent was at this time in London, whither he had repaired (as it was suspected) for the purpose of ascertaining the exact state of his property, in order that on his return he might lay it before Elmwood, accompanied by a formal demand of his daughter's hand, This absence was thought very fortunate by the company, as it afforded the best opportunity for putting Jessy upon her guard; and it was determined to summon her without loss of time, make known to her the true character of the man with whom she had so imprudently been suffered to associate, and insist upon her a solemn promise in full convocation, that she would from that moment give up all communication with him.

Jessy made her appearance. Alas! the fate of heart had been long decided. As she listened to the strange tale, she sometimes coloured with indignation against the accusers, and then again her cheeks grew pale through fear lest the accusation should prove well founded. The charge was concluded; the promise was demanded; yet still Jessy spoke not, but sat absorbed in terror and grief. In vain was her love's guilt repeated; in vain was she called upon to declare her abhorrence at him; still Jessy only answered with her tears. Her friendly relations turned up the white of their eyes at her blindness and delusion; Mrs Milman was loud in exclaiming against the obstinacy and wrong-headedness of young people, who would fancy themselves wiser than their parents; and the formidable cousin Dickins, assuming one of his most severe and dignified looks, insisted upon her giving an immediate answer.

Terrified almost out of her senses at this formal address, the trembling Jessy now contrived to sob out a hope that her aunt had been mistaken, that Everard would still be able to prove his innocence. — 'Innocence!' so impossible a supposition was of itself sufficient to set the whole assembly in an uproar: the Williamsons, the Joneses, Cousin Dickins, and all the family of the Burnabys, gave tongue at once; and above a dozen voices were still busy in affixing the least flattering epithets possible to the name of Everard, when the door opened, and Everard himself stood before them. He was just returned from London, and had hastened to assure himself of Jessy's welfare. In the next moment you might have heard a pin drop. The debate had been carried on in too loud a tone to permit his being ignorant of the nature of their disclosure; but, at all events, the evident and universal embarrassment which his presence created, left him no doubt that himself had been brought upon the carpet, and that in a manner by no means to his credit. His sunburnt cheek glowed with indignation, as he gazed round the circle, and requested to know the meaning of those appellations by which, while ascending the stairs, he had heard

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himself described.

The question being general, no person thought it necessary to take it to himself. Each looked towards his neighbour, as if he expected the answer to come from thence, and consequently all continued silent. Everard now found it needful to particularize and turning to Cousin Dickins (whose voice had been super-eminently loud) he demanded of him the desired explanation.

'Why, really, Sir,' stammered out Cousin Dickins, adjusting his neckcloth, in order to conceal his embarrassment; 'really, Mr Everard -- as to what was said -- I can only say -- that I said nothing -- that is to say, not that I quite said nothing -- though, to say truth, it was almost as good as nothing -- for it was nothing from my own knowledge -- I only repeated -- I only observed -- that, if what Mrs Milman said was true --'

'Mrs Milman?' interrupted Everard, 'that's enough; now then we get a step nearer to the source of the business. Will you then, madam have the goodness to explain your reason for applying such opprobrious epithets to the name of Everard Brooke -- a name which I am bold to say deserves them as little as that of any person in this society I wait for your reply, madam.'

'Well, sir, and by my faith you shall have it; answered Mrs Milman, who by this time had recovered her mind, and was now resolved to carry the business through with flying colours, by assuming a double quantity of assurance. 'You shall have it, never fear! And if it turns out that your name is really as good as any one's in the company, and that you really did not poison the old gentleman, and beat Miss Nancy's brains out, why then so much the better for you, that's all, and there's no harm done.'

'Poison the old gentleman? Beat out Miss Nancy's brains? What Miss Nancy? What old gentleman? Why, in the name of Heaven, Mrs Milman, where did you pick up this farrago of nonsense?'

'I pick up, indeed! Let me tell you, sir, that I never picked up anything, or anybody in my life; and that if you talk of picking up, you are the much more likely person to pick up of the two. And now I'm about it, I'll let you into another piece of my mind. It's extremely rude in you to call my conversation a farrago of nonsense; but truly it's no wonder, for I'm not the first lady that you have treated with rudeness, Heaven knows! and more's the pity --Miss Nancy for that!'

'Miss Nancy again!' exclaimed Everard, 'and who the devil then is Miss Nancy?'

'What then you don't know Miss Nancy? No; never heard of Miss Nancy O'Connor, I warrant?'

'No, madam; I never did.'

'Well, come, now, that is a good one! To beat a lady's brain out, and then to cut her acquaintance, and pretend you know nothing about her, is the finest piece of modern good breeding that I ever heard of! Nay, indeed, I never expected much good breeding from you, sir, ever since that affair of the teaspoon. but one thing I can tell you; your little copper-coloured Hottentot, Mirza, sings a very different song from you on this occasion; for I had the whole story from his own lips.'

'From Mirza's? impossible!'

'It's not mighty polite in you to contradict one so plump, sir, but no matter for that, I repeat it; Mirza told me himself that you had poisoned a gentleman, and beat his daughter's brains out; and now so much for that, and butter to fish. Nay, if you don't choose to believe me, call the boy hither, and ask him; I desire no better, and I see him playing in the garden at this moment.'

'And it shall be done instantly!' cried Everard, at the same time throwing up the window -- 'Mirza! Mirza!'

Mirza was soon in the room.

'Pray, Mirza, what is the meaning --' began Everard, but Mrs Milman immediately interrupted him.

'Silence, if you please, sir; I'll examine the boy myself. Come here, Mirza; well, and how d'ye do, my dear? Pray, Mirza, what was that pretty story you told me this morning about poisoning somebody, and killing somebody with a club, and --'

'Oh! Missy! Missy!' cried Mirza, 'you no say dat! Massa tell me no talk -- Massa grieve -- Massa angry.'

'No, no, child; he'll not be angry. He wants to hear how prettily you tell the story, and so you must tell it all; mustn't he, Mr Brooke?' Everard gave a sign of assent. 'You know, Mirza; it was all about how your master made his fortune; well, and so, Mirza, (upon my word, you're a very nice lad, and there's six-pence for you), well, and so you say, Mirza, and so you say, my dear, that your master killed her in a wood! what? did he kill her quite?'

'Iss, quite! She quite dead! Massa beat brains out wid great club!'

'I, Mirza? exclaimed Everard; 'did I?'

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'Iss, Dad you did, Massa! and God him bless you for it!'

'Bless him for it!' whispered Mrs Milman to Cousin Dickins, 'there's fine morality! the wicked little heathen! but you'll hear more presently!' then turning again to the boy; 'well but, Mirza, you told me something too about poisoning — what, I suppose, before your master killed Miss Anne O'Connor.'

'Conda! Conda!' interrupted the boy.

'Condor, was it?' repeated Mrs Milman: 'well, well; Connor or Condor the name makes no great difference. Well Mirza, and so you say that this Anne O'Condor, instigated by your master, I suppose.'

'Oh! my massa! my massa!' shrieked Mirra in a tone of agony at the same time pointing to Everard who pale as death, and with a countenance expressing the most painful agitation, rushed to a table on which stood a decanter of water, of which he hastily swallowed a draught; though so violently did his hands shake that the goblet was carried to his lips with difficulty.

'Forgive my leaving you so abruptly,' said he, in a faltering voice; 'I will return in a few minutes;' and he hastily quitted the apartment, followed by Mirza.

Now then his guilt a pat doubting! Mrs Milman spread out her petticoats, fanned herself with an air of triumph, and began a sermon upon the wonderful effects of conscience Surprise had checked the course of Jessy's tears, the blood had deserted her lips and cheeks, and she sat motionless looking like a marble statue The good old Elmwood felt in his wound which his darling's heart had just received, but he had nothing to offer for her relief, except a fond pressure of her hand, and a sigh of compassion. The rest of the company shrugged up their shoulders at the depravity of human nature, and nodded their heads significantly at one another, as if they had been so many Chinese josses. Suddenly the door opened; and Mrs Milman was still in the full flow of her eloquence when Everard re-entered the room, to all appearances perfectly recovered from his late disorder.

'Mrs Milman,' said he, 'I am now master of the whole of this business. Your ignorance of circumstances peculiar to the East, the singularity of my adventures, and the broken English in which you heard them related, have led you to a most extraordinary mistake. I cannot clear it up, without subjecting myself to the most agonising recollections, and rending open afresh those wounds, which, it's true, are scarred over, but which are too deep and too deadly to be ever thoroughly healed. If, therefore, the opinion of the world were alone concerned, that opinion which is so little necessary to my own happiness, I should leave you in your error, rather than subject myself to the pain of an explanation. But I see in this circle two persons, one of whom possesses too dear an interest in my affections to permit my leaving a single thorn in her gentle bosom which I have it in my power to remove; while the paternal kindness which the other showed to me while I was still a boy, demands that I should convince him that it was not shown to one unworthy. To calm their feelings, I will sacrifice my own; and, much as I shall suffer while making the recital, the recital of my adventures shall, still be made. Be attentive then, and everything shall be explained.

Curiosity now became the predominant expression — Elmwood breathed freer, held up his head higher than before, and shook his daughter's hand affectionately; a roseate blush, stole over the lovely fair face of Jessy, while a look of silent gratitude thanked her father; the rest of the company drew their chairs closer together, and prepared to listen with all their ears.

Everard seated himself, and thus began.

You are already aware that my fortune was made in the island of Ceylon. It was there that I was so lucky as to find employment in the house of a man whose virtues rendered him as much the object of universal esteem, as the favours which he conferred upon me entitled him to my peculiar gratitude. I was engaged by him as his secretary, but all other names were soon forgotten by us both in that of friends. He was an Englishman as well as myself, and perhaps this had no slight influence in producing so strict an intimacy between us. A variety of untoward circumstances had compelled him to abandon his native land, and sail in pursuit of fortune to the East. His toil had not been vain: the capricious goddess, who fled from him with such disdain in Europe, now showered her favours upon his head with the most unwearied profusion. He had consumed but a few years in Ceylon, and was already rich and possessed of a distinguished situation It seemed as if fortune was at length resolved to convince the world, that she was not always blind; for had she searched the whole island through, she would have found it difficult to bestow wealth and honour upon a wiser or a better man But of all his treasures, that which he counted most precious, that for which he thanked Heaven's bounty at every moment of his existence, and with every pulsation of his heart, was a wife, who united all the beauty and graces of her sex with all the firmness and

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judgement of ours. One only blessing was denied them: Louisa was not a mother.

My friend and patron (his name was Seafield) possessed a villa at a small distance from Columbo. The place, it's true, was of no great extent, but it united, in their fullest perfection, all those charms which render Nature in that climate so irresistible an enchantress. This was, Seafield's most beloved residence, and hither he hastened whenever the duties of his station permitted his absenting himself for a few days from Colombo: in particular, there was a small circular pavilion designed by his own hand, and raised under his own inspection to which he was particularly partial and in which he was accustomed to pass the greatest portion of his time. It stood some few hundred yards from the dwelling house, and was situated on a small eminence, whence the prospect over land and sea was of a description rich, varied and extensive. Around it towered a thick circle of palm trees, resembling a colonnade: their leafy fans formed a second cupola above the roof and while they prevented a single sun-beam from piercing through the coolness of their embowering shades, their tall and slender stems permitted not the eye to lose one of the innumerable charms afforded by the surrounding landscape.

This delightful spot happened to be the residence of Seafield's whole family, when accidental business of importance required Louisa's presence at Columbo. Conscious that her husband considered everyday as lost which he was compelled to pass at a distance from his beloved retreat, she positively refused his attendance, but accepting me as her escort she departed for the city. Diligence and impatience to return home enabled her to dispatch her affairs in less time than she had expected them to occupy; and in the very first moment that she found herself once more at liberty, she ordered the palanquins to be prepared, and her slaves to hold themselves in readiness for departing. Our journey was performed by night, for the double purpose of reaching home the sooner, and of escaping the ardour of the noonday sun. We arrived an hour after daybreak, yet Seafield was already abroad.

'As usual, he ascended the hill to enjoy the beauty of the rising-sun.' Thus said Zadi, Seafield's old and attached domestic; in whose favour his master made an exception to his general opinion, that, in all their transactions with Europeans, the natives of this island were totally devoid of gratitude, honesty, and good faith.

'We shall find him in the pavilion, then?'

'Not an hour ago I left him writing,' was the answer.

'We will go thither and surprise him,' she said, addressing herself to me. 'Wait here while I change my dress; a few moments will suffice for my toilet, and I shall expect to find you here when I return.'

In the meantime, I remained leaning against one of the columns which supported the small portico by which the door was sheltered. From hence I enjoyed an uninterrupted view of the hill and its pavilion, which, surrounded by its light and beautiful garland of palm trees, attracted the sight irresistibly. While my eye dwelt with satisfaction on their broad sheltering heads, I fancied that I could discover a large excrescence upon the stem of one of them, extremely unusual in those trees, which in general rear themselves perpendicularly towards the sky, regular and straight as the pillars of a colonnade. It resembled a large branch, extending from one stem to its neighbour; and what puzzled me more in this appearance, was, that it seemed occasionally to be waved backwards and forwards, though the breathing of the sea-gale was so gentle that it scarcely moved the leaves on the neighbouring branches. I made a variety of guesses to account for this phenomenon, but every thing which my memory or my imagination could suggest, seemed inadequate to solve this difficulty entirely to my satisfaction.

I was still puzzling myself with conjectures, when Zadi drew near me with some slight refreshments. I pointed to the branch, whose apparent motion had excited so much of my attention, and inquired, whether he could at all account for the strong effect produced upon it by the sea-breeze, while the lighter boughs were so gently agitated. He immediately turned himself towards the palm trees; but no sooner did his eye rest upon the spot in question, than the silver basket with its contents dropped from his hands, the paleness of death spread itself over his swarthy countenance; he caught at one of the columns, to save himself from falling on the ground and, while his eyes expressed the deepest horror and consternation, he pronounced with difficulty — 'The Anaconda! That is the Anaconda! We are undone!'

What could have produced an effect so sudden and so violent upon a man whom I well knew to inherit from nature the most determined courage and most remarkable self-possession, was to me absolutely incomprehensible. But though I was ignorant of its cause, the sight of his extreme alarm was almost sufficient to shake my own presence of mind. I saw that he was on the point of sinking on the earth, overpowered by his emotions. I sprang towards him, and caught him in my arms.

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'For the love of heaven,' I exclaimed, compose yourself, old man! Tell me what terrifies you thus. What mean you by the anaconda? What can occasion these complaints, and this alarm?'

He endeavoured to recover himself; he strove to speak, but in vain; and, before I could understand the accents of his stammering tongue, Louisa joined us, and without observing the slave's agitation put her arm within mine, and advanced towards the pavilion. This action seemed to restore to Zadi the lost powers of his body and mind. With a loud cry he threw himself on his knees before us, and in words interrupted by sobs, and accompanied by tears, he forbade our crossing the threshold.

'Your first step without these walls,' he exclaimed, 'leads to inevitable destruction. Every door must be bolted; every window must be barred. This mansion must resemble a sepulchre, where nothing living is to be found.' And, while he spoke, he hastily closed and locked the folding doors, through which we had a prospect of the pavilion. Louisa observed his singular behaviour, and the agitation of his countenance, with looks which expressed the most lively astonishment.

'Are you distracted, Zadi?' she asked, after a few moments; 'what mean these tears, and these expressions so alarming? And why do you forbid our going to your master?'

'— You're going to —? Almighty God! My master! He is yonder! Oh! he is lost! he lost beyond the power of saving!'

'He is lost, say you? Answer me, old man! What mean you? what fear you? Oh! — how my heart beats with terror!'

Her frame trembled with anxiety, while she gazed with wide—stretched eyes upon the messenger of evil tidings, and pressed my hand with a convulsive grasp.

'Recollect yourself, my good Zadi!' said I; 'what is this anaconda, which you speak of with such terror? I have seen nothing except the branch of a palm tree, which the wind moved backwards and forward, singularly enough, it's true, but still nothing in it alarming.'

'Not alarming?' repeated the Indian, wringing his hands; 'not alarming? The Lord have mercy on me, miserable old man! Ah! Mr Everard, that branch of the palm tree! Alas! alas! It is no branch! It is a snake! a terrible snake! We call it an anaconda and its kind is in size the most enormous, in nature the most fierce, and in appetite the most ravenous, of any to be found through all Ceylon! See! see!' he continued, approaching one of the windows, 'see how the monster plays among the branches! It always twines and twists itself into those folds, and knots, and circles, when it prepares to dart itself upon the ground, like lightning, to seize its prey! Oh! my master! my poor dear master! He never can escape! Nothing can save him!'

Half of this alarming explanation was more than enough to throw the wretched Louisa into a state of distraction. Her features were so distorted by terror, that she was scarcely to be known for the same woman, her eyes stretched almost to breaking, and her hands folded together with as strong a grasp as if she meant them never to be again separated, she exclaimed, in a voice so hollow and so expressive of suffocation that it pierced her hearers to the very heart. 'My husband! — my beloved! Oh! help me to save him, good, good men! Forsake him not! Oh! forsake him not!'

But at this moment the wife required assistance not less than the husband. Overpowered by her sensations, she fainted in my arms; Zadi flew to summon her female attendants; and I bore the pale insensible Louisa back to her own apartment, though Zadi's dreadful narrative had almost deprived me of animation myself.

Our endeavours to re—kindle the extinguished flame of life were at length successful Her eyes opened she cast around her a look of apprehension.

'Oh! why are you still here?' said she to me in a feeble voice 'Is his life then of so little consequence? Fly to his succour! Rescue him, or let me die! In preserving him, you will preserve me; if he perishes, I am lost.'

'He lives! he lives! heaven be thanked!' thus shouted the faithful Zadi, as he rushed into Louisa's apartment. His anxious vigilance had induced him to examine every part of the mansion, and ascertain with his own eyes that it was perfectly secure against danger. He now returned out of breath from the balcony, whence he had discovered to his great satisfaction, that his view was unimpeded over the whole pavilion. He remarked, that the door and all the windows (as far as the power of vision extended) were closely fastened; and hence he very reasonably concluded, that his master had been aware of the enemy's approach in full time to take every precaution for his safety.

'Hear you that, my dear lady?' I exclaimed, while I took Louisa's hand; 'surely, this intelligence is a one

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sufficient to restore your strength and tranquility. We had nothing apprehend for Seafield, except his being surprised by the monster while unprepared. But you see that he has had time to shut out the danger: he has now nothing to do but to remain quietly within his retreat, and the snake will either not discover his being so near, or at any rate will be able to break through the bulwarks which separate them. The whole business therefore is a disagreeable blockade for an hour, or perhaps less; at the end of which the anaconda will grow weary of waiting for its prey, and be retiring to seek it in some other quarter, will release our friend, and then we shall be quit for the fright.'

The satisfaction with which I thus endeavoured to reassure the agonized heart of Louisa, was thoroughly established in my own. But Zadi, whose own feelings were too much agitated by his master's situation to permit his attending to those of others, hastened with too little consideration to destroy the hope, which I so fondly indulged, and with which I strove to soothe the afflicted wife. 'Oh! no, no, no!' he exclaimed; 'we must not reckon upon the snake leaving us so soon! When the anaconda has once chosen a group of trees for her abode, and is seen to sport among their branches in the manner. in which we saw her amusing herself, she will remain there for whole days and weeks watching patiently for her prey, till every chance of success fails her, and absolute famine compels her to emigrate; but her capacity of existing without food is almost inconceivable, and till she removes of her own free will, no human power is able to drive her from her retreat.'

'Almighty Powers!' stammered out the trembling Louisa, 'then he is lost indeed! Even should those slight barriers be sufficient to protect him from the monster's fury, he must still at last fall a prey to the assaults of hunger!'

My frowning looks easily made the old man aware of the imprudence which he had just committed; but the mischief was irreparable. Every thing, which his imagination could suggest to soften the effect produced by his ill-judged confession, was unable to blunt the arrow, which had carried with it into the heart of his mistress the poison of despair.

'But after all; said I, 'why are we to take it for granted that our friend is actually exposed to this urgent danger? By your own account, Zadi, above an hour had elapsed between your leaving your master in the pavilion, and your discovery of the Anaconda; and what then can be more likely than the day being so delightful, he should have gone out to walk, and have quitted the pavilion before the snake's approach?'

'Angel of comfort!' exclaimed Louisa, while she seized my hand, and pressed it to her lips; 'blessed, ever blessed be you for that suggestion! Why should it not be, as you suppose? Why should not his absence have rescued him?'

'Ah! dear heaven!' sighed the old man, and shook his head, 'the doors closed, the windows all fastened —'

'Prove nothing,' I interrupted him; 'when did Seafield ever leave his favourite retreat without taking those precautions? Perhaps; at this very moment that we are trembling for his safety, he is at the distance of miles from the place of danger! Perhaps, nothing more is requisite for his full security than that we should take the precaution of warning him in time, lest he should return to the dangerous pavilion instead of coming straight to the house. Come, come, Zadi; let us hasten to find him! Summon together all the male domestics, as well as our palanquin-bearers; let us divide them into small parties and send them into every path, by which it is possible for Seafield to regain the hill.'

'Yes, hasten! hasten! cried Louisa; 'the thought that you may come too late, pierces me to the very soul; yet on his having already quitted the pavilion hangs my whole, my only hope! Hasten, friends! oh! hasten to find him!'

Her eagerness would not suffer us to remain a moment. We consigned her to the care of her female attendants. We then collected the male inhabitants of the house together with all speed, and having armed them in the best manner that time would permit, we approached in different quarters as near the fatal hill, as the protecting shelter of the trees and branches would allow us, without running the risk of being discovered by the anaconda. Zadi remained with me.

On our way, I endeavoured to compose my thoughts, and to make myself master of every particular respecting the danger, to which the friend of my heart was exposed. My own alarm, and Louisa's presence, had hitherto prevented my obtaining a thorough knowledge of the nature of Seafield's situation, and what he had to apprehend: but, now that I was alone with him, I lost no time before I questioned Zadi.

'You see, old man,' said I, 'how your fatal outcry, "an anaconda," has palsied every soul through excess of terror. Now your imprudence will have been most unpardonable, should it turn out that you spoke without being

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quite certain of the fact, or if you should be found through your own natural timidity to have exaggerated the danger. Recollect yourself, therefore, and then answer me calmly and frankly.. Are you positive, that what you saw was really an anaconda; and in the dreadful account which you have just given of her, have you not in some degree overstepped the limits of, truth?'

'Sir,' answered the good old man, 'though it were the last word which I have to utter in this world, I should still repeat my former assertions. Why, the very name of this creature is enough to make every native of this island feel the blood freeze in his veins! and that I have not deceived myself, is, alas! but too certain. I have already seen the anaconda twice at no greater distance than now; though never one of such a monstrous length and thickness as that which is at present before us. This country would speedily become a wilderness, if fortunately these reptiles were not very rarely met with; for in general they remain concealed within the recesses of the deepest woods; there clinging round the branches of some gigantic tree, they remain waiting with inexhaustible patience for an opportunity of darting down upon their prey, the first man or animal who is unlucky enough to pass beneath them. How it happens, that this snake should have advanced so far into the open country, is what I can least comprehend: but as the rainy season is but just over, it is most probable, that she has been swept away by the irresistible violence of some of the mountain-torrents.'

During this conversation we had continued to advance under favour of the thick-woven underwood, till we were scarcely more than a hundred paces distant from the monster. We could now examine it with the most perfect distinctness, and the eye was able to take in at once the whole extent of its gigantic structure. It was a sight calculated to excite in equal degrees our horror and our admiration: it united the most singular and brilliant beauty with everything that could impress the beholder with apprehension; and, though while gazing upon it I felt that every limb shuddered involuntarily, I was still compelled to own, that never had I witnessed an exhibition more fascinating or more gratifying to the eye.

The anaconda was still employed in twisting itself in a thousand coils among the palm-branches with such restless activity, with rapidity so inconceivable, that it was frequently impossible for the sight to follow her movements. At one moment, she fastened herself by the end of her tail to the very summit of the loftiest tree, and, stretched out at her whole length, swung back-wards and forwards like the pendulum of a clock, so' that her head almost seemed to graze the earth beneath her; then in another, before the eye was aware of her intention, she totally disappeared among the leafy canopies. Now she slid down the stem, winding herself round and round it; and now again only the extremity of her tail remained twisted round the root, while she stretched out her body upon the grass, and with elevated head and high-reaching neck described a large or a small circle, as her capricious pleasure prompted.

These latter movements gave us an opportunity to discriminate with more exactness (during a few seconds at a time) the singular richness and beauty of her tints. The long slender body was covered with a network of glittering scales, girdling it round with rings above rings, and effectually securing it against every attack. The head was of a yellowish green, and marked in the middle of the skull with a large dark spot, from whence small stripes of pale yellow were drawn down to the jaws. A broad circle of the same colour went round the throat like a necklace, on either side of which were two olive-coloured patches, in shape resembling shields. Along the back ran a chain of black waves with sharp-pointed edges, from whence on both sides narrow flesh-coloured rings and broad bands of the brightest yellow (alternately and in the most regular order) descended in zigzag fashion towards the silver-white stomach, where they lost themselves imperceptibly: but what served more than all to dazzle the eye with the brilliance of variegated colouring, were innumerable spots of a rich and vivid reddish-purple, sprinkled without order over the whole surface of the upper skin; for with the animal's slightest movement all these points, and spots, and contrasts of variegated hues, melted together in the sunbeams, and formed one universal blaze composed of all the colours of the rainbow. Much as I admired the splendour of its garment, not less did I wonder at the enormous thickness of this terrific creature, which did not yield in bulk to that of a man of moderate size. Yet by comparing its thickness with its length, Zadi was decidedly of opinion, that the anaconda must have been greatly reduced by a fast of unusually long duration. But the tranquillity of our observations was suddenly disturbed by perceiving, that she desisted abruptly from her airy gambols, and remained motionless at the foot of the palm-tree with her head elevated and turned towards the pavilion, as if in the act of listening!

At that moment, oh! God! with what violence did my heart beat against my bosom! If (as from every circumstance appeared but too probable) my friend was really shut up within the pavilion, it was beyond a doubt,

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that the monster had discovered his being so near her, and was now on the point of making a serious attack! We could see distinctly the shape of her hideous head and the flames of her great piercing eyeballs, reflected from the glass windows, whose shutters had been closed from within. But the sight of her own terrors seemed to scare even the snake herself, for she instantly recoiled; and then laying herself down close to the threshold of the circular pavilion, she encompassed it entirely, as if she was determined to secure her destined victim irrevocably, by enclosing him within the impassable limits of her magic ring. Deeply penetrated with the sense of that danger by which my friend was menaced I forgot my own and seizing my gun placed it to my shoulder the ball whistled through the air. I was an excellent marksman and was certain that I had pointed my piece exactly at the monster's head and yet, whether too great anxiety made my hand shake or that the animal at that very moment made some slight change in her attitude, I know not, but it is at least certain, that not the slightest shrinking gave me reason to believe, that she felt herself at all injured. In the, meanwhile, Zadi had seized my arm, and drawn me forcibly deeper part of the thicket.

'Ah! Mr Everard!' sighed he; 'I was well aware, that the anaconda can set all our firearms at defiance. Her scaly hide renders her invulnerable, except when one is quite close to her, and all that you have done is to put your own safety in danger, without advancing a single step nearer to my master's relief.'

However it did not appear that our enemy had paid much attention to my assault upon her. On the contrary, she only busied herself in renewing her attempts to gain an entrance through the pavilion's windows: till at length, seemingly wearied with her unavailing efforts, she retired slowly, and concealed herself under the verdant umbrella of the palm trees. We also had discovered her former lurking place; though we were now more irresolute than ever, as to the means most proper to be adopted towards the rescue of my friend.

While we stood thus with our eyes fixed immovably upon the pavilion we observed the door to be slightly agitated. After a minute, the lock was gently drawn back slowly and with the utmost caution did the door expand about the breadth of half a foot, and out sprang the little Psyche, a beautiful Italian greyhound, Seafield's favourite play fellow and inseparable companion. As if conscious of her danger she rushed down the hill with her utmost swiftness; but with still greater swiftness did the anaconda in one monstrous spring dart rattling down from its airy covert. The poor little animal was seized: we could just hear a short half-suppressed cry, which marked its dying agony; for the dreadful jawbone moved but twice, or thrice, and lo! the dog's chine was broken, and every bone in its body splintered. The snake then dragged her prey to the foot of the palm-tree, (for in order to produce the proper exertion of strength, it seemed necessary for her to have the stem or strong branch of some tree to cling to), where she stretched herself out upon the grass at her ease, and began with her black tongue to separate the flesh from the bones of the crushed little animal.

The distress, occasioned in my mind by this sight, in itself so painful and disgusting, was converted into agony by the reflections to which it gave birth, after the first moments of horror and surprise were passed! That fact was now confirmed, which till this moment (in order to preserve at least a gleam of comfort however faint) I had obstinately refused to believe. Seafield then was actually in the pavilion The discharge of my musket had in all probability made him aware, that his friends were at no great distance. No one but he could have unclosed the door so cautiously, in order to leave his little favourite at liberty to quit their common shelter; and Zadi was positive, that he had observed a riband fastened round the neck of the animal, to which something white appeared to be attached, in form resembling a letter. It was then a message to US! a cry for assistance! a sacred injunction, that we should not abandon him in this season of his utmost need! What agony of soul must he have endured. What agony of soul must he even at that moment be enduring! To what a pitch of desperation must his mind have been worked up, before his trembling hand could have resolved to draw back the bolt, which was the only barrier between himself and annihilation! How bitter a pang must it have given his tender benevolent heart, when he drove out his fond and faithful companion, and exposed her to such danger! and then flattering himself (as no doubt he did) that the little animal's speed would surely enable her to escape. Oh! what a cruel wound must Psyche's expiring half-heard cry have given to his feelings! These reflections, or at least others nearly similar to them, almost deprived poor Zadi of his senses altogether.

'Oh! powers of mercy !' he exclaimed repeatedly; 'what did his letter mean to tell us? That at this moment he is struggling with despair? Alas! alas! we know it, we feel it! and yet here we stand inactive, without counsel, without resolution, without hope!'

'Patience! patience !' said I, interrupting him: 'it is evident, that our waiting here is of no advantage. Let us

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return home, and endeavour to find means of giving some more effectual assistance than our tears.'

We found the domestics returned from their unavailing expedition, and the greatest part of them assembled in the courtyard, whose lofty walls afforded them a secure refuge: being all natives of Ceylon, they were well acquainted with the nature and pursuits of the anaconda, either from their own experience, or from hearsay: but, almost deprived of the power of thought by their terrors, no one was able to point out any means for attacking her with success. I immediately despatched two of them to Columbo, to explain our situation, and demand assistance. I also desired, that medical aid might be sent to Louisa, and that if they could possibly find one, they should bring back with them a speaking trumpet. I then repaired to poor Louisa, and endeavoured to comfort her heart with a faint gleam of hope, which my own was incapable of admitting. I failed in the attempt; she was a prey to the most abject despair: nor was I more successful in my endeavours to persuade her to withdraw from this scene of horror, and accompany my messengers to Columbo; a measure which was advisable both on account of her own security, and because her absence would leave us at liberty to bestow our undivided attention upon her husband. But finding her resolved not to remove from the scene of Seafield's danger, I returned to the courtyard, where the dejected domestics were still lamenting over the situation of their master, and expatiating on the dreadful properties of the anaconda.

'Friends !' I exclaimed, 'there is not one among us all to whom the master of this house has not been a benefactor! Now that he is threatened with destruction, now is the time for us to show our gratitude for his kindness! Come then; let every one follow me, who loves his lord, and who bears an honest heart in his bosom. Let us despise the danger of the attack and set forward in a full body to deliver him by force! We are armed; in numbers, in reflection, in skill, the advantage is on our side. The bolder that we rush upon our enemy, the less dreadful will she appear to us. My life for it, she will be alarmed at the attack, will fly before us, and thus we shall enjoy the inestimable pleasure of rescuing our friend from death. Now then! let all who are of my opinion show themselves to be men, and range themselves on this side of the court.'

Alas! Zadi was the only one who obeyed this invitation: the rest, poor timid wretches (in number between twenty and thirty), stood there trembling, gazing upon each other with doubtful looks, and whispering together, as if desirous of discovering an excuse for the cowardice of each in the ignominy of his neighbour. After a few minutes, one of them, whom the rest had appointed to be spokesman, advanced towards me, and stammered out their general assurance: that to attack the famished snake with force would be nothing better than absolute madness.

This hope disappointed, I next resolved to try, what effect of terror might be produced upon the monster by the united shouts and outcries of so considerable a body, assisted by the general and repeated discharge of our fire-arms. Our preparations were soon made; Louisa was apprised of the clamour which was going to be made: and, in truth, we raised an uproar so loud and so well sustained, that it seemed almost capable of waking the sleepers in the grave. From all the casements we discharged at the same moment our muskets provided with a double charge, and a hail of bullets rattled about the head of the gigantic snake, who afforded us a fair aim. Yet still she continued to play her gambols quietly among the trees; nay, she did not give any sign by which we could judge, that she was sensible of our attack. After a few moments spent in this manner with no better effect, we found that our provision of ammunition was exhausted: besides, we were ourselves too much fatigued to continue any longer an attempt, which afforded us so little prospect of producing any advantage.

By this time the day was drawing rapidly to its close. By dint of turning the painful subject frequently in my mind, and making every possible conjecture, one means of scaring the anaconda had suggested itself, which appeared to me well worthy of attention; but in order to put it in execution the darkness of the night was necessary. I had often read in books of travels, what powerful aid had been derived from fire against the attacks of wild beasts, and how lions and tigers had often forgotten their thirst of blood, and betaken themselves to flight, like the most timid animals, when scared by a fire-brand whirled round, or the blaze of a flaming heap of straw. Armed with such weapons, I was determined, as soon as night should be set in, to approach the anaconda, and put her courage to the proof, even though the faithful Zadi should be the only one of sufficient courage to assist me in my venturous design.

The night arrived: an awful stillness reigned all around us; our enemy, however, still was watchful; for from time to time we could hear her rustling among the branches. I passed the twilight in endeavouring to comfort Louisa with the prospect of a serious attack to be made upon the snake the next day, from which (as I assured her)

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much better success might be expected; but I judged it prudent to conceal from her our nightly enterprise, the effect of which appeared even to myself too uncertain to make me venture to ground upon it any promise of advantage. Besides, her exhausted strength made it absolutely necessary, that she should pass some moments in tranquillity; a state, which seemed to me absolutely incompatible with the tumults of expectation, which the knowledge of our proposed adventure would naturally excite in her bosom.

At length a sign given by Zadi made me aware, that all our preparations were completed. Louisa was reclining on a couch with her eyes closed, and seemed to have fallen into a kind of lethargy. I stole softly from the apartment, and was on the point of quitting the house, when a means suggested itself to me of communicating my design to my friend, even before the arrival of the speaking trumpet, which I expected the next day from Columbo. I recollected, that I had lately taught Seafield a common European trick of combination, by which two persons, separated from each other (having first agreed upon their measures) could convey their sentiments without the help of words: a certain number of blows, corresponding with the number of the place which each letter of the four and twenty holds in the alphabet, enabled the striker to form words and sentences, by which the hearer without other communication was made aware of the steps, which without his knowledge it had been settled for him to take. This trifle had but lately served us to puzzle Louisa, and pass away an idle evening hour; and I flattered myself with the possibility, that it might still exist in Seafield's remembrance. At any rate, I resolved to make the trial without loss of time, and the stillness of the night seemed to afford me the most favourable opportunity for executing my plan with success.

A thin smooth board, well calculated for reverberating sounds, and a strong hammer were easily procured. With these I hastened to the balcony, and began by striking as many blows as the alphabet required, (that is, one to A, two to B, twenty-four to Z, till I had gone through it regularly. I trusted that this orderly manner of proceeding would awaken his attention; and having completed the alphabet, I told him (in the same manner) if he comprehended my meaning, to strike three blows within the pavilion, as loud as he possibly could. Oh! heavenly powers! I had not long to wait! it was not long before three faint sounds informed me, that I was understood, and never did music seem so sweet to my ear! I hurried to tell Louisa, that I had found a means of communicating with her husband, and that I was going to command him to be of good cheer in her name and for her sake. A silent melancholy smile, a convulsive pressure of my hand, were my reward; and I now hastened again to the balcony to assure the poor prisoner, that I was labouring for his relief; that Louisa was well, and begged him to be patient and composed; and that I requested him to keep up his spirits, and resist the attacks of despair, since he might depend upon it, that I would rescue him, or perish in the attempt. I concluded by desiring him to assure me, that he would confide in the activity of my friendship, by repeating his former signal: I now suffered my hammer to rest — I listened — again, more audibly than before, did I hear the three wished-for blows given from within the pavilion, and I now hastened to prosecute my nightly plan with fresh spirits and renovated ardour.

Excited by Zadi's remonstrances, about a dozen of the bravest among the domestics and palanquin-bearers were assembled with torches in their hands in the courtyard. My design was, to steal as near the hill as the underwood would permit, under favour of the darkness, and only guided by a single dark lanthorn. When we could approach no further without hazard, we were to light our torches as fast as possible, and whirling them round and round, to rush towards the pavilion with loud shouts, in order that our attack might be accompanied by all the terrors and advantage of surprise.

Zadi, to whose care the guiding lanthorn was confided, went foremost; I followed close upon his footsteps, and thus with extreme caution and in profound silence did we press through bushes and brambles, till we arrived above half as near again to the pavilion, as the position which we had occupied during the day. The anaconda now lay right before us, quiet and unsuspecting; nor could we have wished for a better opportunity for executing our plan with every probability of success. We now turned to our companions. — But, just Heaven! who can express our astonishment and vexation, and how did our heart sicken at perceiving, that the faithless cowards had shrunk from the danger now that it was so near at hand, and had profited by the darkness to steal away one by one! I was alone with Zadi: we concluded with justice, that for only two persons to make the attempt must be unavailing, and the old man flattered himself, that he should be able to shame his comrades into a resumption of their more manly resolutions. I had but little hopes of his success; yet no choice was left me but to follow him and endeavour to give double strength to his persuasions and reproaches.

Both were employed in vain: their terrors had subdued all sense of shame completely. They called us madmen

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for wishing to expose ourselves to the fury of the famished anaconda; and, instead of promising any future assistance, they declared, that they would only wait for daybreak to secure themselves by flight from a danger so imminent. In the meanwhile Zadi was busy in fastening several torches together in pairs.

'Come, sir !' he cried to me: 'let us lose no more precious time in endeavouring to inspire these heartless knaves with courage! Let us leave the cowards, and try whether perhaps the glare of these torches, doubled as you see them, may not of themselves be sufficient to dazzle and scare away the monster. At the worst we can but perish with our dear master, and it is better to die than not perform our duty !'

I obeyed him: we hastened back to the pavilion. Already were we on the point of ascending the hill, when I felt my arm seized by someone with a convulsive grasp. I turned hastily round: a thin figure, breathless through speed and anxiety, and whose white garments fluttered in the breeze of night, stood beside me. It was Louisa! Our dispute with the slaves had not passed so quietly, but that our voices had reached the ear of Seafield's sorrowing wife, whose sore anguish of heart permitted not slumber to approach. She questioned her attendants; by artful interrogatories she contrived to draw from them the peculiar nature of the enterprise on which we were engaged. She feigned to sleep: and, as soon as her women were thrown off their guard, she stole from her apartment, seized a torch, and followed us, determined to share with us the danger and its reward.

My whole resolution failed me, when I recognized the new-comer, and when she made known in a few short expressive words her desperate resolution. In a low voice I conjured her to return to the mansion-house; I protested, that her presence robbed our arms of strength and our hearts of courage; and I asked her, whether it was not enough agony for us to tremble for an existence so dear as Seafield's, without being obliged to risk the loss of another life equally precious?

'My life for his!' was the only reply which she gave to my remonstrances; 'my life for his! — What shall I rest my hands idly before me, while strangers are active in his defence? Shall I have to blame myself during the remnant of my existence for having done nothing for him in the time of his extreme need — Nothing? Shall my husband actually be rescued by his friends, while his careless wife has not even attempted to preserve him? — No, Everard, no! my life for his! my life for his!'

I listened with admiration to the overflowings of this noble heart! How to resist her vehemence I knew not! I was compelled to give way to her, and yet was conscious that her presence must entirely destroy every chance of our success. It would have been madness to venture in her company to that extreme point of danger, to which Zadi and myself had before not scrupled to advance. The anaconda too appeared at this moment to be more restless than formerly: doubtless the sound of our footsteps, and our whispering dispute, must already have betrayed our being in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, we hastily kindled our fire-brands, one of which we held in each hand, and as we whirled them rapidly backwards and forwards we went forth shouts and shrieks with all our strength; the dead stillness of all around us rendered our outcries doubly dreadful.

A rushing sound among the tops of the palm-trees, as if branch by branch they were forcibly snapped asunder, was the answer given to our challenge. It was the anaconda (whether excited by fear or by anger, I will not pretend to decide) who darted herself from tree to tree with tremendous leaps, while the slender stems were bent and shaken by her burthen. At the same time we were alarmed by a loud hissing, so piercingly sharp, that it seemed close at our ears, and her eyes, blazing with their own vindictive fires, shot lightnings through the gloom of night.

In truth, this appearance was in every respect so dreadful, that it required no ordinary courage to witness it without agitation. I cannot deny, that while gazing on it I felt my hair stand on end and my blood run cold; and I observed that Zadi strove to keep his teeth closed together, in order to prevent me from hearing them chatter. I turned with apprehension to Louisa. Alas! there lay the wretched wife on the earth deprived of consciousness. This sight was sufficient to banish every other consideration. I threw away my torches hastily, clasped the unfortunate in my arms and with Zadi's help bore her with all speed back to the mansion-house; prosperous in this alone, we then retired unpursued by the anaconda. Here, after a long interval of insensibility, we at length succeeded in recalling Louisa's flying spirits. She revived; but it was only to dwell upon the midnight scene, from which we were just returned, and which her inflamed imagination painted in colours, if possible, still more dreadful than the reality. She called without ceasing upon her husband and upon me: and since it was out of my power to give more active assistance elsewhere, it would have been barbarous in me to leave her, without endeavouring by soothing and persuasion to dissipate the gloomy ideas by which her heated brain was distracted.

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Thus passed away the remainder of the night, which left us even with less hope and resolution than we possessed when it arrived. The melancholy morning at length dawned; but the sun was scarcely risen when Zadi rushed into the apartment. His eyes sparkled, and the beating of his heart almost choked his words before he was able to give them utterance.

'Oh! Mr Everard!' he exclaimed, 'my master --- my dear master! He has still hope! He has still courage! He endeavours to communicate with us! We shall soon know how matters go with him -- what he wishes to be done --- what he expects us to do. Yes! yes! we will soon know it!'

It was some time before he was sufficiently calm to explain to me the cause of this emotion. At length I learned, that in examining the pavilion he had just discovered a sheet of paper thrust through the crevice of the door, and which, apparently detained by one of its corners, fluttered loosely in the air, unable to effect its escape. Doubtless it was a letter, which Seafield hoped some favourable gust of wind would carry within our reach, but which he had not sufficiently disengaged from its narrow passage. As to reading the contents, even if the distance had permitted it, Zadi was not possessed of the knowledge requisite. He therefore had hastened in all diligence to communicate to me this discovery, from which I also derived some hope, though fainter than that which filled the bosom of the faithful Zadi.

We hurried to the hill, approached still nearer than we had ventured to do hitherto, and, with the assistance of an excellent telescope, I endeavoured to decipher the characters traced upon the important paper. Alas! that there actually were characters traced on it, was all that I could distinguish; for the light paper fluttered continually in the wind, and was never suffered to rest for two seconds together. My inexhaustible patience, my unwearied exertions, long struggled against the evident impossibility of success: I gained nothing by them except the conviction, that to prosecute the attempt further would only be to throw away a greater portion of my time. Zadi, in breathless silence, and his eyes fixed on my face unalterably, watched my every movement.

'Then you give up the point?' said he at length, while a livid paleness overspread his dark countenance, and such a trembling seized him, that I could see his every limb shaking; 'well, then, there is no more to be said! Let us return to the house, and take courage: I will fetch you the paper.'

'Old man !' I exclaimed, startling at this unexpected assurance, 'What say you? Your good intention is worthy of your good heart; but you would make an unavailing sacrifice to your fidelity; you may bring destruction on yourself, but you never will bring the paper from thence. To do that is out of any mortal power!'

'May be so! may be so !' repeated the Indian; 'but at least the trial shall be made. It seems, as if my master's voice cried to me, that, his safety depended on that paper; and should I be worthy to belong to him, if I were deaf to my master's cry? By the God of my fathers, I will either come back to you with that paper, or never will come back again.'

And with every word that he spoke, his tone became stronger, his step firmer, and the fire of resolution illuminated his large dark eyes.

During this contention we reached the courtyard; in silence, and absorbed in himself, did this unequalled servant make the necessary preparations for his undertaking. His plan was to conceal his whole person, from head to foot, under a covering of boughs and cocoa-leaves, resembling as much as possible the broken branches with which the snake's gambols or indignation had strewn the hill all around her. Under this verdant shield, he flattered himself that he should be able to creep gradually to the pavilion door, unperceived by the anaconda.

'I have been accustomed,' said he, 'to this kind of work from my earliest infancy. In my time I was reckoned an expert elephant-hunter, and by means of this artifice have frequently made those enormous animals my prize.'

But a few minutes were past, and already was Zadi accoutred in this singular disguise. He provided himself with no weapons except his dagger. He obstinately refused to suffer me to accompany him, assuring me that I should only put my own life in danger, without being able to afford him the least assistance. He was so positive, that I was obliged to give up the point: but I was at least determined to accompany the noble-minded fellow with my eyes, as well as with my fervent prayers and wishes. >From the balcony of the mansion-house I had an extensive and unimpeded view over the surrounding objects; and from hence I saw Zadi set forward on his perilous adventure, taking through precaution a wide circuit, in order to reach the hill itself.

With equal prudence he made his approach on that side, where the pavilion would screen him from the enemy's observation. From time to time I lost sight of him among the underwood; even when he was before my eyes I occasionally doubted whether it was he indeed, so cautiously and so artfully did he make his approach,

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creeping on his hands and knees, sometimes remaining without stirring, sometimes stealing forwards with a movement so imperceptible, that it almost eluded the keenness of sight. He was a living example to me of the discretion, assiduity, and skill, which the savage employs in laying his ambuscades, and stealing upon his unsuspecting enemy.

And now favoured by the long grass and fragments of boughs, with which the ground was covered, had Zadi by a thousand serpentine movements reached the wall of the pavilion. My heart beat violently, as I saw on one side the anaconda, as yet, it is true, suspecting nothing, but still dreadful from her appearance, and exhibiting every moment awful proofs of her strength, by the powerful leaps with which she darted herself from bough to bough; and, on the other hand, separated from her by the distance of ten yards at most, I beheld a poor, infirm, and aged man, whose force consisted only in his courage and his discretion.

Zadi in the mean while remained so tranquil and so motionless in his present position near the pavilion-door, that the monster could not fail of being deceived by so unsuspecting an appearance. The Indian's eye was fixed immovably upon the snake, and followed all her twistings and windings with incessant application, while she swung herself with unwearied activity backwards and forwards, now here, now there, now above, now below; till, at the very moment when she shot herself over him in a bound of prodigious extent, I suddenly saw the invaluable paper disappear from its place, without being able to perceive the means by which it was brought into the power of the successful lurker.

I clasped my hands in ecstasy, and poured out my thanks to God from the very bottom of my heart. But all was not yet done. It required no less caution and dexterity to retire than to proach; and never did I offer up more fervent vows than at the moment when the animated thicket began to set itself in motion. Slower than the hour-hand of a dial, now moving forwards, now backwards, now right, now left, it stole itself down the hill. Still it went on, and on, and lower, and lower, till, with inexpressible delight, I saw it almost at the very foot of the hill; and now at length I began to draw my breath without pain. 'The noble fellow is safe,' said I to myself. At that moment, whether joy at the successful issue of his attempt had deprived him of part of his former caution, or whether some accidental derangement of the sheltering branches discovered enough to excite the reptile's suspicion, at that moment I saw the anaconda dart from above, and in the quickness of thought she reached the bottom of the hill, and enveloped the unfortunate in her folds! A piercing shriek of horror burst from me! I felt all my blood conceal itself within my veins!

Yet even in this dreadful situation wonderful was the presence of mind which Zadi still preserved; wonderful was the courage, the activity, and the skill, with which he defended himself against the monster. Grasping his dagger with firm and steady hand, he struck it with repeated blows between the impenetrable scales of his enemy, sought out with inconceivable address the most tender parts to strike, and at length succeeded in giving her so deep and so well-placed a wound, that it must needs have worked her up to the most extreme pitch of pain and fury; for suddenly I beheld him only girdled by a single fold of the anaconda's tail, with which (in the same manner that one who has unexpectedly grasped a nettle, throws it away) she hurled the poor wretch into the air far away, till I lost him among the surrounding bushes. As for the snake, she hastily regained her former hiding-place, where she lay quiet and concealed for some time before she resumed her usual sports; though when she did resume them, it was evidently with less sprightliness than before.

My agony is not to be described! Nothing was to be seen of the unfortunate Indian. What was become of him? Had he been killed by the violence of the fall? Or was he at that moment struggling in the pangs of death? His preservation I considered as beyond the limits of possibility; and yet it seemed to me inhuman and ungrateful quite to abandon him to his fate, without having first exhausted every possible means of assisting him. Irresistibly carried away by these sentiments, I rushed from the balcony, and hastened towards the hill by the same course which he had pursued himself, and which I could easily track by the depression of the dewy grass. Towards that side, also, had he been thrown by the anaconda, and it was probable that the thicket might shelter me, till I could reach the spot where he lay dying. In the eagerness of this hope, I totally overlooked the extreme risk of an undertaking, the very idea of which but four-and-twenty hours sooner would have made me shudder through every limb. So true is it, that violent emotions communicate a force to the mind, which enables it to rise above itself, and gives it courage to encounter danger and even death without the shrinking of a single nerve.

Suddenly my attention was arrested by a faint murmur! It came from a thicket at no great distance: I listened again! Oh heavens! it was the voice of Zadi. I lost not a moment in hastening to the place; he heard me; he opened

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his eyelids, which seemed already closed in eternal sleep, recognized me as I raised him in my arms, and a faint smile stole over his countenance, as he stretched out his hand to me with difficulty.

'Take it,' he said; 'God be thanked, that I am able to reward your kindness so well; -- even in the monster's grasp, I still kept fast hold of it: Oh, take it, take it!'

It was the paper which he had purchased so dearly, and which the faithful creature extended towards me.

'Read it!' he continued; 'lose no time! before I am deprived of my senses again -- and for ever -- at least let me have the satisfaction to know -- what my master wished me to do! alas! alas! now you will be left alone to assist him!'

'And assist him I will, doubt it not, thou noble heart,' I replied, while I strove to raise him from the ground; 'but my first assistance must be given to yourself.'

It was in vain that he conjured me to leave him to his fate, and only think of effecting his master's rescue. Without heeding him I managed to lift him upon my shoulders, and tottering beneath his weight I endeavoured to effect our escape from the dangerous vicinity of the pavilion. With difficulty I succeeded in regaining the open ground. Fortunately some of the other domestics saw us from the house, and hastened to relieve me from my wretched burthen. Assisted by them, I at length saw Zadi safely deposited on a sofa in the mansion-house; he was again on the point of losing all sensibility; but, a cordial of powerful virtue being administered without delay, his strength was restored sufficiently to preserve him from a relapse.

It's true, none of his limbs were fractured, but he was dreadfully bruised by his fall; his breast and ribs had been almost crushed together by the close-drawn folds of the serpent; he was totally unable to move so much as a finger, and his condition was such as would have excited pity even in the most insensible nature. As for me, I almost sunk beneath this addition to that general calamity, which seemed to increase with every succeeding moment. I was now a single man, to whose hand Providence had committed the lives of three afflicted creatures! Never did mortal pray to heaven with more fervour or more un-affected zeal, that I did while imploring the Divine grace to assist me in fulfilling a mission so sacred and so difficult.

But as for Zadi, he seemed to have already forgotten himself, his past dangers, and present pains. He implored me to waste no more time in striving to mitigate his sufferings, and assured me, that the letter of his dear afflicted master would be the best balsam for all his wounds. In compliance with his earnest entreaties, I prepared to peruse the paper: but the tears gushed into my eyes on recognizing the well-known handwriting, and it was with difficulty that I deciphered the following words:

'Oh! I understand you well, my friends, my beloved-ones! your voices, still more your unremitting and desperate exertions to relieve me -- all convince me, that you are near me; that you feel for me; that you spare no labour to effect my rescue! Alas! you will labour in vain! Death has already enveloped me in his dark circle; there is no escape; I have already bidden farewell to life; I cannot long survive in this atmosphere, corrupted as it is by the pestilential vapours, constantly exhaling from the monster's jaws. I die resigned; but do not embitter this last and heavy hour by the apprehension, lest your exertions in my behalf should be the means of involving you in my danger. By all that is sacred and dear, I conjure you, abandon me to my unhappy fate; fly! oh! fly far from hence: it is my last, my only, my most earnest request!

'Everard! Oh! Everard, my poor wife! Do not abandon my Louisa!'

A cold shuddering ran through my bones: the poisonous air robbed us even of our last wretched hope, that the anaconda might at length retire wearied out with her vain expectations, and leave my friend at liberty to quit his retreat. But now it was evident from his letter that, long ere this could happen, Seafield would be no more! immediate help must save him, or none! Zadi sobbed aloud: it was an addition to my own grief to think, that I had been obliged to give a fresh pang to his faithful bosom, and it wrung me to the very soul, when I saw him give way openly to this burst of sorrow. Suddenly he uttered a shriek --so loud, that it startled all who heard him.

'No! no!' he exclaimed in the most violent agitation -- 'No! no he shall not bid farewell to life for ever! there are still means. Oh! wretch that I am! curses, eternal curses on my old head, that I did not think of it till now, and now it comes too late! I might have saved him! I might have saved him! Had I but thought of it sooner my master would have been safe at this moment! now it is too late! he must die, and 'tis my heedlessness which kills him!'

'For mercy sake,' I cried, 'explain yourself, old man! You see that our messengers are not returned from Columbo -- every moment that we lose is inestimable! If you really do know any means of rescue, tell it, discover it! Delay not an instant! Speak! To what means do you allude?'

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'It is too late! it is too late;' he repeated; 'no one but myself could have carried it through; and here I lie, without the power to move a limb, and no one else will undertake a task so desperate!' 'The means! the means!' I exclaimed again, almost frantic with agitation.

'Well, then!' he resumed, his words frequently interrupted with groans; 'the anaconda is, as I told you formerly, the most voracious animal in nature. She is invincible while stimulated its hunger, but she can be overcome by a very child as soon as she has satiated herself with food; then she loses the flexibility of her joints, and instead of her restless activity she seems plunged in a benumbing torpor, and remains unable to move, overpowered by the burthen of her immoderate meal.'

'Excellent dear old man!' said I, in rapture at the ray of hope with which his words inspired me; 'is what you say certain? Could we but satiate this anaconda —'

'My master were rescued!' he replied: 'but to effect this requires the risk of a life; and who will venture that? Oh! were but these old limbs as they were two hours ago. Could I but remove the mountain load which weighs upon my chest, and prevents my breathing.'

'Oh! if I am but right in my guess!' I interrupted the old man; 'you would have driven her prey to the anaconda?'

'The whole herd! the whole herd!' shouted Zadi; and he sank back exhausted by the violence of his emotions. 'This thought,' he continued in a low voice after the pause of a moment, 'this thought suggested itself to my recollection long ago; but, wretch that I was, I believed its execution to be impracticable — the plague, which lately prevailed here among the cattle, has occasioned them to be removed from this part of the country, and they are gone too far to be recalled in time to afford the required assistance. In despair, therefore, I banished this scheme from my thoughts; but now that I am rendered unable to put it in execution, I remember.'

'What? what?' I inquired, almost breathless with anxiety.

'You know well Van Derkel, the rich Hollander, whose estate joins this? He is the most positive man breathing, and having once declared our fears of the plague to be groundless, he refused out of pure obstinacy to suffer his cattle to accompany those of his neighbours; they remain on his estate at this moment; an herd might easily be procured, and then — but it is too late, now it is too late! none but his faithful servant would dare —'

'What?' said I, interrupting him; 'will not his faithful friend?'

Zadi's looks met mine; they burned with new fire, while he confessed that on me alone now rested his only hope. The flames in his eyes seemed to have communicated themselves to my heart; and the blessings with which he loaded me, and the effusions of gratitude to Heaven and to me which he poured forth, confirmed the resolution which I had already adopted.

'Be of good comfort, friend!' said I, as I turned to leave him; 'the man whom you sought is found! I will tread that path which no other will tread, and I now leave you for the purpose of seeking it.'

Zadi's eyes were now filled with tears of joy.

'May the God of my fathers bless you!' he said, raising his eye to heaven; 'now then I can die contented; now then the hour of my master's deliverance will strike at last.'

I lost no time in hastening to Van Derkel's. I offered his herdsman the whole sum in my possession, if he would assist me in driving the beasts under the palm-trees: but he shuddered at the proposal, and rejected my proffered gold. I was not yet discouraged. By his master's authority I promised him freedom, provided he would but venture so far as to advance with the herd to the extremity of the little grove, which on the north side separated the hill from the open country. He hesitated; again I pressed him; and at length he stammered out his consent, but in a voice so faint, and with a look of such irresolution, as convinced me, that I could place little dependence upon his promised help.

However, I at least neglected none of the means, which might contribute to our mutual safety: I caused the slaves to prepare with all diligence a couple of machines similar to those under which Zadi had performed his hazardous undertaking. Covered with these, we began to drive the cattle slowly before us; and as the general agitation had caused them to be totally neglected by their keepers, during their confinement in a place which afforded no herbage for their nourishment, hunger made them more obedient than we should probably have otherwise found them; and thus did we advance towards the hill, though the little resolution of my companion evidently grew still less with every step which we took forwards. To encourage him, I bade him observe the tranquillity of the anaconda, who had gradually withdrawn herself into her green shelter, so that we might almost

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have doubted her being really there.

'That is the very thing which alarms me!' answered the trembling slave; 'I am sure that she has already discovered, and now lurks concealed among the leaves, in order that she may make her prey more secure. Now then, not one step further will I advance; what I have already ventured is enough to merit liberty; but at all events I had rather pass the rest of my days in fetters, than purchase my freedom by advancing a single foot beyond this spot !'

And with these words he hurried away. However, I was the less disturbed at his forsaking me, when I perceived, that without him I could manage to drive the cattle forwards, and that no natural instinct made them aware of the neighbourhood of their enemy. It was not long before we arrived at the hill-foot. I was now obliged to leave the animals to their own guidance, feeling themselves no longer annoyed by my goad they gave way to the impulse of hunger, and dispersing themselves carelessly began to feed upon the welcome herbage; but how great was my joy at perceiving the bull separate himself from the rest of the herd and begin to ascend the hill. We arrived near the group of palm-trees; everything was hushed and tranquil; not a sound was to be heard except the noise of the scattered branches, as the bull trampled them beneath his feet: the anaconda seemed to have disappeared altogether.

But on a sudden a loud and rattling rush was heard among the palms, and with a single spring the snake darted down like a thunder-lap and twisted herself with her whole body round her devoted victim. Before the animal was yet aware of his danger, he already felt his dewlap enclosed between the wide-expanded jaws of the monster, and her teeth struck into it deeply. Roaring aloud he endeavoured to fly, and succeeded in dragging his tormentor a few yards away with him; but instantly she coiled herself round him in three or four wide folds, and drew these knots so close together, that the entangled beast was incapable of moving, and remained as if rooted to the place, already struggling with the terrors and pangs of death. The first noise of this extraordinary contest had been sufficient to put the remaining cattle to flight.

Unequal as was the strife, still it was not over instantly. The noble beast wanted not spirit to defend himself, nor was his strength easily exhausted. Now he rolled himself on the ground, and endeavoured to crush the enemy with his weight; now he swelled every nerve and exerted the power of every muscle, to burst the fetters in which his limbs were enveloped; he shook himself violently; he stamped, he bit, he roared, he pawed up the earth, he foamed at the mouth, and then dashed himself on the ground again with convulsive struggles. But with every moment the anaconda's teeth imprinted on his flesh new wounds; with every moment she drew her folds tighter and tighter; till, after struggling for a full quarter of an hour, I at length saw the poor animal stretched out at full length and breathless, totally deprived of motion and of life.

Now then I expected to see the anaconda gratify the hunger by which she had so long been tormented: but I was ignorant, that it is not the custom of this animal to divide its prey, but to swallow it at one enormous morsel. The size of the murdered bull made this impossible without much preparation; and I now learned, from the snake's proceedings, the necessity which there was for her always remaining in the neighbourhood of some large tree.

She again seized the bull with her teeth, and dragged it to the top of the stoutest palm. Here she endeavoured to place it upright, leaning against the trunk. Having effected this, she enveloped the tree and the carcase together in one great fold, and continued to draw this closer, till she had broken every individual bone in her victim's body into a thousand pieces, and had virtually reduced it into a shapeless mass of flesh. She was still occupied in this manner, when I hastened back to the mansion-house to rejoice Louisa and Zadi with the assurance of my success.

The roaring of the bull had already prepared the latter for my tidings. He limped to meet me at the door in spite of his bodily agonies, and overpowered me with thanks and benedictions. He also informed me, that the expected succours from Columbo were at length arrived, and that a physician had accompanied them. I immediately requested to see the latter, and commissioned him to impart the good news of Seafield's approaching deliverance to Louisa, with such precautions as might prevent her enfeebled constitution from suffering through excess of joy. I also recommended Zadi to his care, and then hastened back to complete my work; Zadi having assured me, that it was absolutely necessary to watch for the moment, when the anaconda should have swallowed her prey, and be enervated and overcome by the torpor of indigestion.

'You will be in no want of assistants,' he added; 'my fellow-servants are all ready to accompany you, not only because I have succeeded in convincing them that all danger is now at an end, but because among the natives of Ceylon the flesh of the anaconda is looked upon as most delicious food.'

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In fact, on entering the courtyard I found the whole body of domestics, women and children as well as men, prepared for the attack with clubs, hatchets, and every sort of weapon, which had offered itself to their hands. The party from Columbo were well provided with ammunition; and we now all set joyfully forwards for the hill, though, on approaching it, we judged it as well still to use some little precaution.

I advanced beyond the rest. The anaconda had by this time entirely covered the carcase with her slime, and was in the very act of gorging this monstrous morsel. This task was not accomplished without violent efforts: a full hour elapsed before she had quite finished her dreadful meal; at length the carcase was entirely swallowed, and she stretched herself out at full length in the grass, with her stomach distended to the most astonishing dimensions. Every trace of her former liveliness and activity had disappeared! Her immoderate appetite had now yielded her up, impotent and defenceless, a prey even to the least formidable foe.

I hasten to conclude this long and painful tragedy. I discharged my musket at the monster at a moderate distance. This time the ball struck her close by her eye. She felt herself wounded: her body swelled with spite and venom, and every stripe of her variegated skin shone with more brilliant and vivid colours. But as to revenging herself upon her assailant, of that she was now totally incapable. She made one vain attempt to regain her old retreat among the boughs of the palm-trees, but sank down again upon the grass motionless and helpless. The report of my musket was the signal agreed upon to give notice to the expectant crowd, that they might approach without danger. Everyone now rushed towards the snake with loud shouting and clamours of joy. We all at once attacked her, and she soon expired under a thousand blows; but I did not wait to witness this catastrophe. A dearer interest occupied my mind: I hastened with all speed to the pavilion, and knocked loudly at the door, which was fastened within.

'Seafield! my friend!' I exclaimed; 'tis I! 'tis Everard! Open! open! I bring you life and liberty.'

A minute passed — another — and still I listened in vain for an answer. Had fatigue overpowered him? Was he asleep, that he answered not? I knocked again; I spoke a second time, and louder; I listened so attentively that I could have distinguished the humming of a gnat within the pavilion. Heaven and earth! was it possible that after all I had come too late? The thought was distraction! I snatched an axe from one of the slaves, and after a few blows the pavilion door flew open.

I rushed into the room, and looked eagerly round for my friend. I found him! Oh! Heaven his eyes were closed his cheeks pale, every feature in his noble countenance so changed that he was scarcely to be recognized. He lay extended in his armchair, and the noise of our entrance seemed to rouse him from a long stupor. He saw me, a faint smile played round his wan lips, while he attempted to stretch out his hand to me but it sank down again from weakness: I threw my arms round him and pressed him to my heart in an agony of joy.

'You are safe!' I endeavoured to say; but the attempt to repress my gushing tears choked my voice, and the sounds were unintelligible.

'Yes!' said he with difficulty, 'this is being a friend indeed! But tell me! Louisa —?'

'She lives, and expects you,' I replied; 'come, come! my friend; rouse yourself! Make an effort, and shake off this lethargy! Look upon your danger as no more than a frightful dream, and awake to the real happiness which awaits you!'

'It waits not for me!' he answered faintly: 'I have received my death-warrant in this chamber. My minutes are counted! Louisa — Oh! bear me to Louisa!'

The chamber was hot and close even to suffocation. We removed him with all speed into the open air, four of the slaves bearing him as he sat in his armchair; but as we conveyed him down the hill we took care to turn his face away from the spot where lay the breathless but still horrible anaconda. The purer atmosphere seemed immediately to produce a beneficial effect upon the sufferer; and his strength was still further recruited by a few drops of a cordial, with which I had taken care to provide myself, and which I administered with the utmost caution.

On our arrival at the mansion-house, we found that Zadi's attention had already provided everything which his master could possibly need. His bed was prepared; every kind of refreshment was in readiness, and the physician was waiting to afford his much-required assistance. But we soon found that the most effectual medicine for Seafield would be the sight of Louisa; and as the physician was of opinion, that the lady was more likely to suffer from anxiety to see her husband, than from the agitation of the interview, my friend was indulged in his wish, and we supported him to the chamber, where his wife so anxiously was expecting his approach.

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I will not attempt to describe this interview, nor that which afterwards took place between Seafield and the faithful Zadi; the feeling heart of itself will fill up this chasm; yet I cannot omit mentioning, that it was not till I had explained to my friend the whole extent of his obligations to that faithful Indian, and till the repeated orders of his master compelled him to appear before him, that Zadi indulged his ardent wish to throw himself at the feet of his beloved lord. And why then did he deprive himself so long of a pleasure which he desired so earnestly? The noble fellow was unwilling to assist his master by showing him how much and how severely he had suffered for his sake! I cannot tell you how much both the re-united couple and myself were affected by this uncommon mark of delicacy and consideration.

Oh! how happily and how swiftly fled away the first days which succeeded the deliverance of my friend: alas! those first days were the only ones destined to pass happily. It was soon but too evident, that Seafield's sufferings in that fatal pavilion had injured his constitution irreparably. With every succeeding day his strength visibly decreased, and the blighted flower bowed itself still nearer to the ground. His malady defied the power of medicine; he seemed to perish away before our eyes; and the physician was at length compelled to acknowledge that all the powers of art were insufficient to sustain any longer Seafield's exhausted frame. Not the unsatisfied demands of nature; not the hunger which gnawed his entrails, nor the burning thirst which dried up his palate; not the agonies of his mind, and his painful wrestling against despair: none of these had affected him so fatally. — No; it was the pestiferous breath exhaling from the jaws of the anaconda, which had penetrated into Seafield's close and sultry prison; and whose force, concentrated and increased by confinement, had fallen upon his constitution like a baleful mildew, and planted the seeds of dissolution in the very marrow of his life.

What Louisa and myself endured, while watching his slow but constantly progressive journey to the tomb, no words can utter. He gave Zadi and his three sons their freedom, and made over to him a small estate near Columbo, fully sufficient to secure the comfort of the good old man for the remainder of his existence. During the last days of his illness he frequently reminded me of the letter which he had written in the pavilion, and of which Zadi had obtained possession at such extreme risk; this paper he frequently charged me to consider as his dying testament; he as frequently repeated the same thing to his wife, while she wept by his bedside. His last words were like his letter, 'Forsake not my poor Louisa!' His last action was to place her hand in mine — he sank back a corpse on his pillow, and Louisa fell lifeless at my feet.

Yet she saw him once more; she insisted on pressing her lips once again to his. I trembled for the convulsive agonies which her delicate frame would undergo during this last and most painful scene: yet was I still more alarmed, when I witnessed the composure of her affliction. She held his hand in hers; she spoke not one word; she heaved not one sigh; not a single tear escaped from her burning eyes. She stood long motionless by his bedside; she bent down, and pressed her colourless lips upon his closed lids; and then slowly and silently she withdrew to her widowed chamber.

I chose for Seafield's sepulchre the place which he had always loved best, and where he had suffered the most; his tomb was raised in the fatal pavilion. Zadi and myself laid our friend in the earth; we should have thought his coffin profaned, had we suffered any other hands to touch it. Seafield and his sufferings slept in the grave: his less fortunate friends still lived to lament him.

My benefactor had left his property jointly to Louisa and myself; and his wishes respecting us had been expressed too clearly to be misunderstood. Louisa was among the loveliest of her sex; but I should have counted it profanation, had my heart suffered itself to harbour one thought of her less pure than is offered at the shrine of some enfranchised saint. I loved not Louisa; no, I adored her. Alas! it was not long before she became a saint indeed.

She complained not, but she sorrowed; she suffered, but it was in silence. In vain did she forbid her lips to confess the progress which grief made in her constitution: her emaciated form sufficiently betrayed it. A few melancholy weeks had elapsed since the death of my friend, when one morning her terrified women informed me, that she was not in her apartment, nor apparently had been in bed all night. My heart instructed me well where to seek the unfortunate. I flew to the pavilion; she was stretched on the marble stone, which covered her husband. In the agony of grief she had burst a blood vessel, and her limbs were already cold; her countenance was calm, and a faint smile seemed to play round her lips: it was the only smile which I had seen there since Seafield's death. She was deposited in the same grave with her husband; for myself, I was unable to sustain the weight of grief imposed upon me by this second calamity, and a long and dangerous illness was the consequence of my mental sufferings.

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The skill of my physician saved my life; and no sooner was I able to quit the house, than I resolved to withdraw from a land rendered hateful to me by such bitter recollections. In consequence of Louisa's decease, the whole of Seafield's property by his will devolved to me — I endeavoured to prevail on Zadi to accept some part of it, but he declared that his master's liberality had gone beyond his utmost wishes.

'Yet one request,' said he, 'I will venture to make. My two eldest sons are grown up and able to take care of themselves; but the third is young, and I feel that my death can be at no great distance. His brothers may treat him ill, or at least may neglect him; but condescend to take him into your care, let him be your servant, and I shall not have a wish in this world left unaccomplished. Under the protection of an honest man, my boy cannot fail to become an honest man himself.'

Mirza (for that was the lad's name, the same who is now with me) was in the room, and joined his entreaties to his father's with such earnestness, that I could not refuse their request. I soon after left Ceylon, followed by Zadi's blessings; the good old man is still alive, and by a third hand I hear from him frequently; but the letters which he dictates embrace but two topics, anxiety for the welfare of his son, and regret for the loss of his beloved master.

'You are now informed,' continued Everard after a moment's pause, addressing himself to the whole society, 'you are now informed by what means I acquired my fortune. It was the gift of gratitude: but never can I recollect the dreadful service which I rendered Seafield (and, alas! which I rendered, him in vain!) without feeling my frame convulsed with horror, and my mind tortured by the most painful recollections. It is this which has ever made me unwilling to discourse on the means by which I became possessed of my wealth. Yet I cannot but think it somewhat hard, that mere silence should be construed into positive guilt; and that I should be treated as if convicted of the most atrocious crimes, because I have not thought it necessary to make public my private life, and to rend open anew the wounds of my heart for the gratification of idle and impertinent curiosity.'

Everard was silent; so were all around him. Confusion blushed on every cheek, except on Jessy's, whose tender heart had been deeply affected by the mournful story, and whose mild blue eyes still floated in tears, though every now and then a smile beamed through them in approbation of her lover's conduct. Her father at length mustered up his courage, and broke through this embarrassing silence.

'My dear good Everard,' said he, 'I know not how to excuse my friends for telling me so many slanders of you, nor myself for having been credulous enough to believe them. In truth, there is but one person in the room, whose lips are worthy to convey to you our apology; there then, let them make it,' — and with these words he placed the blushing Jessy in Everard's arms.

And Jessy's lips wisely expressed the apology in a kiss; and Everard acknowledged, while he pressed her to his bosom as his bride, that the apology was not only sufficient, but a reward in full for the sufferings which he had experienced through the vicissitudes of his whole past life! The End